

FICTION

Fannie Hurst

Every Soul Hath Its Song

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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FICTION

EVERY SOUL HATH ITS SONG

BY

FANNIE HURST

AUTHOR OF

Just Around the Corner

"Oh, the melody in the simplest heart"

BOOKS BY FANNIE HURST

EVERY SOUL HATH ITS SONG

JUST AROUND THE CORNER

Every Soul Hath Its Song

1912, 1916

TO

J.S.D.

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EVERY SOUL HATH ITS SONG

SEA GULLIBLES

In this age of prose, when men's hearts turn point-blank from blank verse to the business of chaining two worlds by cable and of daring to fly with birds; when scholars, ever busy with the dead, are suffering crick in the neck from looking backward to the good old days when Romance wore a tin helmet on his head or lace in his sleeves--in such an age Simon Binswanger first beheld the high-flung torch of Goddess Liberty from the fore of the steerage deck of a wooden ship, his small body huddled in the sag of calico skirt between his mother's knees, and the sky-line and clothes-lines of the lower East Side dawning upon his uncomprehending eyes.

Some decades later, and with an endurance stroke that far outclassed classic Leander's, Simon Binswanger had swum the great Hellespont that surged between the Lower East Side and the Upper West Side, and, trolling his family after, landed them in one of those stucco-fronted, elevator-service apartment-houses where home life is lived on the layer, and the sins of the extension sole and the self-playing piano are visited upon the neighbor below. Landed them four stories high and dry in a strictly modern apartment of three dark, square bedrooms, a square dining-room ventilated by an airshaft, and a square pocket of a kitchen that looked out upon a zigzag of fire-escape. And last a square front-room de-resistance, with a bay of four windows overlooking a distant segment of Hudson River, an imitation stucco mantelpiece, a crystal chandelier, and an air of complete detachment from its curtailed rear.

But even among the false creations of exterior architects and interior decorators, home can find a way. Despite the square dining-room with the stag-and-tree wall-paper design above the plate-rack and a gilded radiator that hissed loudest at mealtime, when Simon Binswanger and his family relaxed round their after-dinner table, the invisible cricket on the visible hearth fell to whirring.

With the oldest gesture of the shod age Mrs. Binswanger dived into her work-basket, withdrew with a sock, inserted her five fingers into the foot, and fell to scanning it this way and that with a furrow between her eyes.

"Ray, go in and tell your sister she should come out of her room and stop that crying nonsense. I tell you it's easier we should all go to Europe, even if we have to swim across, than every evening we should have spoilt for us."

Ray Binswanger rose out of her shoulders, her eyes dazed with print, then collapsed again to the pages of her book.

"Let her cry, mamma."

"It's not so nice, Ray, you should treat your sister like that."

"Can I help it, mamma, that all of a sudden she gets Europe on the brain? You never heard me even holler for Arverne, much less Europe, as long as the boats were running for Brighton, did you, mom?"

"She thinks, Ray, in Europe it's a finer education for you both. She ain't all wrong the way she hates you should run to Brighton with them little snips."

"Just the same you never heard me nag for trips. The going's too good at home. Did you, pop, ever hear me nag?"

"Ja, it's a lot your papa worries about what's what! Look at him there behind his paper, like it was a law he had to read every word! Ray, go get me my glasses under the clock and call in your sister. Them novels will keep. Mind me when I talk, Ray!"

Miss Ray Binswanger rose reluctantly, placing the book face downward on the blue-and-white table coverlet. It was as if seventeen Indian summers had laid their golden blush upon her. Imperceptibly, too, the lanky, prankish years were folding back like petals, revealing the first bloom of her, a suddenly cleared complexion and eyes that had newly learned to drop upon occasion.

"Honest, mamma, do you think it would hurt Izzy to make a move once in a while? He was the one made her cry, anyway, guying her about spaghetti on the brain."

"Sure I did. Wasn't she running down my profesh? She's got to go to Europe for the summer, because the traveling salesmen she meets at home ain't good enough for her. Well, of all the nerve!"

"Just look at him, mamma, stretched out on the sofa there like he was a king!"

Full flung and from a tufted leather couch Isadore Binswanger turned on his pillow, flashing his dark eyes and white teeth full upon her.

"Go chase yourself, Blackey!"

"Blackey! Let me just tell you, Mr. Smarty, that alongside of you I'm so blond I'm dizzy."

"Come and give your big brother a French kiss, Blackey."

"Like fun I will!"

"Do what I say or I'll--"

Mrs. Binswanger rapped her darnin'-ball with a thimble finger.

"Izzy, stop teasing your sister."

"You just ask me to press your white-flannel pants for you the next time you want to play Palm Beach with yourself, and see if I do it or not. You just ask me!"

He made a great feint of lunging after her, and she dodged behind her mother's rocking-chair, tilting it sharply.

"Children!"

"Mamma, don't you let him touch me!"

"You--you little imp, you!"

"Children!"

"I tell you, ma, that kid's getting too fresh."

"You spoil her, Izzy, more as any one."

"It's those yellow novels, and that gang of drugstore snips you let her run with will be her ruination. If she was my kid I bet I'd have kept her in school another year."

"You shut up, Izzy Binswanger, and mind your own business. You never even went as long as me."

"With a boy it's different."

"You better lay pretty low, Izzy Binswanger, or I can tell a few tales. I guess I didn't see you the night after you got in from your last trip, in your white-flannel pants I pressed, dancing on the Brighton boat with that peroxide queen alrighty."

This time his face darkened with the blood of anger.

"You little imp, I'll--"

"Children! Stop it, do you hear! Ray, go right this minute and call Miriam and bring me my glasses. Izzy, do you think it's so nice that a grown man should tease his little sister?"

"I'll be glad when he goes out on his Western trip next week."

"Skidoo, you little imp!"

She tossed her head in high-spirited distemper and flounced through the doorway. He rose from his mound of pillows, jerking his daring waistcoat into place, flinging each knee outward to adjust the knifelike trouser creases, swept backward a black, pomaded forelock and straightened an accurate and vivid cravat.

"She's getting too fresh, I tell you, ma. If I catch her up round the White Front drug-store with that fresh crowd of kids I'll slap her face right there before them."

"Ach, at her age, Izzy, Miriam was just the same way, and now look how fine a boy has got to be before that girl will look at him. Too fine, I say!"

"Where's my hat, ma? I laid it here on the sewing-machine. Gee! the only way for a fellow to keep his hat round this joint is to sit on it!"

A quick frown sprang between Mrs. Binswanger's eyes and she glanced at her husband, hidden behind his barricade of newspaper. Her brow knotted and her wide, uncorseted figure half rose toward him.

"Izzy, one night can't you stay at home and--"

"I ain't gone yet, am I, ma? Don't holler before you're hurt. There's a fellow going to call for me at eight and we're going to a show--a good fellow for me to know, Irving Shapiro, city salesman for the Empire Waist Company. I ain't still in bibs, ma, that I got to be bossed where I go nights."

"Ach, Izzy, for why can't you stay home this evening? Stay home and you and Miriam and your friend sing songs together, and later I fix for you some sandwiches--not, Izzy? A young man like Irving Shapiro I bet likes it if you stay home with him once. Nice it will be for your sister, too--eh, Izzy?"

Mrs. Binswanger's face, slightly sagging at the mouth from the ravages of two recently extracted molars, broke into an invitational smile.

"Eh, Izzy?"

He found and withdrew his hat from behind a newspaper-rack and cast a quick glance toward the form of his father, whose nether half, ending in a pair of carpet slippers dangling free from his balbriggan heels, protruded from the barricade of newspaper.

"That's right, just get the old man started on me, ma, too. When a fellow travels six months out of the year in every two-by-four burg in the Middle West, nagging like this is just what he needs when he gets home."

"You know, Izzy, I'm the last one to start something."

"Then don't always ask a fellow where he's going, ma, and get pa started too."

"You know that not one thing that goes on does papa hear when he reads his paper, Izzy. Never one word do I say to him how I feel when you go, only I--I don't like you should run out nights so late, Izzy. Next week again already you go out on your trip and--"

"Now, ma, just--just you begin if you want to make me sore."

"I tell you, Izzy, I worry enough that you should be on the road so much. And ain't it natural, Izzy, when you ain't away I--I should like it that you stay by home a lot? Sit down, anyway, awhile yet till the Shapiro boy comes."

"Sure I will, ma."

"If I take a trip away from you this summer I worry, Izzy, and if I stay home I worry. Anyway I fix it I worry."

"Now, ma."

"Only sometimes I feel if your papa feels like he wants to spend the money--Well, anything is better as that girl should feel so bad that we don't take her to Europe."

He jingled a handful of loose coins from his pocket to his palm. "Cheer up, ma; if the old man will raise my salary I'll blow you to a wheelbarrow trip through Europe myself."

"Sh-h-h-h, Izzy! Here comes Miriam. I don't want you should tease her one more word to make her mad. You hear?"

In the frame of the doorway, quiescent as an odalisque and with the golden tinge of a sunflower lighting her darkness, Miriam Binswanger held the picture for a moment, her brother greeting her with bow and banter.

"Well, little red-eyes!"

"Izzy, what did I just tell you!"

His sister flashed him a dark glance, reflexly her hand darting upward to her face. "You!"

"Now, now, children! Why don't you and Miriam go in the parlor, Izzy, and sing songs?"

"What you all so cooped up in here for, mamma? Open the window, Ray; it's as hot as summer outside."

"Say, who was your maid this time last year, Miriam?"

"Mamma, you going to let her talk that way to me?"

"Ray, will it hurt you to put up the window like your sister asks?"

"Well, I'm doing it, ain't I?"

"Now, Miriam, you and Izzy go in the parlor and sing for mamma a little."

Miriam's small teeth met in a small click, her voice lay under careful control and as if each nerve was twanging like a plucked violin string.

"Please, mamma, please! I just can't sing to-night!"

She was like a Jacque rose, dark and swaying, her little bosom beneath the sheer blouse rising higher than its wont.

"Please, mamma!"

"Ach, now, Miriam!"

"Where's those steamship pamphlets, mamma, I left laying here on the table?"

"Right here where you left them, Miriam."

Mr. Isadore Binswanger executed a two-stride dash for the couch, plunging into a nest of pillows and piling them high about his head and ears.

"Go-od night! The subject of Europe is again on the table for the seventh evening this week. Nix for mine! Good night! Good night!" And he fell to burrowing his head deeper among the pillows.

"You don't need to listen, Izzy Binswanger. I wasn't talking to you, anyways."

"No, to your mother you was talking--always to me. I got to hear it."

A sudden vibration darted through Mrs. Binswanger's body, straightening it. "Always me! I tell you, Simon, with your family you 'ain't got no troubles. I got 'em all. How he sits there behind his newspaper just like a boarder and not in the family! I tell you more as once in my life I have wished there was never a newspaper printed. Right under his nose he sits with one glued every evening."

"Na, na, old lady!"

"That sweet talk don't make no neverminds with me. 'Na, na,' he says. I tell you even when my children was babies how they could cry every night right under his nose and never a hand would that man raise to help me. I tell you my husband's a grand help to me. 'Such a grand husband,' the ladies always say to me I got. I wish they should know what I know!"

Mr. Binswanger tossed aside his newspaper and raised his spectacles to his horseshoe expanse of bald head. His face radiated into a smile that brought out the whole chirography of fine lines, and his eyes disappeared in laughter like two raisins poked into dough.

"Na, na, old lady, na, na!" He made to pinch her cheek where it bagged toward a soft scallop of double chin, but she withdrew querulously.

"I tell you what I been through this winter, with Izzy out in a Middle West territory where only once in four months I can see him, and my Ray and her going-ons with them little snips, and now Miriam with her Europe on the brain. I tell you that if anybody in this family needs Europe it's me for my health, better as Miriam for her singing and her style. Such nagging I have got ringing in my ears about it I think it's easier to go as to stay home with long faces."

Erect on the edge of her chair Miriam inclined toward her parent. "That's just what I been saying, mamma; all four of us need it. Not only me and Ray, but--"

"Leave me out, missy!"

"Not only us two for our education, mamma, but a trip like that can make you and papa ten years younger. Read what the booklet says. It--"

"I'm an old woman and I don't want I should try to look young like on the streets here up-town you can see the women. What comes natural to me like gray hairs I don't got to try to hide."

"Hurrah for ma! 'Down with the peroxide and the straight fronts,' she says."

"Izzy, that ain't so nice neither to talk such things before your sisters."

"Don't listen to him, mamma. Just let me ask you, mamma, just let me ask you, papa--papa, listen: did you ever in your life have a real vacation? What were those two weeks in Arverne for you last summer compared to on board a ship? You--"

"That's what I need yet--shipboard! I tell you I'm an old man and I'm glad that I got a home where I can take off my shoes and sit in comfort with my rheumatism."

"Hannah Levin's father limped ten times worse than you, papa. Didn't he, mamma? And since he took Hannah over last summer not one stroke has he had since. And she--Well, you see what she did for herself."

Mrs. Binswanger paused in her stitch. "That's so, Simon; Hannah Levin should grab for herself a man like Albert Hamburger. She should fall into the human-hair Hamburger family, a stick like her! At fish-market when he lived down-town each Friday morning I used to meet old man Levin, and I should say his knees were worse as yours, papa."

"When my daughter marries a Albert Hamburger, then maybe too we can afford to take a trip to Europe."

Miss Binswanger raised her eyes, great dark pools glozed over with tears. "All right then, I'll huck at home. But let me tell you, papa, since you come right out and mention it, that's where she met Albert Hamburger, if anybody should ask you, right on board the ship. Those kind don't lie round Arverne with that cheap crowd of week-end salesmen."

"There she goes on my profesh again!"

"That's where she met him, since you talk about such things, papa, right on the steamer."

"So!" Mrs. Binswanger let fall idle hands into her lap. "So!"

"Sure. Didn't you know that, mamma? She was going over for just ten weeks with her mother and father to take a few singing-lessons when they got to Paris, just like I want to, and right on the ship going over she met him and they got engaged."

"So!"

"Yes, mamma."

Mr. Binswanger fell into the attitude of reading again, knees crossed and one carpet slipper dangling. "I know plenty girls as get engaged on dry land, Carrie; just get such ideas that they don't out of your head."

"I don't say, Simon, I don't give you right, but after a winter like I been through I feel like maybe it's better to go as to stay."

"That's right, ma, loosen up and she'll get you yet."

"It ain't nice, Izzy, you should use such talk to your mother. I tell you it ain't so nice a son should tell his mother she

should loosen up."

"I only meant, ma--"

"That's just how I feel, Simon, with the summer coming on I can't stand no more long faces. Last year it was Arverne till a cottage we had to take. Always in April already my troubles for the summer begin. One year Miriam wants Arverne and Ray wants we should go to the mountains where the Schimm girls go. This year, since she got in with them Lillianthal girls, Miriam has to have Europe, and Ray wants to stay home so with snips like Louie Ruah she can run with. I tell you when you got daughters you don't know where--"

"Give 'em both a brain test, ma."

"Stop teasing your sister, Izzy. I always say with girls you got trouble from the start and with boys it ain't no better. Between Arverne and--"

"Arverne! None of the swell crowd goes there any more, mamma."

"Swell! Let me tell you, Miriam, your papa and me never had time to be swell when we was young. I remember the time when we couldn't afford a trip to Coney Island, much less four weeks a cottage at Arverne-next-to-the-sea. Ain't it, papa? I wish the word 'swell' I had never heard. My son Isadore kicks to-night at supper because at hotels on the road he gets fresh napkins with every meal. Now all of a sudden my daughter gets such big notions in her head that nothing won't do for her but Europe for a summer trip. I tell you, Simon, I don't wish a dog to go through what I got to."

Mr. Binswanger let fall his newspaper to his knee.

"Na, na, mamma, for what you get excited? Ain't talk cheap enough for you yet? Why shouldn't you let the children talk?"

Miss Binswanger inclined to her father's knee, her throat arched and flexed. "Papa dear, it's a cheap trip. For what four weeks in a cottage at Arverne-by-the-sea would cost the four of us could take one of those tourists' trips through Europe. The Lillianthals, papa, for four hundred and fifty dollars apiece landed in Italy and went straight through to--"

"The Lillianthals, Lillianthals," mimicked Mrs. Binswanger, sliding her damning-egg down the length of a silken stocking. "I wish that name we had never heard. All of a sudden now education like those girls you think you got to have, music and--"

"Oh, mamma, honest, you just don't care how dumb us girls are. Look at Ray and me, we haven't even got a common education like--"

"You can't say, Miriam Binswanger, that me or your papa ever held one of our children back out of school. If they didn't want to go we couldn't--"

"Oh, mamma, I--I don't mean just school. How do you think I feel when all the girls begin to talk about Europe and all, and I got to sit back at sewing-club like a stick?"

"Ain't it awful, Mabel!"

"Izzy!"

"Why do you think a fellow like Sol Blumenthal is all the time after Lilly Lillianthal and Sophie Litz and those girls? He has been over seventeen times, buying silks, and those girls don't have to sit back like sticks when he talks about the shows in Paris and all."

"I know girls, Miriam, what got as fine husbands as Sol Blumenthal and didn't need to run to Europe for them."

"I never said that, did I, mamma? Only it's a help to girls nowadays if--if they've been to places and know a thing or two."

"If a girl can cook a little and--"

"Look there at Ray, nothing in her head but that novel she's reading, and little snips that'll treat her to a soda-water if she hangs round the White Front long enough, and ride her down to Brighton on one of those dirty excursion boats if she--"

"You shut up, Miriam Binswanger, and mind your own business!"

"You let her talk to me that way, mamma?"

"Go to it, sis."

"You let her talk that way to me and Izzy eggs her on! No wonder she's fresh, the way everybody round here lets her do what she wants, papa worst of all!"

Ray danced to her feet, tossing her hair backward in maenadic waves, her hands outflung, her voice a taunt and a singsong. "I know! I know! You're sore because you're four years older and you're afraid I'll get engaged first. Engaged first! I know! I know!"

"Go to it, sis!"

"Sure, I got a Brighton date every Saturday night this summer, missy, and with a slick little fellow that can take his father's car out every Tuesday night without asking. Eddie Sollinger! I guess you call him a snip, too, because he's a city salesman. I know! I know! Ha! I should worry that the Lillianthals are going to Europe! I know! I know!" She pirouetted to her father's side of the table. "Give me a dollar, pa?"

Mrs. Binswanger held out a remonstrating hand. "Ach, Ray, you mustn't--"

"It ain't even seven yet. Have a heart, ma! Gee! can't I walk up to the corner with Bella Mosher for a soda? Do I have to stick round this fuss nest? I'll be back in a half-hour, ma. Please?"

"Don't let her go, ma."

"You shut up, Izzy!"

"Ach, Ray, I--"

"Give me the dollar, pa, for voting against Europe. Don't let her hypnotize you like she always does. Down with Europe! I say. We should cross the ocean and get our feet wet, eh, pa?"

He waggled a pinch of her flushed cheek between his thumb and forefinger and dived into his pocket.

"Baby-la, you!" he said, crossing her palm; and she was out and past him, imprinting a kiss on the crest of the bald horseshoe and tossing a glance as quick as Pierrette's over one shoulder.

On the echo of the slamming door, her eyes shining with conviction and her face suddenly old with prophecy, Miriam turned upon her mother.

"You see, mamma, you see! Seventeen, and nothing in her head but Brighton Beach and soda-water fountains and joy-riding. Just you watch; some day she'll meet up with some dinky fakir or ribbon clerk at one of those places, and the first thing you know for a son-in-law you'll have a crook."

"Miriam!"

"Yes, you will! Those are the only chances a girl gets if she's not in the swim."

"Listen to her, ma, and then you blame me for not bringing any of the fellows round here for her to meet. You don't catch me doing it, the way she thinks she's better than they are and gives them the high hand. Not muchy!"

"I should worry for the kind you bring, Izzy."

"As nice boys Izzy has brought home, Miriam, as ever in my life I would want to meet."

"Yes, but you see for yourself the way the society fellows, like Sol Blumenthal and Laz Herzog, hang round the Lillianthal girls. I always got to take a back seat, and maybe you think I don't know it."

"I never heard that on ships young men was so plentiful."

"She wants to land an Italian count and she'll just about land a barber."

Mr. Binswanger peered suddenly over the rim of his paper. "A no-count yet is what we need in the family. Get right away such ideas out your head. All my life I 'ain't worked so hard to spend my money on the old country. In America I made it and in America I spend it. Now just stop it, right away, too."

"Go to it, pa!"

Suddenly Miss Binswanger let fall her head into her cupped hands. Tears trickled through. "I--I just wish that I--I hadn't been born! Why--did you move up-town, then, where everybody does things, if--if--"

Her father's reply came in a sudden avalanche. "For why? Because then, just like now, you nagged me. You can take it from me, just so happy as now was me and mamma down by Rivington Street. I'm a plain man and with no time for nonsense. I tell you the shirtwaist business 'ain't been so good that--"

"You--you can't fool me with that poor talk, papa. Everybody knows you get a bigger business each year. You can't fool me that way."

Tears burst and flowed over her words, and her head burrowed deeper. Across her prostrate form Simon Binswanger nodded to his wife in rising perplexity.

"Fine come-off, eh, Carrie?"

"Miriam, ach, Miriam, come here to mamma."

"Aw, take her, pa, if she's so crazy to go. It'll be slack time between now and when I get back from my territory. Max has got pretty good run of the office these days. Take her across, pa, and get it out of her system. Quit your crying, kid."

Mr. Binswanger waggled a crooked finger in close proximity to his son's face. "Du! Du mit a big mouth! Is it because you sell for the house such big bills I can afford to run me all over Europe! A few more accounts like Einstein from Cleveland you can sell for me, and then we can go bankrupt easier as to Europe. Du mit a big mouth!"

"Pa, ain't you ever going to get that out of your system? My first bad account and--"

"You'm a dude! That's all I know, you'm a dude! Right on my back now I got on your old shirts and dressed like a king I feel."

"I'm done, pa! I'm done!"

"Ach, Miriam, don't cry so. Here, look up at mamma. Maybe, Miriam, if you ask your papa once more he will--"

"I tell you, no. What Mark Lillianthal does and what my son can say so easy makes nothing with me. I'm glad as I got a home to stay in."

Above her daughter's bowed head Mrs. Binswanger regarded her husband through watery eyes. "She ain't so wrong, Simon. I tell you I got the first time to hear you come out and say to your family, 'Well, this year we do something big.' The bigger you get in business the littler on the outside you get, Simon. Always you been the last to do things."

"And, papa, everybody--"

"Everybody makes no difference with me. I don't work for the steamship company. For two thousand dollars what such a trip costs I can do better as Europe."

"I--I just wish I hadn't ever been born."

A sudden tear found its way down Mrs. Binswanger's billowy cheek. "You hear, Simon, your own daughter has to wish she had never got born."

She drew her daughter upward to her wide bosom, and through the loose basque percolated the warm tears.

"Sh-h-h-h, Miriam, don't you cry."

"Ach, now, Carrie--"

"I tell you, Simon, I 'ain't been a wife that has made such demands on you, but I guess you think it's a comfort that a mother should hear that in society her daughter has to take a back seat."

"When she 'ain't got a front seat she should take a second seat. I don't need no seat. I know worse young men as Sollie Spitz and Eddie Greenbaum what comes here to see her."

"Just the same you--you said to me the other night, papa, that I never seem to meet young men like Adolph Gans, fellows who are in business for themselves."

"Ja, but I--"

"Well, where do you think Elsa Bergenthal met Adolph, but on the ship?"

"You hear, Simon: Moe Bergenthal, who sells shirtwaists for you right this minute, can afford to send his daughter to Europe."

"Ja, I guess that's why he sells shirtwaists for me instead of for himself."

"See, papa, she--"

"That's right, get him cornered, ma! Go to it, Miriam!"

"Du, du good-for-nothings dude, du!"

"Be a sport, pa!"

"Ach, Simon--"

"Ach, you women make me sick! In the old country, I tell you, I got no business. All the Eytalians what I want to see I can see down on Cherry Street--for less as two thousand dollar too."

"Why--why, that's no way to learn about 'em, papa. You just ought to see me take a back seat when Lilly Lillianthal gets out her post-cards and begins telling about the real ones."

Mrs. Binswanger took on a private tone, peering close into her husband's face. "You hear that, Simon? Mark Lillianthal, what failed regular like clockwork before he moved up-town, his daughter can make our Miriam feel small. You hear that, Simon?"

His daughter's arms were soft about his neck, tight, tighter. "Papa, please! For a couple of thousand we can take that beau-tiful trip I showed you in the booklet. Card-rooms on the steamer, papa. Hannah told me all summer her father played pinochle in Germany, father, right outdoors where they drink beer and eat rye-bread sandwiches all day. In Germany we can even stop at Dusseldorf where you were born, papa--just think, papa, where you were born! In Italy we can make Ray look at the pictures and statues, and all day you can sit outdoors and--and play cards, papa. Just think, papa, by the time you have to buy us swell clothes for Arverne I tell you it will cost you more. All Lilly Lillianthal needed for Europe, mamma, was a new blue suit."

"Go way--go way with such nonsense, I tell you!" "And how you and papa can rest up, mamma." "She's right, Simon; such a trip won't hurt us. I tell you we don't get younger each day."

He regarded his wife with eyes rolled backward. "That's what I need yet, Carrie, all of a sudden you take sides away from me. Always round your little finger your children could always wind themselves."

"Na, Simon, when I see a thing I see it. With Izzy out on his trip these next two months it won't hurt us. So crazy for Europe you know I ain't, but when you got children you got to make sacrifice for them."

"I--"

"For ten weeks, Simon, you can stand it, and me too."

"I--"

"For ten weeks, Simon, if we go on that boat she wants that sails away on June twentieth--it's a fine boat, she says."

"June twentieth I don't go. July twentieth I got to be back when my men go out on the road--"

"Then shoot 'em over this month, pa. Max can--"

"There's a boat two weeks from to-day, pa, see here in the booklet, the same boat, the *Roumania*, only on this month's sailing. We can get ready easy, papa, we--oh, we can get ready easy."

"Ach, Miriam, in two weeks how can we get together our things for a trip like that?"

"Easy, mamma, I tell you I--I'll do all the shopping and packing and everything."

"Sh-h-h-h, I 'ain't promised yet. I tell you if anybody would tell me two days ago to Europe I got to go this month, right away I wouldn't have believed 'em!"

"Ach, Simon, you think yet it's a pleasure for me? You think for me it's a pleasure to shut up my flat and leave it for two months? You think it's easy to leave Izzy, even when he's 'way out West on his trip? You think it's easy to leave that boy with the whole ocean between?"

"Aw, ma, cut the comedy!"

"Ten times, Simon, I rather stay right here in my flat, but--"

"Then right away on the whole thing I put down my foot."

"Papa!"

"No, no, Simon, I want we should go. Girls nowadays, Simon, got to be smart--not in the kitchen, but in the head."

"Be a sport, pa."

"It's enough I got a son what's a sport."

"Only a little over two months, papa. Two weeks from to-day we can get a booking. To-morrow I'll go down to the steamship offices and fix it all up; I know all about it, papa; there isn't a booklet I haven't read."

"Na, na, I--"

"Simon, in all your life not one thing have you refused me. In all my life, Simon, have I made on you one demand? Answer me, Simon, eh? Answer your wife." She placed her thimble hand across his knee, peering through dim eyes up into his face. "Eh, Simon, in thirty years?"

"Carrie-sha! Carrie-sha!" He smiled at her through eyes dimmer still, then rose, wagging the bent forefinger. "But not one day over ten weeks, so help me!"

"Papa!"

With a cry that broke on its highest note Miss Binswanger sprang to her feet, her arms clasping about her father's neck.

"Oh, papa! Papa! Mamma!"

"Sh-h-h-h! the door-bell! Go to the door, Izzy; I guess maybe that's Ray back or your friend. Ach, such excitement! Already I feel like we're on the boat."

"Oh, mamma, mamma!" Her words came too rapidly for coherence and her heart would dance against her breast. "I--I'm just as happy!" Kissing her mother once on each eye, she danced across to her brother, tagging him playfully. "Lazy! I'll go to the door. Lazy! Lazy! Tra-la-la, tra-la-la!" and danced to the door, flinging it wide.

Enter Mr. Irving Shapiro, his soft campus hat pressed against his striped waistcoat in a slight bow, and a row of even teeth flashed beneath a neat hedge of mustache.

"Mr. Izzy Binswanger live here?"

"Hello, Irv! That you? Come in!"

She dropped a courtesy. "That sounds like he lives here, don't it?
That's him calling."

And because her new exuberance sent the blood fizzing through her veins with the bite and sparkle of Vichy, a smile danced across her face, now in her eyes, now quick upon her lips.

"Come right in the dining-room, Mr.--Mr.--"

"Shapiro."

"--Shapiro; he's expecting you." She drew back the portieres, quirking her head as he passed through. Isadore Binswanger rose from his couch, pressing his friend's hand and passing him round the little circle.

"Pa, meet Irving Shapiro, city man for the Empire Waist Company. Irv, meet my father and mother and my sister."

A round of handshaking.

"We're as excited as a barnyard round here, Irv; the governor and the family just decided to light out for Europe for two months."

"Europe!"

"Ja, my children they drag a old man like me where they want."

Mrs. Binswanger leaned forward smiling in her chair. "You see, we want papa should have a good rest, Mr. Shapiro. You know yourself I guess shirtwaists ain't no easy business. We don't know yet if we can get berths on the twentieth this month, but--"

"State-rooms, mamma."

"State-rooms, then. What's that boat we sail on, Miriam?"

"*Roumania*, mamma."

Mr. Shapiro sat suddenly forward in his chair, his eager face thrust forward. "Say, I'm your man!"

"You!"

"Before you get your reservations let me steer you. I got a cousin works down at the White Flag offices--Harry Mansbach. He'll fix you up if there ain't a room left on the boat. He's the greatest little fixer you ever seen."

"Ach, Mr. Shapiro, how grand! To-morrow, Miriam, maybe when you get the berths--"

"State-rooms, mamma."

"State-rooms, maybe Mr. Shapiro will--will go mit."

"Aw, mamma, he--"

"Will I! Well, I guess!"

Across the table their eyes met and held.

* * * * *

Even into the granite canon of lower Broadway spring can find a way. In the fifty-first story of the latest triumph in skyscraping a six-dollar-a-week stenographer filled her drinking-tumbler with water and placed it, with two pansies floating atop, beside her typewriting machine. In Wall Street an apple-woman with the most ancient face in the world leaned out of her doorway with a new offering, forced but firm strawberries that caught a backward glance from the passing tide of finders and keepers, losers and weepers. Two sparrows hopped in and out among the stone gargoyles of a municipal building. A dray-driver cursed at the snarl of traffic and flecked the first sweat from his horse's flanks. A gaily striped awning drooped across the front of the White Flag steamship offices, and out from its entrance, spring in her face, emerged Miss Miriam Binswanger; at her shoulder Irving Shapiro attended.

"Honest, Mr. Shapiro, I--I just don't know what I would have done except for you."

"I told you Harry Mansbach would fix you up."

She clasped her wrist-bag carefully over the bulk of a thick envelope and turned her shining face full upon him.

"On deck A, too, right with the best!"

He steered her by a light pressure of her arm into the up-town flux of the sidewalk. "If I was a right smart kind of a fellow I never would have helped you to get those cabins."

"Oh, Mr. Shapiro!"

"But that's me every time, always working against myself."

"Well, of all the nerve!" And her voice would belie that she knew his delicate portent.

"If not for me, maybe you couldn't have gotten those reservations and you would have to stay at home. That's where I would come in, see?"

"Well, of all things!"

"But that's me every time. Meet a girl one day, take a fancy to her, and off she sails for Europe the next."

"Honest, Mr. Shapiro, you're just the limit!" She would have no more hold of his arm, but at the next Subway hood paused in the act of descending and held out her hand. "I'm just so much obliged, Mr. Shapiro."

He removed his hat, standing there holding it in the crook of his arm, the bright sunlight on his wavy hair. "Aw, now, Miss Binswanger, is this the way to leave a fellow?"

"Sure, it is! Anyways, don't you have to go to work?"

"I should let my work interfere with my pleasure! Anyway, that's the beauty of my line--I work when I please, not when my boss pleases."

"I got to go shopping and straight home, Mr. Shapiro. Just think, two weeks from yesterday we sail, and we got enough sewing and packing to be done at our house to keep a whole regiment busy."

He withdrew her from the tangle of pedestrians and into the entrance of a corner candy-shop. "Aw, now, what's your hurry?" he insisted, regarding her with smiling, invitational eyes.

"Well, of all the nerve!" She would not meet his gaze, and swung her little leather wrist-bag back and forward by its strap.

"I dare you to get on the Elevated with me and ride out with me to Bronx Park for a sniff of the country."

"I should say not! I got to go buy a steamer-trunk and a whole list of things mamma gave me and then hurry home and help. Maybe--maybe some other day."

"Aw, have a heart, Miss Miriam! To-morrow I've got to go over to Newark to sell a bill of goods. Maybe some other day will never come. Feel how grand it is out. Just half a day. Come!"

She was full of small emphasis and with no yielding note in her voice.

"No, no, I can't go."

"Just a little while, Miss Miriam. All those things will keep until to-morrow. I can get you a steamer-trunk wholesale, anyway. Look, it's nearly two o'clock already! Come on and be game! Think of it--out in the park a day like this! Grass growing, birds singing, and the zoo and all. Aw, be game, Miss Miriam!"

"If I thought Ray would help mamma, but she's got a grouch on and--"

"Sure she will! Gee! what's the fun meeting a girl you think you're going to like if she won't do one little thing for a

fellow! You bet it ain't every girl I'd beg like this. Whoops, I could just rip things open to-day!" It was as if he felt his life in every limb. "Come on, Miss Miriam, be a sport! Come on!"

"I--I oughtn't to."

"That's what makes it all the more fun."

Her eyes were so dark, so like pools! They met his with a smile clear through to their depths. "Well, maybe, but--but just for a little while."

"Just a little while."

"I--I oughtn't."

"You ought."

"Well, just this once."

"Sure, just this once." He linked his arm in hers.

"I--I--"

"Gee!" he said, "you're a girl after my own heart!"

On the Elevated train the windows were lowered to the first inrush of spring, and when they left the city behind them came the first green smells of open field and bursting bud.

"Now are you sorry you came, little Miss Miriam?"

She bared her head to the rush of breeze and he held her hat on his lap.

"Well, I should say not!"

"No crowds, just everything to ourselves."

"M-m-m-m! Smells like lilacs."

"We'll pick some."

"I--I ought to be home."

"Forget it!"

"Now, Mr. Shap-iro!" But her eyes continued to laugh and the straight line of her mouth would quiver.

"Some eyes you've got, girlie! Some great big eyes! They nearly bowled me over when you opened the door for me last night. Let me see your eyes--what color are they, anyway?"

"Green."

They laughed without rhyme and without reason, and as if their hearts were distilling joy. Then for a time they rode without speech and with only the wind in their ears, and he watched the tendrils of her hair blowing this way and that.

"Just think," she said, finally, "we land in Naples just four weeks from to-day!"

"Hope the boat don't sail."

"You don't."

"Do!"

"If you aren't just the limit!"

"What'll I be doing while you're gallivanting round the country with some Italian count?"

"I should worry."

"I better put a bee in Izzy's ear, and maybe he'll put another in your father's, and the old gentleman will change his mind and won't go."

"Yes--he--will--not! When papa promises he sticks."

"Well, you don't know the nery things I can do if I want. Nerve is my middle name."

"You sure are some nery."

"Cheer up! I always say to myself when a firm closes the front door on me: 'Cheer up; there's always the back door and the fire-escape left.' That's how I made my rep in shirtwaists--on nerve." He inclined to her slightly across the car-seat. "You wouldn't close the front door on me, would you, Miss Miriam?"

"Look, we get off here!"

"Would you?"

"N-no, silly."

Within the park new grass was soft as plush under their feet, and once away from the winding asphalt of the main driveway the bosky heart of a dell closed them in, and the green was suddenly dappled with shadow. Here and there in the cool, damp spots violets lifted their heads and pale wood-anemones, spring's firstlings. They sat on a rock spread first with newspaper. Over their heads birds twitted.

"Somehow, here so far away and all I--I just can't get it in my head that I'm really going."

"I can't, neither."

"Naples--just think!"

"Ain't it funny, Miss Miriam, but with some girls when you meet them it's just like you had known them for always, and then again with others somehow a fellow never gets anywheres."

"That's the way with me. I take a fancy to a person or I don't."

"That's me every time. Once let me get to liking a person, and good night!"

"Me, too."

"Now take you, Miss Miriam. From the very minute last night when you opened that door for me, with your cheeks so pink and your eyes so big and bright, something just went--well, something just went sort of lickety-clap inside of me. You seen for yourself how I wanted to back out of going to the show with Izz?"

"Yes."

"It--it ain't many girls I'd want to stay home from a show for."

"Say, just listen to the birds. If I could trill like that I wouldn't have to take any lessons in Paris."

"You sing, Miss Miriam?"

"Oh, a little."

"Gee! you are a girl after my own heart! There's nothing gets me like a little girl with a voice."

"My teacher says I'm a dramatic soprano."

"When you going to sing for me, eh?"

"I'll sing for you some time alrighty."

"Soon?"

"Yes."

"How soon?"

"Maybe after--after I've had some lessons in Paris."

He was suddenly grave. "Aw, there you go on that old trip again! Gee! I wish I could grab that bag out of your hand and throw it with tickets and all in the lake!"

"You know with me it's right funny too. The minute I get something I want, then I don't want it any more. Before papa said yes I was so crazy to go, and now that I got the tickets bought I'm not so anxious at all."

"Then don't go, Miss Miriam."

She withdrew her hand and danced to her feet, her incertitude vanishing like a candle flame blown out. "Look over there, will you--a redbird!"

"If it ain't!" and he followed her quickly, high-stepping between violet patches.

"Honest, it's hard to walk, the violets are so thick."

"Here, let me pick you a bunch of them to take home, Miss Miriam. Say, ain't they beauties! Look, great big purple ones, and black and soft-looking toward the middle just like your eyes. Look what beauties--they'll keep a long time when you get home, if you wrap them in wet tissue-paper."

They fell to plucking, now here, now there.

The sun had got low when they retraced their steps to the train, and the chill of evening long since had set in.

"You--you ought to told me it was so late."

"I didn't know it myself, Miss Miriam."

"Let's hurry. Mamma won't know where--how--"

"We'll make it back in thirty minutes."

"Let's run for that train."

"Give me your hand."

They were off and against the wind, their faces thrust forward and upward. Homeward in the coach they were strangely silent, this time his hat in her lap. At the entrance to her apartment-house he left her with reiterated farewells.

"Then I can come to-morrow night, Miss Miriam?"

"Y-yes." And she stepped into the elevator. He waved through the trellis-work, as she moved upward, brandishing his hat. She answered with a flourish of her bunch of violets.

"Good-by!"

At the threshold her mother met her, querulous and in the midst of adjusting summer covers to furniture.

"How late! I hope, Miriam, right away you had the steamer-trunk sent up. Good berths--good state-rooms you got? What you got in that paper, that aloes root I told you to get against seasickness? Gimme and right away I boil it."

"No, no, don't touch them! They--they're violets. Let me put them in water with wet tissue-paper over them."

* * * * *

To the early clattering of that faithful chariot of daybreak, the milk-wagon, and with the April dawn quivering and flushing over the roofs of houses, Mrs. Binswanger rose from her restless couch and into a black flannelette wrapper.

"Simon, wake up! How a man can sleep like that the day what he starts for Europe!"

To her husband's continued and stentorian evidences of sleep she tiptoed to the adjoining bedroom, slipped feet sloughing as she walked.

"Girls!"

Only their light breathing answered her. Atop the bed-coverlet her younger daughter's hand lay upturned, the fingers curling toward the palm.

"Ray! Miriam!"

Miriam stirred and burrowed deeper into her pillow, her hair darkly spread against the white in a luxury of confusion.

"Girls!"

"What, mamma?"

"Five o'clock, Miriam, and we ain't got the trunks strapped yet, or that seasick medicine from Mrs. Berkovitz."

"For Heaven's sake, mamma, the boat don't sail till three o'clock this afternoon! There's plenty time. Go back to bed awhile, mamma."

"When such a trip I got before me as twelve days on water, I don't lay me in bed until the last minute. Ray, get up and help mamma. In a minute the milkman comes, and I want you should tell him we don't take no more for ten weeks. Get up, Ray, and help mamma see that all the windows is locked tight."

"M-m-m-m."

"Miriam, get up! I want you should throw this quilt from your bed over the brass table in the parlor so it don't get rust. Miriam, didn't you say yourself last night you must get up early? Always only at night my children got mouths about how early they get up."

From the soft mound of her couch Miriam rose to the dawn with the beautiful gesture of tossing backward her black hair. Sleep trembled on her lashes and she yawned frankly with her arms outflung.

"Oh-h-h-h-h dear!"

"I tell you I got more gumption as my daughters. I want, Miriam, you should go down by Berkovitz's for that prescription for your papa."

"Aw, now, mamma, you've got six different kinds of--"

"I tell you when I let your papa get seasick or any kind of sick on this trip, with his going-on about hisself, right away my whole trip is spoilt. Ray, if you don't get up and sew in them cuffs and collars on your coat don't expect as I will do it for you. For my part you can travel just like a rag-bag, Ray!"

"M-m-m-m."

Shivering and with her small ankles pressed together, Miriam peered out into the pale light.

"A grand day, mamma."

"Miriam, I think if I sew all the express checks up in a bag and wear them right here under my waist with the jewelry, they are better as in papa's pockets. With his tobacco-bag, easy as anything he can pull them out and lose them. That's what we need yet, to lose our express checks!"

"Mamma, that's been on your mind for ten days. For goodness' sakes, nobody's going to lose the express checks!"

"What time they call for the trunks, Miriam?"

"For goodness' sakes, mamma, didn't I tell you exactly ten times that's all been attended to! Yesterday Irving went direct to the transfer office with me."

"I ain't so sure of nothing what I don't attend to myself. Ray, get up!"

The sun rose over the roofs of the city, gilding them. At seven o'clock the household was astir, strapping, nailing, folding, and unfolding. Mr. Binswanger stooped with difficulty over his wicker traveling-bag.

"So! Na!"

In the act of adjusting her perky new hat Miriam flung out an intercepting hand. "Oh, papa, you mustn't put in that old flannel house-coat. That's not fit to wear anywhere but at home. And, papa, papa, you just mustn't take along that old black skull-cap; you'll be laughing-stock! Papa, please!"

He flung her off. "In my house and out of my house what I want to wear I wear. If in Naples them Eytalians don't like what I wear, then--"

"*Italians*, papa; how many times have I told you to say it *Italians*?"

"When they don't like what I wear over there, right away they should lump it."

"Papa, please!"

From the room adjoining Mrs. Binswanger leaned a crumpled coiffure through the frame of the open door: "Simon, I got here that red woolen undershirt. I want you should put it on before we start."

"Na, na, mamma, I--"

"Right away Mrs. Berkovitz says it will keep the salt air away from your rheumatism. That's what I need yet, you should *grex* from the start with your backache. Ray, take this in to your papa. Fooling with that new camera she stands all morning, when she should help a little. Look, Miriam, you think that in here I got the express checks safe?"

"Yes, mamma."

At ten o'clock, with the last bolt sprung and the last baggage departed, Mrs. Binswanger fell to the task of fitting gold links in her husband's adjustable cuffs, polishing his various pairs of spectacles, inserting various handkerchiefs in adjacent and expeditious pockets of his clothing.

"Simon, I want you should go in and dress now. All your things is laid right out on the bed for you."

"Mamma, you and papa don't need to begin to dress already. None of you need to leave the house until about two, and it's only ten now. Just think, from now until two o'clock you got to get ready in, mamma."

"When I travel I don't take no chances."

Miriam worked eager fingers into her new, dark-blue kid gloves. She was dark and trig in a little belted jacket, a gold quill shimmering at a cocky angle on the new blue-straw hat.

"To be on the safe side, mamma, I'm going right now to meet Irving, so we can sure have lunch and be at the boat by two."

"Not one minute later, Miriam!"

"Not one minute, mamma. Don't forget, Ray, you promised to bring my field-glass for me. Be in the state-room all of you where Irving and I can find you easy. There's always a big crowd at sailing. Don't get excited, mamma. Ray, be sure and fix papa's cuffs so the red flannel don't show. Good-by. Don't get excited, mamma!"

"Miriam, you got on the asafetidy-bag?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Miriam, you don't be one minute later as two--"

"No, mamma."

"Miriam, you--"

"Good-by!"

Over a luncheon that lay cold and unrelished between them Irving Shapiro leaned to Miriam Binswanger, his voice competing with the five-piece orchestra and noonday blather of the Oriental Cafe.

"I just can't get it in my head, somehow, Miriam, that to-morrow this time you'll be out on the sea."

"Me neither."

"I just never had two weeks fly like these since we got acquainted."

"Me--me neither."

Music like great laughter rose over the slip-up in her voice.

"You going to write to me, Miriam?"

"Yes, Irving."

"Often?"

"Yes, Irving."

"You're not going to forget me over there, are you, when you get to meeting all those counts and big fellows?"

"Oh, Irving!"

"You're not going to clean forget me then, are you, Miriam, and the great times we've had together, and the days in the woods, and the singing, and--"

"Oh, Irving, don't. I--Please--"

She laid her fork across her untouched plate and turned her face from him. Tears rose to choke her, and, tighten her throat against them as she would, one rose to the surface and ricocheted down her cheek.

"Why, Miriam!"

"It's nothing, Irving, only--only let's get out of here. I don't want any lunch, I just don't."

"Miriam, that's the way I feel, too. I--I just can't bear to have you go!"

"You--We can't talk like that, Irving."

"I tell you, Miriam, I just can't bear it!"

"I--I--oh--"

He leaned across the table for her hand, whispering, with an entire flattening of tone, "Miriam, don't go!"

"Irving, don't--talk so--so silly!"

"Miriam, let's--let's you and me stay at home!"

"Irving!"

"Let's, Miriam!"

"Irving, are you crazy?" But her voice yearned toward him.

"Miriam, right at this table I've got an idea. We can do it, Miriam; we can do it if you're game."

"Do what?"

He flashed out his watch. "We've got two hours and twenty minutes before she sails."

"Irving!"

"We have, dear, to--to get a special license and the ring and do the trick."

"Why, I--"

"Two hours and twenty minutes to make it all right for you to stay back with me. Miriam, are you game, dear?"

They regarded each other across the table as if each beheld in the other a vision.

"Irving, you--you must be crazy!"

"I'm not, dear. I was never less crazy. What's the use of us having to get apart after we just got each other? What's all those phony counts and picture-galleries and high-sounding stunts compared to us staying home and hitting it off together, Miriam? Just tell me that, Miriam."

"Irving, I--we just couldn't! Look at mamma and papa and Ray, all down at the boat maybe by now waiting for me, and none of them wanting to go except me. For a whole year I had to beg them for this, Irving. They wouldn't be going now if it wasn't for me. I--Irving, you must be crazy!"

He leaned closer and out of range of the waiter, his voice repressed to a tight whisper.

"None of those things count when a girl and a fellow fall in love like you and me, Miriam."

Even in her crisis her diffidence inclosed her like a sheath. "I never said I--I was in love, did I?"

"But you are! They'll go over there, Miriam, without you and have the time of their lives. We'll stay home and keep the flat open for them so your mother won't have to worry any more about burglars. After the first surprise it won't be a trick at all. We got two hours and fifteen minutes, dearie, and we can do the act and be down at the boat with bells on to tell 'em good-by. Now ain't the time to think about the little things and waste time, Miriam. We got to do it now or off you go hiking, just like--like we had never met, a whole ocean between us, Miriam!"

"Irving, you--you mustn't."

She pushed back from the table. He paid his check with a hand that trembled, resuming, even as he crammed his bill-folder into a rear pocket:

"Be a sport, Miriam! I tell you we got the right to do it because we're in love. We'll just tell them the truth, that at the last minute we--we just couldn't let go. I'll do the talking, Miriam; I'll tell the old folks."

"Ray she--"

"If you ain't afraid to start out on a hundred a month and commissions, dear, we don't need to be scared of nothing. I'll tell them just the plain truth, dear. Just think, if we do it now, when they come back in ten weeks we can be down at the pier to meet them, eh, Miriam, just like an--an old married couple--eh, Miriam--eh, Miriam, dear!"

She rose. A red seepage of blood flooded her face; her bosom rose and fell.

"Are you game, Miriam? Are you, darling--eh, Miriam, eh?"

"Yes, Irving."

* * * * *

Alongside her pier, white as a gull, new painted, new washed, cargoed and stoked, the *Roumania* reared three red smoke-stacks, and sat proudly with the gang-plank flung out from her mighty hip and her nose tapering toward the blue harbor and the blue billows beyond.

Within the narrow confines of a first-deck stateroom, piled round with luggage and its double-decker berths freshly made up, Mrs. Binswanger applied an anxious eye to the port-hole, straining tiptoe for a wider glimpse of deck.

"I tell you this much, papa, in another five minutes when that child don't come, right away off the boat I get and go home where I belong."

In the act of browsing among the lower contents of his wicker hand-bag

Mr. Binswanger raised a perspiring face.

"Na, na, mamma, thirty minutes' time yet she's got to get here. Everybody don't got to come on four hours too soon like us."

"Ja, you should worry about anything, so long as you got right in front of you your newspapers and your tobacco. Right away for his tobacco he has to dig when he sees so worried I am I can't see. Why don't our Ray come back now if she can't find 'em and say she can't find 'em?"

"I tell you, Carrie, if you let me go myself I can find 'em and--"

"Right here you stay with me, Simon Binswanger! We don't get separated no more as we can help. I ain't--Ach, look such a crowd, and no Miriam. I--"

"Na, na, Carrie!"

"So easy-going he is! My daughter should keep me worried like this! To lunch the day what she sails to Europe she has to go! Always she complains that salesmen ain't good enough for her yet, and on the day she sails she has to go to lunch with one. Why, I ask you, Simon, why don't that Ray come back?"

Mr. Binswanger packed his pipe tight and adjusted a small, close-fitting black cap. "To travel with women, I tell you, it ain't no pleasure."

"Ach, du Himmel! Right away off that cap comes, Simon! With my own hands right away out of sight I hide it. Just once I want Miriam should see you in that skull-hat! Right away off you take it, Simon!"

"Ach, Carrie, on my own head I--"

"I tell you already ten times I wish I was back in my flat. I guess you think it's a good feeling I got to lock up my flat for Himmel knows who to break in, and my son Isadore 'way out in Ohio and not even here to--to say to his mother good-bye. Already with such a smell on this boat and my feelings I got a homesickness I don't wish on my worst enemy. My boy should be left like this in America all alone!"

"Ach, Carrie, for why--"

Of a sudden Mrs. Binswanger's face fell into soft creases, her eyes closed, and cold tears oozed through, zigzagging downward. "My boy out West with--"

"Na, na, Carrie! Don't you worry our Izzy don't take care of hisself better as you. For what his expense accounts are--always a parlor car he has to have--he can take care of hisself twice better as us, mamma. Mamma, you should feel fine now we got started. I wish, mamma, you could see such a card-room and such a dining-room they got up-stairs--gold chairs like you never seen. We should go up on deck, Carrie, and--"

"Ach, Simon, Simon, why don't that child come! So nearly crazy I never was in my life. And now on top my Ray gone too. In a few minutes the boat sails, and I don't know yet if I got a child on board. I tell you, Simon, when Ray comes back I think it's better we carry off our trunks and--"

"Na, na, mamma, hear out in the hall. I told you so! Didn't I tell you they come? You hear now Miriam's voice. Didn't I tell you, didn't I tell you?"

"Mamma, papa, here we are!"

And in the doorway the hesitant form of erstwhile Miriam Binswanger, her eyes dim as if obscured by a fog of tulle, over one shoulder the flushed face of Mr. Irving Shapiro, and in turn over his the dark, quick features of Ray, flashing their quick expressions.

"I--I found 'em, mamma, just coming on board."

A white flame of anger seemed suddenly to lick dry the two tears that staggered down Mrs. Binswanger's plump cheeks.

"I tell you, Miriam, you got a lots of regards for your parents."

"But, mamma, we--"

"A child what can worry her mother like this! Ten minutes before we sail on board she comes just like nothing had happened. I should think, Mr. Shapiro, that a young man what can hold a responsible position like you, would see as a young girl what he invites out to lunch should have more regards for her parents as you both."

"Mamma, you--But just wait, mamma."

Miriam stepped half resolutely into the room, peeling the glove from off her left hand, and her glance here and there and everywhere with the hither and thither of a wind-blown leaf.

"Mamma, guess what--what we--we got to tell you? Mamma, we--Irving, you--you tell," Her bared hand fell like a quivering wing and she shrank back against his gray tweed coat-sleeve. "Irving, you tell!"

"Miriam, nothing ain't wrong! Izzy, my--"

"No, no, Mrs. Binswanger, nothing is wrong; what Miriam was trying to say was that everything's right, wasn't it, Miriam?"

"Yes, Irving."

Mr. Binswanger threw two hands with the familiar upward gesture. "Come, right away in a few minutes you got to get off, Shapiro. First I take you up and show you the card-room and--"

"Sh-h-h-h, papa, let Irving--Go on, Irving."

He cleared his throat, inserting two fingers within his tall collar. "You see, Mr. Binswanger, you and Mrs. Binswanger, just at the last minute we--we both seen we couldn't let go!"

"Miriam!"

"Now don't get excited, Mrs. Binswanger, only we--well, we just went and got married, Mrs. Binswanger, when we seen we couldn't let go. From Dr. Cann we just came. A half-hour on pins and needles, you can believe us or not, we had to wait for him, and that's what made us so late. See, on her hand she's got the ring and--"

"See, mamma!"

"And in my pocket I got the special license. We couldn't help it, Mr. Binswanger, we--we just couldn't let go."

"We couldn't, mamma, papa. We thought we ought to stay at home in the flat--you're so worried, mamma, about burglars and nobody in America with Izzy--and--and--Mamma? Papa? Haven't you got nothing to say to your Miriam?"

She extended empty and eloquent arms, a note of pleading rising above the tears in her words.

"Nothing? Mamma? Papa?"

From without came voices; the grinding of chains lifting cargo; a great basso from a smoke-stack; more voices. "All off! All off!" Feet scurrying over wooden decks! "All off! All off!" A second steam-blast that shot up like a rocket.

"Mamma? Ray? Papa? Haven't any of you got anything to say?"

"*Gott in Himmel!*" said Mrs. Binswanger. "*Gott in Himmel!*"

"So!" said Mr. Binswanger, placing a hand with a loud pat on each knee.

"So!"

"Oh, papa!"

"A fine come-off! A fine come-off! Eh, mamma? To Europe we go to take our daughter, and just so soon as we go no daughter we 'ain't got to take!"

"*Gott in Himmel! Gott in Himmel!*"

"Ray, haven't you got nothing to say to Irving and me--Ray!"

With a quick, fluid movement the younger sister slid close and her arms wound tight. "Miriam, you--you little darling, you! Miriam! Irving! You darlings!"

Suddenly Mrs. Binswanger inclined, inclosing the two in a wide, moist embrace. "Ach, my Miriam, what have you done! Not a stitch, not even a right wedding! Irving, you bad boy, you, like I--I should ever dream you had thoughts to be our son-in-law. Ach, my children, my children! Simon, I tell you we can be thankful it's a young man what we know is all right. Ach, I--I just don't know--I--just--don't know."

"Papa, you ain't mad at us?"

"What good it does me to be mad? I might just so well be glad as mad. My little Miriam-sha, my little Miriam-sha!" And he fell to blinking as if with gritty eyelids.

"Simon--ach, Simon--you--ach, my husband, you--you ain't crying, you--"

"Go 'way, Carrie, with such nonsense! You women don't know yet the difference between a laff and a cry. Well, Shapiro, you play me a fine trick, eh?"

"It wasn't a trick, Mr. Binswanger--pa, it was--"

"All off! All off!" And a third great blast sounded that set the tumblers rattling in their stands.

"I guess me--me and Irving's got to get off now, mamma--"

Mrs. Binswanger grasped her husband's arm in sudden panic. "Simon, I--I think as we should get off and go home with them. I--"

"Now, now, mamma, don't get excited! No, no, you mustn't! We will keep house fine for you until you come back. See, mamma! I have the key, and everything's fixed. See, mamma! You got to go, mamma. Ray should see Europe before she finds out there--there's just one thing that's better than going to Europe. Please, mamma, don't get excited. I tell you we'll have things fine when you come back. Won't we, Irving, won't we?"

"Ach, nothing in the house, Miriam."

"We got to get off now, Miriam dear, we got to. You can write us about those things, Mrs. Binswanger--mamma. Come, Miriam!"

"Yes, yes, Irving. Now don't cry, mamma, please! When everybody is so happy it's a sin to cry."

"Not a stitch on her wedding-day! All her clothes locked up here on the boat! Let me open the top tray of the trunk, Miriam, and give you your toothbrush and a few waists--Ach, nearly crazy I am! How I built for that girl's wedding when it--"

"Come, mamma, come--"

They were jamming up the crowded stairway and out to the sun-washed deck. Women in gay corsages and bright-colored veils strolled with an air of immediate adjustment. Men already in steamer caps and tweeds leaned against the railings. Travelers were rapidly separating themselves from stay-at-homes. Already the near-side decks were lined with faces, some wet-eyed and some smiling, and all with kerchiefs or small flags ready for adieus.

"All off! All off!"

"Good-by, mamma darling. Don't worry!"

"Irving, you be good to my Miriam. It's just like you got from me a piece of my heart. Be good to my baby, Irving. Be good!"

Ray tugged at her mother's skirts. "Sh-h-h-h, mamma, the whole boat don't need to know."

"Be good to her, Irving!"

"Like I--just like I could be anything else to her, mamma!"

"Good-by, mamma darling. Don't cry so, I tell you! Let me go, please, mamma, please! Good-by, papa darling, take good care of yourself and--I--just love you, papa! Ray, have a grand time and don't miss none of it. That's right, kiss Irving; he's your brother-in-law now. Don't cry, mamma darling! Good-by! Good-by!"

A tangle of adieus, more handkerchiefing, more tears and laughter, more ear-splitting shrieks of steam and a black plume of smoke that rose in a billow, and hand in hand Miriam and Irving Shapiro joggling down the gang-plank to the pier.

From the bow of the top deck the ship's orchestra let out a blare of music designed to cover tears and heartaches. The gang-plank drew up and in like a tongue, separating land from sea. From every deck faces were peering down into the crowd below.

Miriam grasped her husband's coat-sleeve, in her frenzy taking a fine pinch of flesh with it. Tears rained down her cheeks.

"There they are, Irving, all three of 'em on the second deck, waving down at us! Good-by, mamma, papa, Ray! Oh, Irving, I just can't stand to see 'em go! Papa, Ray, mamma darling!"

"Now, now, Miriam, think what a grand time they're going to have and how soon they're going to be home again."

"Oh, my darlings!"

Mrs. Binswanger sopped at her eyes, waving betimes the small black cap rescued in the up-deck rush.

Laughter crept with a tinge of hysteria into Miriam's voice. "Oh, darlings, I--I just can't bear to have you go. They're--they're moving, Irving! I--Oh, mamma, papa, darlings! They're moving, Irving!"

Out into the bay where the sunlight hung between blue water and bluer sky, a sea-gull swinging round her spar, the *Roumania* steamed, unconscious of her freight.

"Good-by, mamma, good-by. Let's follow them to the end of the pier, Irving. I--I want to watch them till they're out of sight."

"Don't cry so, darling!"

"Look! look, see that black speck; it's papa! Oh, I love him, Irving. Good-by, my darlings! Good-by! They didn't want to go except for me, and--Oh, my darlings!"

"Come, dear, we can't see them any more. Come now, it's all over, dear."

They picked their way through the dispersing crowd back toward the dock gates.

"See, dear, how grand everything is! You and me happy here and--"

"Oh, Irving, I know, but--"

"But nothing."

"Pin my veil for me, dear, to--to hide my eyes. I bet I'm a sight!"

"You're not a sight, you're a beauty!"

"Sh-h-h-h, I don't feel like making fun, Irving!"

"It's a hot day, dear, so we got to celebrate some cool way. Let's take a cab and--"

"No, Irving dear, we can't afford another one."

"To-day we can afford any old thing we want."

"No, no, dear."

"I got it, then! If we ride down to the Battery we can catch a boat for Brighton. Then we can have a little boat-ride all

our own, eh? You and me, darling, on a boat-trip all our own."

She turned her shining eyes full upon him. "That'll be just perfect, Irving!" she said.

ROLLING STOCK

In the great human democracy, revolution cannot uncrown the builder of bridges to place upon his throne the builder of pantry shelves. Gray matter and blue blood and white pigment are not dynasties of man's making. Accident of birth, and not primogeniture, makes master minds and mulattoes, seamstresses and rich men's sons. Wharf-rats are more often born than made.

That is why, in this dynasty not of man's making, weavers gone blind from the intricacies of their queen's coronation robe, can kneel at her hem to kiss the cloth of gold that cursed them. A peasant can look on at a poet with no thought to barter his black bread and lentils for a single gossamer fancy. Backstair slaveys vie with each other whose master is more mighty. And this is the story of Millie Moores who, with no anarchy in her heart and no feud with the human democracy, could design for women to whom befell the wine and pearl dog-collars of life, frocks as sheer as web, and on her knees beside them, her mouth full of pins and her sole necklace a tape-measure, thrill to see them garbed in the glory of her labor.

Indeed, when the iridescent bubble of reputation floated out from her modest dressmaking rooms in East Twenty-third Street, Millie Moores, whom youth had rushed past, because she had no leisure for it, felt her heart open like a grateful flower when life brought her more chores to do. And when one day a next-year's-model limousine drew up outside her small doorway with the colored fashion sheet stuck in the glass panel, and one day another, and then one spring day three of them in shining procession along her curb, something cheeped in Millie Moores's heart and she doubled her prices.

And then because ladies long of purse and short of breath found the three dark flights difficult, and because the first small fruit of success burst in Millie Moores's mouth, releasing its taste of wine, she withdrew her three-figure savings account from the Manhattan Trust Company, rented an elevator-service, mauve-upholstered establishment on middle Broadway, secured the managerial services of a slender young man fresh from the Louis Quinze rooms of Madam Roth-Modes, Fifth Avenue, tripled her prices, and emerged from the brown cocoon of Twenty-third Street, Madam Moores, Modiste.

Two years later, three perfect-thirty-six sibyls promenaded the mauve display rooms, tempting those who waddle with sleeveless frocks that might have been designed for the Venus of Milo warmed to life.

The presiding young man, slim and full of the small ways that ingratiate, and with a pomaded glory of tow hair rippling back in a double wave that women's fingers itched to caress and men's hands itched to thresh, pushed forward the mauve velvet chairs with a waiter's servility, but none of his humility; officiated over the crowded pages of the crowded appointment-book, jotted down measurements with an imperturbability that grew for every inch the tape-line measured over and above.

Last, Madam Moores, her small figure full of nerves; two spots of red high on her cheeks; her erstwhile graying hairs, a bit premature and but a sprinkling of them, turned to the inward of a new and elaborate coiffure; and meeting this high tide with a smile, newly enhanced by bridge-work and properly restrained to that dimension of insolence demanded by the rich of those who serve them well.

In the springtime Fifth Avenue and Sixth Avenue turn lightly to thoughts of Narragansett Pier and Bronx Park. Fifth Avenue sheds its furs and Sixth Avenue its woolen underwear. At the dusk of one such day, when the taste of summer was like poppy leaves crushed between the teeth, and open streetcars and open shirtwaists blossomed forth even as the distant larkspur in the distant field, Madam Moores beheld the electric-protection door swing behind the last customer and relaxed frankly against a table piled high with fabrics of a dozen sheens.

"Whew! Thank heavens, she's gone!"

To a symphony of six-o'clock whistles the rumble of machines from the workrooms suddenly ceased.

"Turn out the shower lights, Phonzie, and see that Van Nord's black lace goes out in time for opera to-night. When she telephoned at noon I told her it was on the way."

Mr. Alphonse Michelson hurtled a mauve-colored footstool and hastened rearward toward the swinging-door that led to the emptying workrooms. The tallest of the perfect-thirty-sixes, stepping out of her beaded slippers into sturdier footwear of the street, threw him a smile as he passed that set her glittering earrings and metal-yellow ringlets bobbing like bells in a breeze.

"Hand me the shoe-buttoner, Phonzie. The doctor says stooping is bad for my hair-pins."

Their laughter, light as foam, met and mingled.

"Oh, you nervy Gertie!"

"What's your hurry, Phonzie dearie?"

"I don't see you stopping me."

"Fine chance, with her crouching over there, ready to spring."

"Hang around, sweetness. Maybe I'm not on duty, and I'll take you to supper if you've not got a date with one of your million-dollar Charlies."

"Soft pedal, Phonzie! You know I'd break a date with any one of 'em any day in the week for a sixty-cent table d'hote with you!"

"Hang around then, sweetness."

"Hang around! Gawd, if I hang around you any more than I have been doing in the last five years, following you from one establishment to the other, they'll have to kill me to put me out of my misery."

"You're all right, Gert. And when you haven't any of the greenback boys around to fill in, you can always fall back on me."

"You're a nice old boy, Phonzie, and I like the kink in your hair, but--but sometimes when I get blue, like to-night, I--I just wish I had never clapped eyes on you."

"How she hates me."

"I wish to God I did."

"Cut the tragedy, Gert."

"That's the trouble; I been cutting it for the mock comedy all my life."

"You, the highest little flyer in the flock!"

"Yeh, because I've never found anybody who even cares enough about me to clip my wings." Her laughter was short and with a blunt edge.

"Whew! Such a spill for you, Gert!"

"It's the spring gets on my nerves, I guess. Blow me to a table d'hote to-night, Phonzie. I got a red-ink thirst on me and I'm as blue as indigo."

"Hang around, Gert, and if I'm not on duty I--"

"Honest, you're the greatest kid to squirm when you think a girl is going to pin you down. You let me get about as serious as a musical comedy with you and then you put up the barbed wire."

"Yes, I do not!"

"Fine chance I've got of ever pinning you down! You care about as much for me as--as anybody else does, and that ain't saying much."

"Aw, Gert, you got the dumps--"

"Look at her over there. I can see by her profile she's hanging around to buy you your dinner to-night. Whatta you bet she springs the appointment-book yarn on you and you fall for it?"

A laugh flitted beneath Mr. Michelson's blond hedge of mustache. "Can I help it that I got such hypnotizing, mesmerizing ways?"

She smiled beneath her rouge, and wanly. "No, darling," she said.

Across the room Madam Moores regarded them from beside the pile of sheeny silks, her fingers plucking nervously at the fabrics.

"Hurry up over there, Phonzie. I told her the black lace was on the way."

Miss Dobriner daubed at her red lips with a lacy fribble of handkerchief, her voice sotto behind it.

"Don't let her pin you, Phonzie. Have a heart and take me to supper when I'm blue as indigo."

He leaned to impale a pin upon his lapel. "She's so white to me, Gert, how can I squirm if she asks me to go over the appointment-book with her to-night?"

"Tell her your grandmother's dead."

He leaned for another pin. "Stick around down in Seligman's. If I dust my hat with my handkerchief when I pass, I'm nailed for the evening. If I can wriggle I'll blow you to Churchey's for supper."

"I--"

"Sh-h-h-h."

He retreated behind the mauve-colored swinging-door. The two remaining sibyls, hatted and coated to crane the neck of the passer-by, hurried arm-in-arm out into the spring evening. An errand girl, who had dropped her skirt and put up her hair so that the eye of the law might wink at her stigma of youth, hung the shimmering gowns away for another day's display. Gertie Dobriner patted her ringed fingers against her mouth to press back a yawn and trailed across the room, adjusting her hat before a full-length mirror. In the light from a single electric bulb her hair showed three colors--yellow gold, green gold, and, toward the roots, the dark gold of old bronze.

"You can go now, Gert."

"Yes, madam."

Miss Dobriner adjusted a spray of curls. Through the mirror she could observe the mauve-colored swinging-door.

"Did--did Du Cass order that fish-tail model, madam?"

Madam Moores dallied with her appointment-book. Through the mirror she could observe the mauve-colored swinging-door.

"Yes, in green."

"If I had her complexion I'd wear sandpaper to match it."

"We haven't all of us got the looks, Gert, that'll get us four-carat stones to wear down to a twenty-dollar-a-week job."

Miss Dobriner's hand flew to her throat and the gem that gleamed there. "I--I guess I can buy a stone on time for myself without--without any insinuations."

"You can wear the stone, all right, Gert, but you can't get past the insinuations."

"I--I ain't so stuck on this place, madam, that I got to stand for your insinuations."

"No, it ain't the *place* you're stuck on that keeps you here, Gert."

They regarded each other through eyes banked with the red fires of anger, and beside the full-length mirror Miss Dobriner trembled as she stood.

"You can think what you please, madam. I--I'm hired by Phonzie and I'm here to wear models and not to steer your thinking."

Madam Moores sat so tense in her chair that her weight did not relax to it. "You and me can't have no fusses, you know that, don't you? I give Phonzie the run of my floor, and he's the one has to deal with--with freshness."

"You--you started it, madam. I--can get along with anybody. I don't have to stay in a place where I'm not wanted; it's just because Phonzie--"

"We won't fuss about it, Gertie. I'm the last one to fall out with my help."

Silence.

"Did--did Laidlaw order that trotteur model in plaid, Gert?"

"No; she's coming back to-morrow."

"To-day's the day to land an order."

"She says that pongee we made her last spring never fit her slick enough between the shoulders. I felt like telling her we don't guarantee to fit tubs."

"You got to handle Laidlaw right, Gert. There'll be two trousseaux and a ball in that family before June. The best way to lose a customer like Laidlaw is to sell her what she ought to wear instead of what she wants to wear."

"Handle her right! I wore rubber gloves. Did I quiver an eyelash when she ordered that pink organdie, and didn't Phonzie nearly double up when he took down the order? You want to see her measurements. I'll get the book and--"

"No, no, Gert; you can go on. I got to stay and go over the appointments with Phonzie."

A quick red flowed up and under the rouged surface of Miss Dobriner's cheeks. "Oh--excuse me!"

"What!"

"I--All right, I'm going."

She readjusted her hat, a tiny winged chariot of pink straw and designed after fashion's most epileptic caprice, coaxed her ringed fingers into a pair of but slightly soiled white gloves, her eyes the while staring past her slim reflection in the mirror and on to the mauve-colored swinging-door.

"Good night, Gert."

Miss Dobriner bared her teeth to a smile and closed her lips again before she spoke. "Good night--madam."

Then she went out, clicking the door behind her. Through the mauve-colored swinging-door and scarcely a clock-tick later entered Mr. Alphonse Michelson, spick, light-footed, slim.

"Charley's left with the black lace, madam."

It was as if Madam Moores suddenly threw off the husk of the day.

"Tired, Phonzie?"

He ran a hand across his silk hair and glanced about. "Everybody gone?"

"Yes."

He reached for his hat and cane and a pair of untried gray gloves atop them. "I sent the yellow taffeta out on a C.O.D."

That gold buckle she wanted on the shoulder cost her just twenty bucks more."

"Good!"

He fitted on his hat carefully and snapped his gloves across his palm.

"Well, I'm off, madam."

She adjusted her hat in a simulation of indifference. "Like to come up to the flat for supper and--and go over the books, Phonzie?"

"Huh?"

"There's plenty for two and--and we could kind of go over things."

He twirled his cane. "Oh, I--I'm running up there too often, sponging off you."

"Sponging! Like I'd ask you if I didn't want you!"

"I been up there sponging off you three times this week. Anyways, I'm--"

"Don't I always just give you pot luck?"

"Yes, but you'll think afterwhile that I got you mixed up with my meal-ticket."

A sensitive seepage of blood rushed over Madam Moores's nervous face, stinging it. "Of course, if you won't want to come!"

"Don't want to come! A fellow that's never had a snap like your cozy corner in his life--"

"Of course if--if you got a date with one of--of the models or something."

"I never said that, did I?"

"Well, get that sponging idea out of your head, Phonzie. There's always plenty for two in my cupboard. Like I says the other night, what's the use being able to afford my little flat if I can't get some pleasure out of it?"

"It sure looks good to this hall-room Johnnie."

She gathered her gloves and her black silk handbag. "Then come, Phonzie," she said, "I'm going to take you home." And her throat might have been lined with fur.

They went out together, locking the doors behind them, and into an evening as soft as silk and full of stars.

Along the wide up-town street the human tide flowed fast and as if thaw had set in, releasing it from the bondage of winter. Girls in light wraps and without hats loitered in the white flare of drugstore lights. Here and there a brown stoop bloomed with a boarder or two. In front of Seligman's florist shop, which occupied the ground floor of Madam Moores's dressmaking establishment, Alphonse Michelson paused for a moment in the flare of its decorative show-window and flecked at his hatband with sheer untried handkerchief.

"Come on, Phonzie."

"Coming, madam."

In the up-town Subway, bound for the up-town flat, he leaned to her with his small blond mustache raised in a smile.

"Where's the book, madam?"

"Forgot it," she replied, without shame.

* * * * *

Out of three hundred and eighty dollars cash, a bit of black and gold brocade flung adroitly over the imitation hearth, a cot masquerading under a Mexican afghan of many colors, a canary in a cage, a potted geranium, a shallow chair with a threadbare head-rest, a lamp, a rug, a two-burner gas-stove, Madam Moores had evolved Home.

And why not? The Petit Trianon was built that a queen might there find rest from marble halls. The Borghese women in their palaces live behind drawn shades, but Italian peasants sit in their low doorways and sing as they rock and suckle.

In Madam Moores's two-flights-up flat the windows were flung open to the moist air of spring, which flowed in cool as water between crisp muslin curtains, stirring them. In the sudden flare of electric light the canary unfolded its head from a sheaf of wing, cheeped, and fell to picking up seed from the bottom of its cage.

Mr. Alphonse Michelson collapsed into the shallow chair beside the table and relaxed his head against the threadbare dent in the upholstery.

"Whoops! home never was like this!"

"Is him tired?"

"Dead."

"Smoke?"

"Yep."

"There."

"Ah!"

"Now him all comfy and I go fix poor tired bad boy him din-din."

More native than mother-tongue is Mother's tongue. Whom women love they would first destroy with gibberish. To Mr. Michelson's linguistic credit, however, he shifted in his chair in unease.

"What did you say?"

"What him want for din-din?"

He slung one slim leg atop the other, slumping deeper to the luxury of his chair. "Dinner?"

"Yes, din-din."

"Say, those were swell chicken livers smothered in onions you served the other night, madam. Believe me, those were some livers!"

No, reader, Romance is not dead. On the contrary, he has survived the frock-coat and learned to chew a clove.

A radiance as soft as the glow from a pink-shaded lamp flowed over Madam Moores's face.

"Livers him going to have and biscuits made in my own ittsie bittsie oven. Eh?"

"Swell."

She divested herself of her wraps, fluffing her mahogany-colored hair where the hat had restricted it, lighted a tiny stove off in the tiny kitchenette and enveloped herself in a blue-bib-top apron. Her movements were short and full of caprice, and when she set the table, brushing his chair as she passed and repassed, lights came out in her eyes when she dared raise her lids to show them.

They dined by the concealed fireplace and from off a table that could fold its legs under like Aladdin's. Fumes of well-made coffee rose as ingratiating as the perfume of a love story. Mr. Michelson dropped a lump of butter into the fluffy heart of a biscuit and clapped the halves together.

"Some biscuits!"

"Bad boy, stop jollyng."

"Say, if I'd tell you the truth about what I think of these biscuits, you'd say I was writing a streetcar advertisement for

baking-powder. Say, this is some cup custard!"

"More?"

"Full to my eyebrows."

"Just a little bittsie?"

"Nope."

He lighted a cigarette and they settled back in after-dinner completeness, their dessert-plates pushed well toward the center of the table and their senses quiet. She pleated the edge of her napkin and watched him blow leisurely spirals of smoke to the ceiling.

"What you thinking about, Phonzie?"

"Nothing."

"Honest?"

"If I was thinking at all I was just sizing it up as pretty soft for a fellow like me to get this sort of stand-in with--with my boss. Gawd! me and Roth used to love each other like snakes."

"I--I ain't your boss, Phonzie. Don't I give you the run of everything--hiring the models and all?"

"Sure you're my boss, and it's pretty soft for me."

"And I was just thinking, Phonzie, that it's pretty soft for me to have found a fellow like you to manage things for me."

"Shucks!"

"Without you, so used to the ways of the Avenue and all that kind of thing, where would I be now, trying to run in the right kind of bluff with the trade?"

"That's easy! After all, Fifth Avenue and Third Avenue is pretty much alike in the end, madam. A spade may be a spade, but if you're a good salesman, you can put it on black velvet and sell it for a dessert-spoon any day in the week."

"That's just what I'm saying, Phonzie, about you're knowing how. I needed just a fellow like you to show me how the swell trade has got to be blindfolded, and that the difference between a dressmaker and a modiste is about a hundred and fifty dollars a gown."

"You ought to see the way we handled them when I was on the floor for Roth. Say, we wouldn't touch a peignoir in that establishment for under two hundred and fifty, and--we had 'em coming in there like sheep. The Riverside Drive trade is nothing, madam, compared to what we could do down there with the Avenue business."

"You sure know how to handle the lorgnette bunch, Phonzie."

"Is it any wonder, being in the business twenty years?"

"Twenty years! Why, Phonzie, you--you don't look much more than twenty yourself."

He laughed, shifting one knee to the other. "That's because you can't see that my eye teeth are gold, madam."

"You're so light on your feet, Phonzie, and slick."

"To look twenty and feel your forty years ain't what it's cracked up to be. If I had a home of my own, you know what I'd buy first--a pair of carpet slippers and a patent rocker."

"I bet you mean it, too, Phonzie."

"Sure I mean it! How'd you like to go through life like me, trying to keep the kink ironed in my hair and out of my back, or lose my job at the only kind of work I'm good for? It's like having to live with a grin frozen on your face so you can't

close your mouth."

"I--I just can't get over it, Phonzie, you *forty*! You five years older than me and me afraid--thinking all along it was just the other way."

"I had already shed my milk teeth before you were born, madam."

"Whatta you know about that!"

"Ask Gert. She's been following me around from place to place for years, sticking to me because I say there ain't a model in the business can show the clothes like she can."

"Yes?"

"Ask her; she's my age and we been on the job together for twenty years. Long before live models was even known in the business, she and me were showing goods in the old Cunningham place on Madison Avenue."

"Even--even back there you was dead set on having good figures around the place, wasn't you, Phonzie?"

"I tell you it's economy in the end, madam, to have figures that can show off the goods to advantage."

"Oh, I'm not kicking, Phonzie, but I was just saying."

"I have been in the business long enough, madam, to learn that the greatest way in the world to show gowns is on live stock. A dame will fall for any sort of a rag stuck on a figure like Gert's, and think the waist-line and all is thrown in with the dress. You seen for yourself Van Ness order five gowns right off Gert's back to-day. Would she have fallen for them if we had shown them in the hand? Not much! She forgot all about her own thirty-eight waist-line when she ordered that pink organdie. She was seeing Gert's twenty-two inches."

"But honest, Phonzie, take a girl like Gert, even with her figure, she--Oh, I don't know, there's something about her!"

"She may rub your fur the wrong way, madam, but under all her flip ways they don't come no finer than Gert."

"No, it ain't that, only she don't always get across. Take Lipton; she won't even let her show her a gown; she's always calling for Dodo instead. Sometimes I think the trade takes exceptions to a girl like Gert, her all decked out in diamonds that--show how--how fly she must be."

"Gertie Dobriner's the best in the business, just the same, madam. She ain't stuck on her way of living no more than I am, but she's a model and she 'ain't got enough of anything else in her to make the world treat her any different than a model."

"I'm not saying she ain't a good thirty-six, Phonzie."

"I got to hand it to her, madam, when it comes to a lot of things. She may be a little skylarker, but take it from me, it ain't from choice, and when she likes you--God! honest, I think that girl would pawn her soul for you. When I was down with pneumonia--"

"I ain't saying a thing against her."

"She's no saint, maybe, but then God knows I'm not, either, and what I don't know about her private life don't bother me."

"Oh, I--I know you like her all right."

"Say, I'll bet you any amount if that girl had memory enough to learn the words of a song or the steps of a dance, she could have landed a first-row job in any musical show on Broadway. She could do it now, for that matter. Gad! did you see her to-day showing off that Queen Louise cloth-of-gold model? Honest, she took my breath away, and I been on the floor with her twenty years."

"Y-yes."

"Keep down your hips and waist-line, Gert, I always say to her, and you are good in the business for ten years yet."

"She should worry while the crop of four carats is good."

"Yes, but just the same a girl like her don't know when her luck may turn. A girl can lose her luck sometimes before she loses her figure."

"Any old time she can lose her luck with you."

"Me!"

"Yes, you!"

Madam Moores bent over the pleats in her napkin. Opposite her, his cigarette held fastidiously aloft, he regarded her through its haze.

"Well, of all things! So that--that's what you think?"

"I--I know."

"Know what?"

"That she's dead strong for you."

"Sure she is, but what's that got to do with it? That girl's like--well, she's like a sister or--or a pal to me, but she's got about as much time for a fellow of my pace, except when she gets blue, as--as the Queen of Sheba has."

"That's what you think, maybe, but everybody else knows she--she's been after you for years, trying--"

"Aw, cut the comedy, madam. Honest, you make me sore. She's nothing to me off the floor but a darn good pal. Say, I can treat her to a sixty-cent table d'hote twice a week; but don't you think in the back of my head, when it comes to a showdown, that I couldn't even buy silk shoelaces for a girl of her kind. I ain't her pace and we both know it. Bosh!"

"You'd like to be, all right, if--if she didn't have so many rich ones hanging around."

"Just the same, many's the time she's told me if she could land a regular fellow and do the regular thing and settle down on seventy-five a month in a Harlem flat, why she'd drop all this skylarking of hers for a family of youngsters, so quick it would make your head swim."

"Sure, that's just what I say, she--"

"Many's the time she--she's cried to me--just cried, because the kind of life she has to live don't lead to anything, and she knows it."

"I ain't blaming you for liking her, Phonzie; a girl with her figure can make an old dub like me look like--well, I just guess after her I--I must look like thirty cents to you."

"You! Say, you got more real sense in your little finger than three of Gert's kind put together."

She colored like a wild rose.

"Sense ain't what counts with the men nowadays; it's looks and--and speed like Gert's."

"Girls like Gert are all right, I tell you; but say, when it comes to real brains like yours--nobody home."

"Maybe not, but just the same it's the girls with sense get tired having the men rave about their smartness and pass on, to go rushing after a empty head completely smothered under yellow curls. That's how much *real* brains counts for with--with you men."

He flung her a gesture, his cigarette trailing a design in smoke. "Honest, madam, you got me wrong there. A fellow like me 'ain't got the nerve to--to go after a woman like you. A girl like Dodo or Gert is my size, but I'd be a swell dub trying to line up alongside of you, now wouldn't I?"

Tears that were distilled in her heart rose to her eyes, dimming them.

Her hand fluttered in among the plates and cups and saucers toward him.

"Phonzie, I--I--"

"You what?"

"I--I--Aw, nothing."

Her head fell suddenly forward in her arms, pushing the elaborate coiffure awry, and beneath the blue-checked apron her shoulders heaved.

He rose. "Madam! Why, madam, what--"

"Don't--don't pay any attention to me, Phonzie. I--I just got a silly fit on me. I'll be all right in a minute."

"Aw, madam, I--I didn't mean to make you sore by anything I said."

"You go now, Phonzie; the whole evening don't need to be spoiled for you just because I went and got a silly fit of blues on. You--you go get some live one like Gert and--and take her out skylarking."

"You're sore about Gert, is that it, madam?"

"No, no. Honest, Phonzie."

"Madam, I--I just don't know what's got you. Is it something I said has hurt your feelings?"

"No, no."

He advanced with an incertitude that muddled his movements, made to cross to her side where she lay with her arms outstretched in the fuddle of dishes, made to touch her black silk sleeve where it emerged from the blue-checked apron, hesitated, sucking his lips in between his teeth, swung on his heel, then around once more, and placed his hand lightly on her shoulder.

"Madam?"

"You--you just go on, Phonzie. I--I guess I'm an old fool, anyways. It's like trying to squeeze blood out of a turnip for me to try and squeeze anything but work out of my life. I--I guess I'm just nothing but an old fool."

"But, madam, how can a fellow like me squeeze anything out of life for you? Look at me! Why, I ain't worth your house room. I'm nothing but a fellow who draws his salary off a woman, and has all his life. Why, you--you earn as much in a week as I do in a month."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Look, you with a home you made for yourself and a business you built up out of your own brains, and what am I? A hall-room guy that can put a bluff across with a lot of idiot women. Look at me, forty and doing a chorus-man's work. You got me wrong, madam. I don't measure nowhere near up to you. If I did, do you think I wouldn't be settled down long ago like a regular--Aw, well, what's the use talking." He plucked at his short mustache, pulling the hairs sharply.

She raised her face and let him gaze at the ravages of her tears. "Why--why don't you come right out and say it, that I 'ain't got the looks and--the pep?"

"Madam, can't you see I'm only--"

"You--you can't run yourself down to me. You, and nobody else, has made the establishment what it is. I never had a head for the *little* things that count. That's why I spent my best years down in Twenty-third Street. What did I know about the *big* little things!--the carriage-call stunt and the sachet-bags in the lining and the blue and gold labels, all *little* things that get *big* results. I never had a head for the things that hold the rich trade, like the walking models, or the French accent."

"You got the head for the big things, and that's what counts."

"That's why, when you say you can't line up alongside of me, it's no excuse."

"I--I mean it."

"Just because I got a head for designing doesn't make me a nine days' wonder. Why don't you--you come right out and say what you mean, Phonzie?"

"Why, I--I don't even know how to talk to a woman like you, madam. La-La girls have always been my pace."

"I know, Phonzie, and I--I ain't blaming you. A slick-looking fellow like you can skylark around as he pleases and don't need to have time for--the overworked, tired-out ones like me."

"Madam, I never dreamed--"

"Dreamed! Phonzie, I--I've got no shame if I tell you, but, God! how many nights I--I've lain right here on this couch dreaming of--of--"

"Well?"

"Of you and me, Phonzie, hitting it off together."

"Madam!"

Her head burrowed deeper in her arms, her voice muffled in their depth.

"Madam!"

"How many times I've dreamed, Phonzie. You and me, real partners in the business and--and in everything. Us in a little home together, one of the five-room flats down on the next floor, with a life-size kitchen and a life-size dining-room and--and a life-size--Aw, Phonzie, you--you'll think I'm crazy."

"Madam, why, madam, I just don't know."

"Them's the dreams a silly old thing like me, that never had nothing but work and--and nothing else in her life, can lay right here on this couch, night after night, and--Gawd! I--I bet you think I--I'm just crazy, Phonzie."

For answer he leaned over and took her small figure in his arms, wiping away with his sheer untried handkerchief the tears; but fresh ones sashayed down her face and flowed over her words.

"Phonzie, tell me, do you--do you--think--"

He held her closer. "Sure, madam, I do."

* * * * *

On the wings of a twelvemonth, spring had come around again and the taste of summer was like poppy-leaves between the teeth, and the perennial open shirtwaists and open street-cars bloomed, even as the distant larkspur in the distant field. At six o'clock with darkness came a spattering of rain, heavy single drops that fell each with its splotch, exuding from the asphalt the warming smell of thaw. Then came wind, right high-tempered, too, slanting the rain and scudding it and blowing pedestrians' skirts forward and their umbrellas inside outward. Mr. Alphonse Michelson fitted his hand like a vizor over his eyes and peered out into the wet dusk. Lights gleamed and were reflected in the dark pool of rain-swept asphalt. Passers-by hurried for shelter and bent into the wind.

In Madam Moores's establishment, enlarged during the twelvemonth to twice its floor space, the business day waned and died; in the workrooms the whirl of machines sank into the quiet maw of darkness; in the showrooms the shower lights, all but a single cluster, blinked out. Alphonse Michelson slid into a tan, rain-proof coat, turning up the collar and buttoning across the flap, then fell to pacing the thick-*nap* carpet.

From a mauve-colored telephone-booth emerged Miss Gertie Dobriner, flushed from bad service and from bad air.

"Whew!"

"Get her?"

"Sure I got her. Is it such a stunt to get an address from a customer?"

"Good!"

"I says to her, I says, 'I seen it standing on the sidewalk next to your French maid and I wanted to buy one like it for my little niece.'"

"Can we get it to-night?"

"Yes, proud papa! But listen; I wrote it down, 'Hinshaw, 2227 Casset Street, Brooklyn.'"

"Brooklyn!"

"Yes, two blocks from the Bridge, and for a henpecked husband you got a large fat job on your hands if you want to make another getaway to-night. This man Hinshaw shows 'em right in his house."

"Brooklyn, of all places!"

"Right-oh!"

He snapped his fingers in a series of rapid clicks. "Ain't that the limit? If I'd only mentioned it to you this afternoon earlier, we could have been over and back by now."

"Wait until Monday then, Phonzie."

"Yes, but you ought to have heard her this morning, Gert; it's not often she gets her heart so set. To-morrow being Sunday, all of a sudden she gets a-wishing for one of the glass-top ones like she's seen around in the parks, to take him out in for the first time."

"Oh, I'm game! I'll go, but can you beat it! A trip to Brooklyn when I got a friend from Carson City waiting at his hotel to buy out Rector's for me to-night."

"You go on with him, Gert. What's the use you dragging over there, too, now that you got the address for me. I would never have mentioned it to you at all if I'd have known you couldn't just go buy the kind she wants in any department store. I'll go over there alone, Gert."

"Yes, and get stung on the shape and the hood and all. I bought just an ordinary one for my little niece once, and you got to get them shallow. Anyways, I'm going to chip in half on this. I want to get the little devil something, anyways."

"Aw no, Gert, this is my surprise."

"I guess I can chip in on a present for the kid's month-old birthday."

"Well, then, say I meet you in the Eighty-sixth Street Subway at seven, so we can catch a Brooklyn express and make it over in thirty minutes."

"Yes."

"But it's raining, Gert. Look out. Honest, I don't like to ask you to break your date to hike over there in the rain with me."

"Raining! Aw, then let's cut it, Phonzie. I got a new marcel and a cold on my chest that weighs a ton. She can't roll it on a wet Sunday, nohow."

"Paper says clear and warm to-morrow, Gert; but, honest, you don't need to go."

"You're a nice boy, Phonzie, and a proud father, but you can't spend my money for me. What you bet I get ten per cent. off for cash? Subway at seven. I'll be there."

"I may be a bit late, Gert. She ain't so strong yet, and after last night I don't want to get her nervous."

"I told you she'd be sore at me for taking you to the Ritz ball last night, and God knows it wasn't no pleasure in my life to go model-hunting with you, when I might have been joy-riding with my friend from Carson City."

"It's just because she ain't herself yet. I'm off, Gert. Till seven in the Subway!"

"Yes, till seven!"

* * * * *

When Mr. Alphonse Michelson unlocked the door of his second-floor five-room apartment, a lamp softly burning through a yellow silk lamp-shade met him with the soft radiance of home. Beside the door he divested himself of his rain-spotted mackintosh, inserted his dripping umbrella in a tall china stand, shook a little rivulet from his hat and hung it on a pair of wall antlers.

"That you, Phonzie?"

"Yes, hon, it's me."

"Sh-h-h-h!"

He tiptoed down the aisle of hallway and into the soft-lighted front room. From a mound of pillows and sleepy from their luxury Millie Moores rose to his approach, her forefinger placed across her lips and a pale mist of chiffon falling backward from her arms.

What a masseuse is Love! The lines had faded from Millie's face and in their place the grace of tenderness and a roundness where the chin had softened. Years had folded back like petals, revealing the heart and the unwithered bosom of her.

He kissed her, pressing the finger of warning closer against her lips, and she patted a place for him on the Mexican afghan beside her.

"Phonzie!"

"How you feelin', hon?"

"Strong! If it ain't raining to-morrow, I'm going to take him out if I have to carry him in my arms. Say, wouldn't I like to feel myself rolling him in one of them white-enamel, glass-top things like Van Ness has for her last one. Ida May tried three places to get one for us."

"They're made special."

"All my life I've wanted to feel myself wheeling him, Phonzie. I used to dream myself doing it in the old place down on Twenty-third Street, when I used to sit at the sewing-table from eight until eight. Gee! I--honest, I just can't wait to see if the sun is shining to-morrow."

He kissed her again on the back of each finger, and she let her hand, pale and rather inert, rest on his hair.

"Is my boy hungry for his din-din?"

"Gee! yes! The noon appointments came so thick I had to send Eddie out to bring me a bite."

"What kind of a day?"

"Everything smooth but the designing-room. Gert done her best, but they don't take hold without you, hon. They can't even get in their heads that gold charmeuse idea Gert and I swiped at the Ritz last night."

"Did you tell them I'll be back on the job next week, Phonzie?"

"Nothing doing. You're going to stay right here, snug in your rug, another two weeks."

"Rave on, hon, but I got the nurse engaged for Monday. How's the Van Norder wedding-dress coming?"

"Great! That box train you drew up will float down the aisle after her like a white cobweb. It's a knock-out."

"Say, won't I be glad to get back in harness!"

"You got to take it slow, Mil."

"And ain't you glad it's all over, Phonzie?"

"Am I!"

"Four weeks old to-morrow, and Ida May was over to-day and says she never seen a kid so big for his age."

"He takes after my grandfather--he was six feet two without shoes."

"You ought to seen him to-day laying next to me, Phonzie. He looked up and squinted, dear, for all the world like you."

A bell tinkled. In the frame of a double doorway a seventeen-year-old maid drew back the portieres on brass rings that grated. In the room adjoining and beneath a lighted dome of colored glass a table lay spread, uncovered dishes exuding fragrant spirals of steam.

"Supper! Say, ain't it great to have you back at the table again, Mil?"

"Oh, I don't know, the way--the way you went hiking off last night to--to a ball."

"Aw, now, hon, 'ain't you got that out of your system yet? For a girlie with all your good sense, if you ain't the greatest little one to get a silly gix and work it to death."

"I just made a civil remark."

"What was the use wasting that ten-dollar pair of tickets the guy from Carson City gave her, when we could use them and get some tips on some of the imports the women wore?"

"I never said to waste them."

"You know it don't hurt to get around and see what's being worn, hon.
That's our business."

Tears of weakness welled to her eyes and she stooped over her plate to conceal them.

"I'm not saying anything, am I? Only--only it's right lucky she can fill my place so--so well while I--I got to be away awhile."

Her barbed comment only pricked him to happy thought. He made a quick foray into his side pocket. "I brought up one of these pink velvet roses for you to look at, Mil. It's Gert's idea to festoon these underneath the net tunic on McGrath's blue taffeta. See, like that. It's a neat little idea, hon, and Gert had these roses made up in shaded effects like this one. How you like it?"

The tiny bud lay on the table between them, nor did she take it up.

"All right."

He leaned to pat her cheek. "These are swell potatoes, hon."

Her lips warmed and opened. "I--I told her how to make 'em."

"Give me some more."

She in turn leaned to press his hand. "Such a hungry boy."

"Can I take a peek at the kid before--"

"Aw, Phonzie, and wake him up like you did last night. He'll sleep straight through now till half past twelve; that's why I didn't even tiptoe back in the bedroom myself. The doctor says the first half of the night is his best sleep; let him sleep till half past twelve, dear."

"Aw, just one peek before I go."

"Before you what?"

"I got to go out for a little while to-night, hon. On business."

"Where?"

"Slews. I got to meet him in the Subway at seven and go to Brooklyn shops with him to look over those ventilators I'm having put in the fitting-rooms."

She laid down her fork. "I thought you said he was in St. Louis?"

"He got back."

"Oh!"

"You lay down in the front room and read till I get back, hon, and maybe--maybe I'll bring you a surprise."

The meal continued in silence, but after a few seconds her throat seemed to close and she discarded the pretense of eating.

"Now don't you get sore, Mil; you never used to be like this. It's just because you're not right strong yet."

"I ain't--ain't sore."

"You are. You got a foolish idea in your head, Mil."

"Why should I have an idea? I guess I'm getting all that's coming to me for--for forcing things."

"Now, Mil, I bet anything you're still feeling sore about last night. Aren't you?"

"Sore? It ain't my business, Phonzie, if you can stay out till one o'clock one night and the next want to begin the same thing over again."

"We had to stick around last night, Mil. Gert was drawing off the models under her handkerchief and on the dance program. That's how we got the yellow charmeuse, just by keeping after it and drawing it line for line."

"I know, I know."

"Then give me a kiss and when I come back maybe--maybe I'll bring you a surprise up my sleeve, hon."

She sat beside her cold meal, tears scratching her eyes like blown grit. "It's like I told you this morning, Phonzie; when you get tired, all you got to do is remember I got the new trunk standing right behind the cretonne curtains, and I can pack my duds any day in the week and find a welcome over at--at Ida May's."

"Mil, ain't you ashamed!"

"Why, I could pack up and--and find a welcome there right to-night, if the kid wasn't too little for the night air."

"Mil, honest, I--I just don't know what to make of you. I--I've just lost my nerve about going now."

"I'm not going to be the one to say stay."

With his coat unhooked from the antlers and flung across his arm, he stood contemplating, a furrow of perplexity between his eyes.

"If I--I hadn't promised--"

"You go. I guess it won't be the last evening I spend alone."

"Yes it will, hon."

"I know, I know."

He buttoned his coat and stooped over her, the smell of damp exuding from his clothes.

"Just you lay down in the front room till I get back, Mil. Here, look at some of these new fashion books I brought home. I'll be back early, hon, and maybe wake you and the kid up with--with a surprise."

"Quit!"

"Just a French kiss, hon."

She raised a cold face. He tilted her head backward and pressed his lips to hers, then went out, closing the door lightly behind him.

For a breathing space she remained where he had left her, with her lips held in between her teeth and the sobbing breath fluttering in her throat. The pink rose lay on the table, its beautiful silk-velvet leaves concealing its cotton heart. She regarded it through a hot blur of tears that stung her eyeballs. Her throat grew tighter. Suddenly she sprang to her feet and to the hallway. A full-length coat hung from the antlers and a filmy scarf, carelessly flung. She slid into the coat, cramming the sleeves of her negligee in at the shoulders, wrapping the scarf about her head and knotting it at the throat in a hysteria of sudden decision. Then down the flight of stairs, her knees trembling as she ran. When she reached the bubbly sidewalk, cool rain slanted in her face. She gathered her strength and plunged against it.

At the corner, in the white flare of an arc-light, chin sunk on his chest against the onslaught of rain, and head leading, Alphonse Michelson stepped across the shining sea of asphalt. She broke into a run, the uneven careen of the weak, keeping to the shadow of the buildings; doubling her pace.

When he reached the hooded descent to the Subway, she was almost in his shadow; then cautiously after him down the iron stairs, and when he paused to buy his ticket, he might have touched her as she held herself taut against the wall and out of his vision. A passer-by glanced back at her twice. From the last landing of the stairway and leaning across the balustrade, she could follow him now with her eyes, through the iron gateway and on to the station platform.

From behind a pillar, a hen pheasant's tail in her hat raising her above the crowd, her shoulders rain-spotted and a dripping umbrella held well away from her, emerged Gertie Dobriner, a reproach in her expression, but meeting him with a pantomime of laughs and sallies. A tangle of passengers closed them in. A train wild with speed tore into the station, grinding to a stop on shrieking wheels. A second later it tore out again, leaving the platform empty.

Then Madam Moores turned her face to the rainswept street and retraced her steps, except that a vertigo fuddled her progress and twice she swayed. When she climbed the staircase to her apartment she was obliged to rest midway, sitting huddled against the banister, her soaked scarf fallen backward across her shoulders. She unlatched her door carefully, to save the squeak and to avoid the small maid who sang over and above the clatter of her dishes. The yellow lamp diffused its quiet light the length of the hallway, and she tottered down and into the bedroom at the far end.

A night lamp burned beside a basinette that might have been lined with the breast feathers of a dove, so downy was it. An imitation-ivory clock ticked among a litter of imitation-ivory dresser fittings. On the edge of the bed, and with no thought for its lacy coverlet, she sat down heavily, her wet coat dragging it awry. An hour ticked past. The maid completed her tasks, announced her departure, and tiptoed out to meet an appointment with a gas-fitter's assistant in the lower rear hall.

After a while Madam Moores fell to crying, but in long wheezes that came from her throat dry. The child in the crib uncurled a small, pink fist and opened his eyes, but with the gloss of sleep still across them and not forfeiting his dream. Still another hour and she rose, groping her way behind a chintz curtain at the far end of the room; fell to scattering and reassembling the contents of a trunk, stacking together her own garments and the tiny garments of a tiny white layette.

Toward midnight she fell to crying again beside the crib, and in audible jerks and moans that racked her. The child stirred. Cramming her handkerchief against her lips, she faltered down the hallway. In the front room and on the pillowed couch she collapsed weakly, eyes closed and her grief-crumpled face turned toward the door.

On the ground floor of a dim house in a dim street, which by the contrivance of its occupants had been converted from its original role of dark and sinister dining-room to wareroom for a dozen or more perambulators on high, rubber-tired wheels, Alphonse Michelson and Gertie Dobriner stood in conference with a dark-wrapped figure, her blue-checked apron wound muff fashion about her hands.

Miss Dobriner tapped a finger against her too red lips. "Seventy dollars net for a baby-carriage!"

"Yes'm, and a bargain at that. If he was home he'd show you the books hisself and the prices we get."

"Seventy dollars for a baby-carriage! For that, Phonzie, you can buy the kid a taxi."

In a sotto voice and with a flow of red suffusing his face, Alphonse Michelson turned to Gertie Dobriner, his hand curved blinker fashion to inclose his words.

"For Gawd's sake, cut the haggling, Gert. If this here white enamel is the carriage we want, let's take it and hike. I got to get home."

Miss Dobriner drew up her back to a feline arch. "The gentleman says we'll take it for sixty-five, spot cash."

"My husband's great for one price, madam. We don't cater to none but private trade and--"

"Sure you don't. If we could have got one of these glass-top carriages in a department store, we wouldn't be swimming over here to Brooklyn just to try out our stroke."

"Mrs. Nan Ness, who sent you here, knows the kind of goods we turn out. She says she's going to give us an order for a twin buggy yet, some of these days. If the Four Hundred believed in babies like the Four Million, we'd have a plant all over Brooklyn. Only my husband won't spread, he--he--"

Mr. Michelson waved aside the impending recitation with a sweep of his hand. "Is this the one you like, Gert?"

"Yes, with the folding top. Say, don't I want to see madam's face when she sees it. And say, won't the kid be a scream, Phonzie, all nestled up in there like a honey bunch?"

He slid his hand into his pocket, withdrawing a leather folder. "Here, we'll take this one with the folding top, but get us a fresh one out of stock."

"We'll make you this carriage up, sir, just as you see it now."

"Make it up! We've got to have it now. To-night!"

"But, sir, we only got these samples made up to show."

"Then we got to buy the sample."

"No, no. My husband ain't home and I--I can't sell the sample. We--"

"But I tell you we got to have it to-night. To-morrow's Sunday and the lady who--"

"No, no. With my husband not here, I can't let go no sample. As a special favor, sir, we'll make you one up in a week."

Miss Dobriner stooped forward, her eyes narrow as slits. "Seventy-five, spot down."

Indecision vanished as rags before Abracadabra.

"We make it a rule not to sell our samples, but--"

"That carriage has got to be delivered at my house to-night before ten."

"Sir, that can't go out to-night. It's got to be packed special and sent over on a flat-top dray. These carriages got to be packed like they was babies themselves."

"Can you beat that for luck?" He inserted two fingers in his tall collar as if it choked him. "Can you beat that?"

"The first thing Monday morning, sir, as a special favor, but that carriage can't go out to-night. We got one man does nothing but pack them for delivery."

He plunged his hands into his pockets and paced the narrow aisle down the center of the room. "We got to get that carriage over there to-night if--if we have to wheel it over!"

Miss Dobriner clapped her hands in an ecstasy of inspiration. "Good! We'll wheel it home. We can make it by midnight. What you bet?"

He turned upon her, but with a ray in his eyes. "Say, Gert, that ain't such a worse idea, but--"

"No buts. The night is young, and I know a fellow used to walk from the Bronx to Brooklyn with his girl every Sunday."

"Sure! What's an eight-mile walk on a spring night like this? It's all cleared up and stopped raining. Only, gee! I--I hate to be getting home all hours again."

She flipped him a gesture. "Say, it's not my surprise party you're giving."

"It's not that, Gert, only I don't want to keep her waiting until she gets sore enough to have the edge taken off the surprise when it does come."

"Say, suit yourself. It's not my kid I'm going to wheel out to-morrow. I should worry."

"I'll do it."

"You're not doing me a favor. With my cold and my marcel, a three-hour walk ain't the one thing in life I'm craving."

"I'll roll it over the bridge and be home by twelve, easy. You take the Subway, Gert; it's too big a trot for you."

"Nix! I don't start anything I can't finish."

She cocked her hat to a forward angle, so that the hen pheasant's tail swung rakishly over her face, took an Hellenic stride through the aisle of perambulators, flung her arms across her bosom in an attitude of extravaganza, then tossed off a military salute.

"Ready, march!"

"You're a peach, Gert."

"I've tried pretty near everything in my life. Why not wheel another fellow's baby-carriage for another fellow's wife's baby across Brooklyn Bridge at midnight? Whoops! why not!"

"We're off, then, Gert."

"Forward, march!"

"Keep your eye on the steering-wheel, Phonzie, and remember, ten miles is speed limit on the Bridge. One, two, three! Gawd! if my friend from Carson City could only see me now!"

Out on the drying sidewalk they leaned to each other, and the duet of their merriment ran ahead of them down the meager street and found out its dark corners.

"Honest, Phonzie, won't the girls just bust when they hear this!"

"And Mil, poor old girl, she's right weak and full of nerves now, but she'll laugh loudest of all when she knows why I went with Slews."

"Yes. She-can-laugh-loudest-of-all."

"What?"

"Come on, or we won't get home until morning."

And on the crest of her insouciance she thrust out her arm, giving the shining white perambulator a running push from the rear, so that it went rolling lightly from her and with a perfect gear action down the slight incline of sidewalk. They were after it at a bound, light-heeled and full of laughter.

"Whoops, my dear!"

"Whoa!"

* * * * *

At a turn in the dark street the lights of the Bridge flashed suddenly upon them, swung in high festoons across an infinitude of night. Above, a few majestic stars, new coined, gleamed in a clear sky.

"What do you bet that with me at the wheel we can clear the Bridge in thirty minutes, Phonzie?"

"Sure we can; but here, let me shove."

She elbowed him aside, the banter gone suddenly from her voice.

"No, let me."

She fell to pushing it silently along. Stars came out in her eyes. He advanced to her pace, matching his stride to hers, fancies like colored beads slipping along the slender thread of his thoughts.

"Swell sight, ain't it, Gert, the harbor lights so bright and the sky so deep?"

Silence.

"Seeing so much sky all at once reminds me, Gert. You know about that midnight--blue satin Hertz had the brass to dump back on us because the skirt was too tight. Huh?"

Her eyes were far and away.

"Huh, whatta you know about that, Gert?"

Her hands, gripped around the handle-bars, were full of nerves; she could feel them jumping in her palm.

"Huh, Gert?"

"What you say, Phonzie?"

"All right, don't answer. Moon all you like, for my part." And he fell to whistling as he strode beside her, his eyes on the light-spangled outline of the city.

* * * * *

At twelve o'clock the lights in the lower hall of the up-town apartment-house had been extinguished. All but one, which burned like a tired eye beneath the ornate staircase. The misty quiet of midnight, which is as heavy as a veil, hung in the corridors. Miss Gertie Dobriner entered first and, holding wide the door between them, Alphonse Michelson at the front wheels, they tilted the white carriage up the narrow staircase, their whispers floating through the gloom.

"Easy there, Phonzie!"

"There!"

"Watch out!"

"Whew! that was a close shave!"

"Here, let me unlock the door. 'Sh-h-h!'"

"Don't go, Gert. Come on in, and after the big show I'll send you home in a cab."

"Nix! After a three-hour walk, a street-car will look good enough to me."

"Well, then, come on in, just a minute, Gert. I want you to see the fun. What you bet she's asleep in the front room, sore as thunder, too? We'll sneak back and dump the kid in and wheel him in on her."

"Aw no! I--I got to go now, Phonzie."

"Come on, Gert, don't be a quitter. Don't you want to see her face when she knows that Slews has been all a fluke? Come on, Gert, I'll wake up the kid if I try to dump him in alone."

"Well, for just a minute. I--I don't want to butt in on your and--and her fun."

They entered with the stealthy espionage of thieves, and in the narrow hallway she waited while he tiptoed to the bedroom and back again, his lips pursed outward in a "Sh-h-h."

"She must be in the front room. The kid's in his crib. Come on, Gert.
'Sh-h-h!'"

He was pink-faced and full of caution, raising each foot in exaggerated stealth. Between them they manoeuvred the carriage down the hallway.

"Sh-h-h. If she's awake, she can hear every word in the front room."

From her wakeful couch Madam Moores raised herself on her elbow, cupping her ear in her palm, and straining her glance down the long hallway. The tears had dried on her cheeks.

"Here, Gert, you dump in these things and let me lift the kid."

"No, no; let me! Go 'way, Phonzie. You'll wake him! I just want her to be too surprised to open her mouth when she sees him sleeping in it like a top."

She threw back the net drapery and leaned to the heart of the crib, and the blood ran in a flash across her face.

"Little darling--little Phonzie darling!"

"Don't wake him, Gert."

She was reluctant to withdraw herself. "His little darling fists, so pink and curled up! Little Phonzie darling!"

He hung over each process, proud and awkward.

"Little darling--little darling--here, Phonzie help."

They transferred the burden, the child not moving on his pillow. In the shallow heart of the perambulator, the high froth of pillows about him, he lay like a bud, his soft profile against the lace, and his skin like the innermost petal of a rose.

"Phonzie, ain't he--ain't he the softest little darling! Gawd! how--how she'll love to--to be wheeling him!"

His fingers fumbled with excitement and fell to strapping and buckling with a great show and a great ineffectually.

"Here, help me let down the glass top."

"Sh-h-h-h! Every word carries in this flat."

"Now!"

"Now!"

"You wheel him down and in on her, Gert."

She stiffened with a new diffidence. "No, no. It's your surprise."

"You done all the work on the job as much as me, and it's half your present, anyways. You roll him down the hall and stand next to her till she wakes up. She's a tight little sleeper, but if she don't wake soon I'll drop a book or something. Go on, Gert, roll it in."

"No, no, Phonzie. You and her have your fun out alone. It's your fun, anyways, not mine. This piece of rolling-stock will roll herself along home now."

"Aw, now--"

"Anyways, I'm dead. Look what a rag I am! Look at the hem of this skirt! The next time I do a crazy thing like walk from Brooklyn, I want to be burned in oil."

"Now, Gert, stick around and I'll send you home in a cab."

But she was out and past him craning her neck backward through the aperture of the open door. "Go to it, Phonzie! It's your fun, anyways. Yours and hers. S'long!"

He had already begun his triumphant passage down the hallway, and on her couch among her pillows Madam Moores closed her eyes in a simulation of sleep and against the tears that scalded her lids.

In a south-bound car Gertie Dobriner found a seat well toward the front. Across the aisle a day laborer on a night debauch threw her a watery stare and a thick-tongued, thick-brogued remark. A char-woman with a newspaper bundle hugged under one arm dozed in the seat alongside, her head lolling from shoulder to shoulder. Raindrops had long since dried on the window-pane. Gertie Dobriner cupped her chin in her palm and gazed out at the quiet street and the shuttered shops hurtling past.

Twice the conductor touched her shoulder, his hand outstretched for fare. She sprang about, fumbling in her purse for a coin, but with difficulty, because through the hot blur of her tears she could only grope ineffectually. When she finally found a five-cent piece, a tear had wiggle-waggled down her cheek and fell, splotching the back of her glove.

Across the aisle the day laborer leaned to her batting at the hen pheasant's tail in her hat, and a cold, alcoholic tear dripping from the corner of his own eye.

"Cheer up, my gir-rl," he said, through a beard like old moss--"cheer up and be a spor-r-rt!"

HOCHENHEIMER OF CINCINNATI

When Mound City began to experience the growing-pains of a Million Club, a Louisiana Exposition, and a block-long Public Library, she spread Westward Ho!--like a giant stretching and flinging out his great legs.

When rooming-houses and shoe-factories began to shove and push into richly curtained brown-stone-front Pine Street, reluctant papas, with urgent wives and still more urgent daughters, sold at a loss and bought white-stone fronts in restricted West End districts.

Subdivisions sprang up overnight. Two-story, two-doored flat-buildings, whole ranks and files of them, with square patches of front porch cut in two by dividing railings, marched westward and skirted the restricted districts with the formality of an army flanking. Grand Avenue, once the city's limit, now girded its middle like a loin-cloth. The middle-aged inhabitant who could remember it when it was a corn-field now beheld full-blasted breweries, cinematograph theaters, ten-story office-buildings, old mansions converted into piano-salesrooms and millinery emporiums, business colleges, and more full-blasted breweries up and down its length.

At Cook Street, which runs into Grand Avenue like a small tributary, a pall of smoke descended thick as a veil; and every morning, from off her second-story window-sills, Mrs. Shongut swept tiny dancing balls of soot; and one day Miss Rena Shongut's neat rim of tenderly tended geraniums died of suffocation.

Shortly after, the Adolph Shongut Produce Company signed a heavy note and bought out the Mound City Fancy Sausage and Poultry Company at a low figure. The spring following, large "To Let" signs appeared in the second-story windows of the modest house on Cook Street. And, hard pressed by the approaching first payment of the note and the great iron voice of the Middle West Shoe Company, which backed up against the woodshed; goaded by the no-less-insistent voice of Mrs. Shongut, whose soot balls increased, and by Rena, who developed large pores; shamed by the scorn of a son who had the finger-nails and trousers creases of a bank clerk--Adolph Shongut joined the great pantechnicon procession Westward Ho! and moved to a flat out on Wasserman Avenue--a six-room-and-bath, sleeping-porch, hot-and-cold-water, built-in-plate-rack, steam-heat, hardwood-floor, decorated-to-suit-tenant flat neatly mounted behind a conservative incline of a front terrace, with a square patch of rear lawn that backed imminently into the white-stone garages of Kingston Place.

Friedrichstrasse, Rue de la Paix, Fifth Avenue, Piccadilly, Princess Street and Via Nazionale are the highways of the world. Trod in literature, asterisked in guide-books, and pictured on postal cards, their habits are celebrated. Who does not know that Fifth Avenue is the most rococo boulevard in the world, and that it drinks its afternoon tea from etched,

thin-stemmed glasses? Who does not know that Rue de la Paix runs through more novels than any other paved thoroughfare, and that Piccadilly bobbies have wider chest expansion than the Swiss Guards?

Wasserman Avenue has no such renown; but it has its routine, like the history-hoary Via Nazionale, which daily closes its souvenir-shops to seek siesta from two until four, the hours when American tourists are rattling in sight-seeing automobiles along the Appian Way.

At half past seven, six mornings in the week, a well-breakfasted procession, morning papers protruding from sack-coat pockets and toothpicks assiduous, hastens down the well-scrubbed front steps of Wasserman Avenue and turns its face toward the sun and the two-blocks-distant street-car. At half past seven, six days in the week, the wives of Wasserman Avenue hold their wrappers close up about their throats and poke uncoiled heads out of doors to Godspeed their well-breakfasted spouses.

Wasserman Avenue flutters farewell handkerchiefs to its husbands until they turn the corner at Rindley's West End Meat and Vegetable Market. At eventide Wasserman Avenue greets its husbands with kisses, frankly delivered on its rows of front porches.

Do not smile. Gautier wrote about the consolation of the arts; but, after all, he has little enough to say of that cold moment when art leaves off and heart turns to heart.

Most of Wasserman Avenue had never read much of Gautier, but it knew the greater truth of the consolation of the hearth. When Mrs. Shongut waved farewell to her husband that greater truth lay mirrored in her eyes, which followed him until Rindley's West End Meat and Vegetable Market shunted him from view.

"Mamma, come in and close the screen door--you look a sight in that wrapper."

Mrs. Shongut withdrew herself from the aperture and turned to the sunshine-flooded, mahogany-and-green-velours sitting-room.

"You think that papa seems so well, Renie? At breakfast this morning he looked so bad underneath his eyes."

Rena yawned in her rocking-chair and rustled the morning paper. The horrific caprice of her pores had long since succumbed to the West End balm of Wasserman Avenue. No rajah's seventh daughter of a seventh daughter had cheeks more delicately golden--that fine tinge which is like the glory of sunlight.

"Now begin, mamma, to find something to worry about! For two months he hasn't had a heart spell."

Mrs. Shongut drew a thin-veined hand across her brow. Her narrow shoulders, which were never held straight, dropped even lower, as though from pressure.

"He don't say much, but I know he worries enough about that second payment coming due in July and only a month and a half off. I tell you I knew what I was talking about when I never wanted him to buy out the Mound City. I was the one who said we was doing better in little business."

"Now begin, mamma!"

"I told him he couldn't count on Izzy to stay down in the business with him. I told him Izzy wouldn't spoil his white hands by helping his papa in business."

"I suppose, mamma, you think Izzy should have stayed down with papa when he could get that job with Uncle Isadore."

"You know why your Uncle Isadore took Izzy? Because to a strange bookkeeper he has to pay more. Your Uncle Isadore is my own brother, Renie, but I tell you he 'ain't never acted like it."

"That's what I say. What have we got rich relatives with a banking-house for, if Izzy can't start there instead of in papa's little business?"

"Ya, ya! What your Uncle Isadore does for Izzy wait and see. For his own sister he never done nothing, and for his own sister's son he don't do nothing, neither. You seen for yourself, if it was not for Aunt Becky begging him nearly on her knees, how he would have treated us that time with the mortgage. Better, I say, Izzy should stay with his papa in business or get out West like he wants, and where he can't keep such fine white hands to gamble with."

Miss Shongut slanted deeper until her slim body was a direct hypotenuse to the chair. "Honest, mamma, it's a shame the way you look for trouble, and the way you and papa pick on that boy."

"Pick! When a boy gambles the roulette and the cards and the horses until--"

"When a boy likes cards and horses and roulette it isn't so nice, I know, mamma; but it don't need to mean he's a born gambler, does it? Boys have got to sow their wild oats."

"Ya, ya! Wild oats! A boy that gambles away his last cent when he knows just the least bit of excitement his father can't stand! Izzy knows how it goes against his father when he plays. Ya, ya! I don't need to look for trouble; I got it. Your papa, with his heart trouble, is enough by itself."

"Well, we're all careful, ain't we, mamma? Did I even holler the other night when I thought I heard a burglar in the dining-room?"

"Ya! How I worry about the things you should know." Mrs. Shongut flung wide the windows and pinned back the lace curtains, so that the spring air, cool as water, flowed in.

Her daughter sprang to her feet and drew her filmy wrapper closer about her. "Mamma, the Solingers don't need to look right in on us from their dining-room."

"Say, I ain't got no time to be stylish for the neighbors. On wash-day I got my housework to do. Honest, Renie, do you think, instead of laying round, it would hurt you to go back and make the beds awhile? Do you think a girl like you ought to got to be told, on wash-day and with Lizzie in the laundry, to help a little with the housework? Do you think, Renie, it's nice? I ask you."

"It's early yet, mamma; the housework will keep."

"Early yet, she says! On Monday, with my girl in the laundry and you with five shirtwaists in the wash, it's early, she says! Your mother ain't too lazy to start now, lemme tell you. Get them Kingston Place ideas out of your head, Renie. Remember we don't do nothing but look out on their fine white garages; remember business ain't so grand with your papa, neither."

"Now begin that, mamma! I know it all by heart."

"I ain't beginning nothing, Renie; but, believe me, it ain't so nice for a girl to have to be told everything. How that little Jeannie Lissman, next door, helps her mother already, it's a pleasure to see. I--"

"You've told me about her before, mamma."

Mrs. Shongut flung a sheet across the upright piano.

"Gimme the broom, mamma. I'll sweep."

"Sweep I never said you need to do. It's bad enough I got to spoil my hands. Go back and wake Izzy up and make the beds."

"Aw, mamma, let him sleep. He don't have to be down until nine."

"Nine o'clock nowadays young men have got to work! Up to five years ago every morning at dark your papa was down-town to see the poultry come in, and now at eight o'clock my son can't be woke up to go to work. Honest, I tell you times is changed!"

"Mamma, the way you pick on that boy!"

Mrs. Shongut folded both hands atop her broom in a solemn and hieratic gesture; her face was full of lines, as though time had autographed it many times over in a fine hand.

"Can you blame me? Can you blame me that I worry about that boy, with his wild ways? That a boy like him should gamble away every cent of his salary, except when he wins a little and buys us such nonsenses as bracelets! That a boy who learnt bookkeeping in an expensive business school, and knows that with his papa business ain't so good, shouldn't offer to pay out of his salary a little board! I tell you, Renie, as he goes now, it can't lead to no good; sometimes I would do almost anything to get him out West. Not a cent does he offer to--"

"He only makes--"

"You know, Renie, how little I want his money; but that he shouldn't offer to help out at home a little--that every cent on cards and clothes he should spend! I ask you, is it any reason him and his papa got scenes together until for the neighbors I'm ashamed, and for papa's heart so afraid? That a fine boy like our Izzy should run so wild!"

Tears lay close to the surface of her voice, and she created a sudden flurry of dust, sweeping with short, swift strokes.

"Izzy's not so worse! Give me a boy like Izzy any time, to a mollycoddle. He's just throwing off steam now."

"Just take up with your wild brother against your old parents! Your papa's a young man, with no heart trouble and lots of money; he can afford to have a card-playing son what has to have second breakfast alone every morning! Just you side with your brother!"

Miss Shongut side-stepped the furniture, which in the panicky confusion of sweeping was huddled toward the center of the room, and through a cloud of dust to the door.

"Every time I open my mouth in this family I put my foot in it. I should worry about what isn't my business!"

"Well, one thing I can say, me and papa never need to reproach ourselves that we 'ain't done the right thing by our children."

"Clean sheets, mamma?"

"Yes; and don't muss up the linen-shelves."

Her daughter flitted down a narrow aisle of hallway; from the shoulders her thin, flowing sleeves floated backward, filmy, white.

Mrs. Shongut flung open the screen door and swept a pile of webby dust to the porch and then off on the patch of grass.

Thin spring sunshine lay warm along the neat terraces of Wasserman Avenue. Windows were flung wide to the fresh kiss of spring; pillows, comforters, and rugs draped across their sills. Across the street a negro, with an old gunny-sack tied apron-fashion about his loins, turned a garden hose on a stretch of asphalt and swept away the flood with his broom. A woman, whose hair caught the sunlight like copper, avoided the flood and tilted a perambulator on its two rear wheels down the wooden steps of her veranda.

Across the dividing rail of the Shonguts' porch a child with a strap of school-books flung over one shoulder ran down the soft terrace, and a woman emerged after her to the topmost step of the veranda, holding her checked apron up about her waist and shielding her eyes with one hand.

"Jeannie! Jean-nie!"

"Yes'm."

"Watch out for the street-car crossing, Jeannie."

"Yes'm."

"Jean-nie!"

"What?"

"Be sure!"

"Yeh."

"Good morning, Mrs. Shongut."

"Good morning, Mrs. Lissman. Looks like spring!"

"Ain't it so? I say to Mr. Lissman this morning, before he went down-town, that he should bring home some grass seed to-night."

"Ya, ya! Before you know it now, we got hot summer after such a late spring."

"I say to my Roscoe that after school to-day he should bring up the rubber-plant out of the cellar."

"That's right; use 'em while they're young, Mrs. Lissman. When they grow up it's different."

"Mrs. Shongut, you should talk! Only last night I says to my husband, I says, when I seen Miss Renie pass by, 'Such a pretty girl!' I tell you, Mrs. Shongut, such a pretty girl and such a fine-looking boy you can be proud of."

"Ach, Mrs. Lissman, you think so?"

"There ain't one on the street any prettier than Miss Renie. I tell you, if my Roscoe was ten years older she could have him,' I says to my husband."

Mrs. Shongut leaned forward on her broom-handle. "If I say so myself, Mrs. Lissman, I got good reasons to have pleasure out of my children. I guess you heard, Mrs. Lissman, what a grand position my Izzy has got with his uncle, of the Isadore Flexner Banking-house. Bookkeeping in a banking-house, Mrs. Lissman, for a boy like Izzy!"

"I tell you, Mrs. Shongut, if you got rich relations it's a help."

"How grand my brother has done for himself, Mrs. Lissman! Such a house he has built on Kingston Place! Such a home! You can see for yourself, Mrs. Lissman, how his wife and daughters drive up sometimes in their automobile."

"I'm surprised they don't come more often, Mrs. Shongut; your Renie and them girls, I guess, are grand friends."

"Ya; and to be in that banking-house is a grand start for my boy. I always say it can lead to almost anything. Only I tell him he shouldn't let fine company make him wild."

"Ach, boys will be boys, Mrs. Shongut. Even now it ain't so easy for me to get make my Roscoe to come in off his roller-skates at night. My Jeannie I can make mind; but I tell her when she is old enough to have beaus, then our troubles begin with her."

Mrs. Shongut's voice dropped into her throat in the guise of a whisper. "Some time, Mrs. Lissman, when my Renie ain't home, I want you should come over and I read you some of the letters that girl gets from young men. So mad she always gets at me if she knows I talk about them."

"Mrs. Shongut, you'll laugh when I tell you; but already in the school my Jeannie gets little notes what the little boys write to her. Mad it makes me like anything; but what can you do when you got a pretty girl?"

"A young man in Peoria, Mrs. Lissman, such beautiful letters he writes Renie, never in my life did I read. Such language, Mrs. Lissman; just like out of a song-book! Not a time my Renie goes out that I don't go right to her desk to read 'em--that's how beautiful he writes. In Green Springs she met him."

"Ain't it a pleasure, Mrs. Shongut, to have grand letters like that? Even with my little Jeannie, though it makes me so mad, still I--"

"But do you think my Renie will have any of them? 'Not,' she says, 'if they was lined in gold.'"

"I guess she got plenty beaus. Say, I ain't so blind that I don't see Sollie Spitz on your porch every--"

"Sollie Spitz! Ach, Mrs. Lissman, believe me, there's nothing to that! My Renie since a little child likes reading and writing like he does. I tell her papa we made a mistake not to keep her in school like she wanted."

"My Jeannie--"

"She loves learning, that girl. Under her pillow yesterday I found a book of verses about flowers. Where she gets such a mind, Mrs. Lissman, I don't know. But Sollie Spitz! Say, we don't want no poets in the family."

"I should say not! But I guess she gets all the good chances she wants."

"And more. A young man from Cincinnati--if I tell you his name, right away you know him--twice her papa brought him out to supper after they had business down-town together--only twice; and now every week he sends her five pounds--"

"Just think!"

"And such roses, Mrs. Lissman! You seen for yourself when I sent you one the other day. Right in his own hothouse he grows 'em, Mrs. Lissman."

"Just think!"

"If I tell you his name, Mrs. Lissman, right away you know his firm. In Cincinnati they say he's got the finest house up on the hill--musical chairs, that play when you sit on 'em. Twice every week he sends her--"

"Grand!"

"I tell you, I says to her papa, 'her cousins over in Kingston Place got tickets to take the young men to theaters with and automobiles to ride them round in; but, if I say so myself, not one of them has better chances than my Renie, right here in our little flat.'"

Mrs. Lissman folded her arms in a shelf across her bosom and leaned her ample uncorseted figure against the railing. "I give you right, Mrs. Shongut. Look at Jeannette Bamberger, over on Kingston; every night when me and Mr. Lissman used to walk past last summer, right on her grand front porch that girl sat alone, like she was glued."

"I know."

"Then look at Birdie Schimm, across the street. Her mother a poor widow who keeps a roomer, and look how her girl did for herself! Down at Rindley's this morning nothing was fine enough for that Birdie to buy for her table. I tell you, Mrs. Shongut, money ain't everything in this world."

"I always tell Renie she can take her place with the best of them."

"Washing?"

"An hour already my Lizzie has been down in the laundry."

"Half a day I take Addie to help with the ironing."

"You should watch her, Mrs. Lissman; she steals soap."

"They're all alike."

"Ah, the mailman. Always in my family no one gets letters but my Renie. Look, Mrs. Lissman! What did I tell you? Another one from Cincinnati. Renie! Renie!" Mrs. Shongut bustled indoors, leaving her broom indolent against the porch pillar. "Renie!"

"Yes, mamma."

"Letter!" Feet hurrying down the hall. "Letter from Cincinnati, Renie."

"Mamma, do you have to read the postmarks off my letters? I can read my own mail without any help."

"How she sasses her mother! Say, for my part, I should worry if you get letters or not. A girl that is afraid to give her mother a little pleasure!"

Mrs. Shongut made a great show of dragging the room's furniture back into place; unpinning the lace curtains and draping them carefully in their folds; drawing chairs across the carpet until the casters squealed; uncovering the piano. At the business of dusting the mantelpiece she lingered, stealing furtive glances through its mirror.

Miss Shongut ripped open the letter with a hairpin and curled her supple figure in a roomy curve of the divan. Her hair,

unloosened, fell in a thick, black cascade down her back.

Mrs. Shongut redusted the mantel, raising each piece of bric-a-brac carefully; ran her cloth across the piano keys, giving out a discord; straightened the piano cover; repolished the mantelpiece mirror.

Her daughter read, blew the envelope open at its ripped end and inserted the letter. Her eyes, gray as dawn, met her mother's.

"Well, Renie, is--is he well?"

Silence.

"You're afraid, I guess, it gives me a little pleasure if I know what he has to say. A girl gets a letter from a man like Max Hochenheimer, of Cincinnati, and sits like a funeral!"

Rena unfolded herself from the divan and slid to her feet, slim as a sibyl.

"I knew it!"

"Knew what?"

"He's coming!"

"Coming? What?"

"He left Cincinnati last night and gets here this morning."

"This morning!"

"He comes on business, he says. And at five o'clock he stops in at the store and comes home to supper with papa."

"Supper--and a regular wash-day meal I got! Tongue sweet-sour, and red cabbage! Renie, get on your things and--"

"Honest, if it wasn't too late I would telegraph him I ain't home."

"Get on your things, Renie, and go right down to Rindley's for a roast. If you telephone they don't give you weight. This afternoon I go myself for the vegetables." Excitement purred in Mrs. Shongut's voice. "Hurry, Renie!"

"I'll get Izzy to take me out to supper and to a show."

"Get on your things, I say, Renie. I'll call Lizzie up-stairs too; we don't need no wash-day, with company for supper. Honest, excited like a chicken I get. Hurry, Renie!"

Miss Shongut stood quiescent, however, gazing through the lace curtains at the sun-lashed terrace, still soft from the ravages of winter and only faintly green. A flush spread to the tips of her delicate ears.

"Izzy's got to take me out to supper and a show. I won't stay home."

"Renie, you lost your mind? You! A young man like Max Hochenheimer begins to pay you attentions in earnest--a man that could have any girl in this town he snaps his finger for--a young man what your stuck-up cousins over on Kingston would grab at! You--you--Ach, to a man like Max Hochenheimer, of Cincinnati, she wants to say she ain't home yet!"

"Him! An old fatty like him! Izzy calls him Old Squash! Izzy says he's the only live Cartoon in captivity."

"Izzy--always Izzy! Believe me, your brother could do better than layin' in bed at eight o'clock in the morning, to copy after Max Hochenheimer."

"Always running down Izzy! Money ain't everything. I--I like other things in a man besides money--always money."

"Believe me, he has plenty besides money, has Max Hochenheimer. He 'ain't got no time maybe for silk socks and

pressed pants, but for a fine good man your papa says he 'ain't got no equal. Your brother Izzy, I tell you, could do well to mock after Max Hochenheimer--a man what made hisself; a man what built up for hisself in Cincinnati a business in country sausages that is known all over the world."

"Country sausages!"

"No; he 'ain't got no time for rhymes like that long-haired Sollie Spitz, that ain't worth his house-room and sits until by the nightshirt I got to hold papa back from going out and telling him we 'ain't got no hotel! Max Hochenheimer is a man what's in a legitimate business."

"Please, mamma, keep quiet about him. I don't care if he--"

"I tell you the poultry and the sausage business maybe ain't up to your fine ideas; but believe me, the poultry business will keep you in shoes and stockings when in the poetry business you can go barefoot."

"All right, mamma; I won't argue."

"Your papa has had enough business with Max Hochenheimer to know what kind of a man he is and what kind of a firm. Such a grand man to deal with, papa says. Plain as a old shoe--just like he was a salesman instead of the president of his firm. A poor boy he started, and now such a house they say he built for his mother in Avondale on the hill! Squashy! I only wish for a month our Izzy had his income."

"I wouldn't marry him if--"

"Don't be so quick with yourself, missy. Just because he comes here on a day's business and then comes out to supper with papa don't mean so much."

"Don't it? Well, then, if you know more about what's in this letter than I do, I've got no more to say."

Mrs. Shongut sat down as though the power to stand had suddenly deserted her limbs. "What--what do you mean, Renie?"

"I'm not so dumb that I--I don't know what a fellow means by a letter like this."

"Renie!" The lines seemed to fade out of Mrs. Shongut's face, softening it. "Renie! My little Renie!"

"You don't need to my-little-Renie me, mamma; I--"

"Renie, I can't believe it--that such luck should come to us. A man like Max Hochenheimer, of Cincinnati, who can give her the greatest happiness, comes for our little girl--"

"I--"

"Always like me and papa had to struggle, Renie, in money matters you won't have to. I tell you, Renie, nothing makes a woman old so soon. Like a queen you can sit back in your automobile. Always a man what's good to his mother, like Max Hochenheimer, makes, too, a grand husband. I want, Renie, to see your Aunt Becky's and your cousins' faces at the reception. Renie--I--"

"Mamma, you talk like--Oh, you make me so mad."

"Musical chairs they got in the house, Renie, what, as soon as you sit on, begin to play. Mrs. Schwartz herself sat on one; and the harder you sit, she says, the louder it plays. Automobiles; a elevator for his mother! I--Ach, Renie, I--I feel like all our troubles are over. I-- Ach, Renie, you should know how it feels to be a mother."

Tears rained frankly down Mrs. Shongut's face and she smiled through their mist, and her outstretched arms would tremble.

"Renie, come to mamma!"

Miss Shongut, quivering, drew herself beyond their reach. "Such talk! Honest, mamma, you--you make me ashamed, and mad like anything, too. I wouldn't marry a little old squashy fellow like him if he was worth the mint."

"Renie! Re-nie!"

"An old fellow, just because he's got money and--"

"Old! Max Hochenheimer ain't more than in his first thirties, and old she calls him! When a man makes hisself by hard work he 'ain't got time to keep young, with silk socks and creased pants, and hair-tonic what smells up my house a hour after Izzy's been gone. It ain't the color of a man's vest, Renie--it's the color of his heart, underneath it. When papa was a young man, do you think, if I had looked at the cigar ashes on his vest instead of at what was underneath, that I--"

"That talk's no use with me, mamma."

"Renie; you--you wouldn't do it--you wouldn't refuse him?"

Her reply leaped out suddenly, full of fire: "It's not me or my feelings you care anything about. Every one but me you think about first. What about me? What about me? I'm the one that's got to do the marrying and live with him. I'm the one you're trying to sell off like I was cattle. I'm the one! I'm the one!"

"Renie!"

"Yes; sell me off--sell me off--like cattle!"

Tears, blinding, scalding, searing, rushed down her cheeks, and her smooth bosom, where the wrapper fell away to reveal it, heaved with the storm beneath.

"But you can't sell me--you can't! You can't keep nagging to get me married off. I can get out, but I won't be married out! If I wasn't afraid of papa, with his heart, I'd tell him so, too. I'd tell him so now. I won't be married out--I won't be married out! I won't! I won't!"

Mrs. Shongut clasped her cheeks in the vise of her two hands. "Married out! She reproaches me yet--a mother that would go through fire for her children's happiness!"

"Always you're making me uncomfortable that I'm not married yet--not papa or Izzy, but you--you! Never does one of the girls get engaged that you don't look at me like I was wearing the welcome off the door-mat."

"Listen to my own child talk to me! No wonder you cry so hard, Renie Shongut, to talk to your mother like that--a girl that I've indulged like you. To sass her mother like that! A man like Max Hochenheimer comes along, a man where the goodness looks out of his face, a man what can give her every comfort; and, because he ain't a fine talker like that long-haired Sollie Spitz, she--"

"You leave him out! Anyways, he's got fine feeling for something besides--sausages."

"Is it a crime, Renie, that I should want so much your happiness? Your papa's getting a old man now, Renie; I won't always be here, neither."

"For the love of Mike, what's the row? Can't a fellow get any beauty sleep round this here shebang? What are you two cutting up about?"

The portieres parted to reveal Mr. Isadore Shongut, pressed, manicured, groomed, shaved--something young about him; something conceited; his magenta bow tied to a nicety, his plushlike hair brushed up and backward after the manner of fashion's latest caprice, and smoothing a smooth hand along his smooth jowl.

"Morning, ma. What's the row, Renie? Gee! it's a swell joint round here for a fellow with nerves! What's the row, kid?"

Mr. Isadore Shongut made a cigarette and puffed it, curled himself in a deep-seated chair, with his head low and his legs flung high. His sister lay on the divan, with her tearful profile buried, *basso-rilievo*, against a green velours cushion, her arms limp and dangling in exhaustion.

"What's the row, Renie?"

"N-nothing."

"Aw, come out with it--what's the row? What you sitting there for, ma, like your luck had turned on you?"

"Ask--ask your sister, Izzy; she can tell you."

"Smater, sis?"

"N-nothing--only--only--old--old Hochenheimer's coming to--to supper to-night, Izzy; and--"

"Old Squash! Oh, Whillikens!"

"Take me out, Izzy! Take me out anywhere--to a show or supper, or--or anywhere; but take me out, Izzy. Take me out before he comes."

"Sure I will! Old Squash! Whillikens!"

* * * * *

At five o'clock Wasserman Avenue emerged in dainty dimity and silk sewing-bags. Rocking-chairs, tiptilted against veranda railings, were swung round front-face. Greetings, light as rubber balls, bounded from porch to porch. Fine needles flashed through dainty fabrics stretched like drum parchment across embroidery hoops; young children, shrilling and shouting in the heat of play, darted beneath maternal eyes; long-legged girls in knee-high skirts strolled up and down the sidewalks, arms intertwined.

At five-thirty the sun had got so low that it found out Mrs. Schimm in a shady corner of her porch, dazzled her eyes, and flashed teasingly on her needle, so that she crammed her dainty fabric in her sewing-bag and crossed the paved street.

"You don't mind, Mrs. Lissman, if I come over on your porch for a while, where it's shady?"

"It's a pleasure, Mrs. Schimm. Come right up and have a rocker."

"Just a few minutes I can stay."

"That's a beautiful stitch, Mrs. Schimm. When I finish this centerpiece I start me a dozen doilies too."

"I can learn it to you in five minutes, Mrs. Lissman. All my Birdie's trousseau napkins I did with this Battenberg stitch."

"Grand!"

"For a poor widow's daughter, Mrs. Lissman, that girl had a trousseau she don't need to be ashamed of."

"Look, will you? Mrs. Shapiro's coming down her front steps all diked out in a summer silk. I guess she goes down to have supper with her husband, since he keeps open evenings."

"I don't want to say nothing; but I don't think it's so nice--do you, Mrs. Lissman?--the first month what her mourning for her mother is up a yellow bird of paradise as big as a fan she has to have on her hat."

"Ain't it so!"

"I wish you could see the bird of paradise my Birdie bought when her and Simon was in Kansas City on their wedding-trip--you can believe me or not, a yard long! How that man spends money on that girl, Mrs. Lissman!"

"Say, when you got it to spend I always say it's right. He's in a good business and makes good money."

"You should know how good."

"The rainy days come to them that save up for them, like us old-fashioned ones, Mrs. Schimm."

"I--Look, will you? Ain't that Izzy Shongut crossing the street? He comes home from work this early! I tell you, Mrs. Lissman, I don't want to say nothing; but I hear things ain't so good with the Shonguts."

"So!"

"Yes; I hear, since the old man bought out that sausage concern, they got their troubles."

"And such a nice woman! That's what she needs yet on top of his heart trouble and her girl running round with Sollie Spitz; and, from what she don't say, I can see that boy causes her enough worry with his wild ways. That's what that poor woman needs yet!"

"Look at Izzy, Mrs. Lissman. I bet that boy drinks or something. Look at his face--like a sheet! I tell you that boy ain't walking up this street straight. Look for yourself, Mrs. Lissman. Ach, his poor mother!" A current like electricity that sets a wire humming ran in waves along Mrs. Schimm's voice. "Look!"

"Oh-oh! I say, ain't that a trouble for that poor woman? When you see other people's trouble your own ain't so bad."

"Ain't that awful? Just look at his face! Ain't that a trouble for you?"

"She herself as much as told me not a thing does her swell brother over on Kingston do for them. I guess such a job as that boy has got in his banking-house he could get from a stranger too."

"Sh-h-h, Mrs. Lissman! Here he comes. Don't let on like we been talking about him. Speak to him like always."

"Good evening, Izzy."

Isadora Shongut paused in the act of mounting the front steps and turned a blood-driven face toward his neighbor. His under jaw sagged and trembled, and his well-knit body seemed to have lost its power to stand erect, so that his clothes bagged.

"Good evening, Mrs.--Lissman."

"You're home early to-night, Izzy?"

"Y-yes."

He fitted his key into the front-door lock, but his hand trembled so that it would not turn; and for a racking moment he stood there vainly pushing a weak knee against the panel, and his breath came out of his throat in a wheeze.

The maid-of-all-work, straggly and down at the heels, answered his fumbling at the lock and opened the door to him.

"You, Mr. Izzy!"

He sprang in like a catamount, clicking the door quick as a flash behind him. "Sh-h-h! Where's ma?"

"Your mamma ain't home; she went up to Rindley's. You ain't sick, are you, Mr. Izzy?"

A spasm of relief flashed over his face, and he snapped his dry fingers in an agony of nervousness. "Where's Renie? Quick!"

"She's in her room, layin' down. She ain't goin' to be home to the supper-party to-night, Mr. Izzy; she--What's the matter, Mr. Izzy?"

He was down the hallway in three running bounds and, without the preliminary of knocking, into his sister's tiny, semi-darkened bedroom, his breathing suddenly filling it. She sprang from her little chintz-covered bed, where she had flung herself across its top, her face and wrapper ruffled with sleep.

"Izzy!"

"Sh-h-h!"

"Izzy, what--where--Izzy, what is it?"

"Sh-h-h, for God's sake! 'Sh-h! Don't let 'em hear, Renie. Don't let 'em hear!"

Her swimming senses suddenly seemed to clear. "What's happened, Izzy? Quick! What's wrong?"

He clicked the key in the lock, and in the agony of the same dry-fingered nervousness rubbed his hand back and forth across his dry lips. "Don't let 'em hear--the old man or ma--don't!"

"Quick! What is it, Izzy?" She sat down on the edge of the bed, weak.

"Tell me, Izzy; something terrible is wrong. It--it isn't papa, Izzy?"

Tell me it isn't papa. For God's sake, Izzy, he--he ain't--"

"Sh-h-h! N-no! No, it ain't. It--it ain't pa. It's me, Renie--it's me!" He crumbled at her feet, his palms plastered over his eyes and his fingers clutched deep in the high nap of his hair. "It's me! It's me!"

"What? What?"

"Sh-h-h! For God's sake, Renie, you got to stand by me; you got to stand by me this time if you ever did! Promise me, Renie! It's me, Renie. I--Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

She stooped to his side, her voice and hands trembling beyond control.

"Izzy! Izzy, tell me--tell me! What is it?"

"Oh, my God, why didn't I die? Why didn't I die?"

"Izzy, what--what is it? Money? Haven't I always stood by you before?"

Won't I now? Tell me, Izzy. Tell me, I say!"

She tugged at his hands, prying them away from his eyes; but the terror she saw there set her trembling again and thrice she opened her lips before she found voice.

"Izzy, if you don't tell me, mamma will be back soon, and then pa; and--you better tell me quick. Your own sister will stand by you. Get up, dearie." Tears trickled through his fingers and she could see the curve of his back rise and fall to the retching of suppressed sobs. "Izzy, you got to tell me quick--do you hear?"

He raised his ravaged face at the sharp-edged incisiveness in her voice. "I'm in trouble, Renie--such trouble. Oh, my God, such horrible trouble!"

"Tell me quick--do you hear? Quick, or mamma and papa--"

"Renie--sh-h-h! They mustn't know--the old man mustn't; she mustn't, if--if I got to kill myself first. His heart--he--he mustn't, Renie--he mustn't know."

"Know what?"

"It's all up, Renie. I've done something--the worst thing I ever done in my life; but I didn't know while I was doing it, Renie, how--what it was. I swear I didn't! It was like borrowing, I thought. I was sure I could pay it back. I thought the system was a great one and--and I couldn't lose."

"Izzy--roulette again! You--you been losing at--at roulette again?"

"No, no; but they found out at--at the bank, Renie. I--oh, my God! Nothing won't save me!"

"The bank, Izzy?"

"They found out, Renie. Yesterday, when the bank was closed, he--Uncle Isadore--put 'em on the books. Nothing won't save me now, Renie. He won't; you--you know him--hard as nails! Nothing won't save me. It's going to be stripes for me, Renie. Ma--the old man--stripes! I--I can't let 'em do it. I--I'll kill myself first. I can't let 'em--I--can't--I can't let 'em!"

He burrowed his head in her lap to stifle his voice, which slipped up and away from his control; and her icy hands and knees could feel his entire body trembling.

"Sh-h-h, dearie! Try to tell me slow, dearie, for pa's and ma's sake, so--so we can fix it up somehow."

"We can't fix it up. The old man 'ain't got the money and--and he can't stand it."

"For God's sake, Izzy, tell me or I'll go mad! Slow, dearie, so Renie can think and listen and help you. She's with you, darling, and nothing can hurt you. Now begin, Izzy, and go slow. What did you start to tell me about Uncle Isadore and the books? Slow, darling."

Her voice was smooth and flowing, and the hand that stroked his hair was slow and soothing; the great stream of his passion abated and he huddled quietly at her feet.

"Now begin, dearie. Uncle Isadore--what?"

"This morning, when I got down to--to the office, two men had--my books."

"Yes."

"O God! When I seen 'em, right away my heart just stopped."

"Sh-h-h! Yes--two men had the books."

"And Uncle Isadore--Uncle Isadore--he was--he--"

"Go on!"

"He--he was in the cage, too; and--and you know how he looks when his eyes get little."

"Yes, yes, Izzy."

"They were--expert accountants with him. All day yesterday, Sunday, they were on my books; and--and they had me, Renie--they had me like a rat in a trap."

"Had you, Izzy?"

He drew himself upward, clutching at her arms; and the sobs began to tear him afresh. "They had me, Renie."

"Oh, Izzy, why--"

"I could have paid it back. I could have put it back if the old skinflint hadn't got to sniffing round and sicked 'em on my books. I could have won it all back in time, Renie. With my own uncle, my own mother's brother, it--it wasn't like I was stealing it, was it, Renie? Was it?"

"Oh, my God, Izzy!"

"It wasn't, Renie--my own uncle! I could have won it back if--if--"

"Won back what, Izzy--won back what?"

"I--I started with a hundred, Renie. I had to have it; I had to, I tell you. You remember that night I--I wanted you to go over and ask Aunt Beck for it? I had to have it. Pa--. I--I couldn't excite him any more about it; and--and I had to have it, I tell you, Renie."

"Yes; then what?"

"And I--I borrowed it without asking. I--I fixed it on my books so--so Uncle Isadore wouldn't--couldn't--. I--I fixed it on my books."

"Oh-oh, Izzy! Oh--oh--oh!"

"I was trying out a system--a new one--and it worked, Renie. I tried it out on the new wheel down at Sharkey's and the seventeen system worked like a trick. I won big the first and second nights, Renie--you remember the night I brought you and ma the bracelets? I paid back the hundred the first week, Renie; and no one knew--no one knew."

"Oh-h-h-h!"

"The next Friday my luck turned on me--I never ought to have played on Friday--turned like a toad one unlucky Friday night. I got in deep before I knew it, and deeper and deeper; and then--and then it just seemed there wasn't no holding me, Renie. I got wild--got wild, I tell you; and I--I wrote 'em checks I didn't have no right to write. I--I went crazy, I tell you. Next day--you remember that morning I left the house so early?--I had to fix it with the books and borrow what--what I needed before the banks opened. I--I had to make good on them checks, Renie. I fixed it with the books, and from that time on it worked."

"Oh, Izzy--Izzy--Izzy!"

"I kept losing, Renie; but I knew, if my luck just changed from that unlucky Friday night, I could pay it back like the first time. All I needed was a little time and a little luck and I could pay it back like the first hundred; so I kept fixing my books, Renie, and--and borrowing more--and more."

"How much?"

"O God, Renie! I could have paid it back with time; I--"

"Sh-h-h! How much, Izzy--how much?"

"Somebody must have snitched on me, how I was losing every night. The old skinflint, he--Oh, my God! They got me, Renie--they got me; and it'll kill the old man!"

"How much, Izzy--how much?"

"Oh, my God! I could have paid it back if--if--"

"How much? Tell me, I say!"

"Four--thousand!"

"Oh-h-h, Izzy--Izzy--Izzy!" She sprang back from him, blind with scalding tears. "Izzy! Four thousand! Oh, my God! Four thousand!"

"I could have paid it back, Renie; the system was all right, but--"

"Four thousand! Four thousand!"

"He--he was all for detaining me right away, Renie; sending for pa, and--and sicking the law right on his--his own sister's son. On my knees for three hours I had to beg, Renie--on my knees, for ma's sake and your sake and pa's--just for a little time I begged. A little time was all I begged. He don't care nothing for blood. I--I had to beg him, Renie, till--till I fainted."

"What shall we do, Izzy? What shall we do?"

"I squeezed two weeks' time out of him, Renie. Two weeks to pay it back or he puts the law on me--two weeks; and I got it from him like blood from a turnip. Oh, my God, Renie, four thousand in two weeks--four thousand in two weeks!"

He fell in a half-swoon against her skirts. Out of her arms she made a pillow of mercy and drew his head down to her bosom; and tears, bitter with salt, mingled with his, and her heart's blood buzzed in her brain.

"Izzy, Izzy! What have you done?"

"I can't pay it back, Renie. Where could I get half that much? I can't pay back four dollars, much less four thousand. I can't! I can't!"

"Four thousand!"

"We gotta keep it from the old man and ma, Renie. Let 'em kill me if they want to; but we gotta keep it from him and ma."

"Four thousand! Four thousand!"

In the half-light of the room, with the late sunshine pressing warm against the drawn green shades, the remote shouts of children coming to them through the quiet, and the whir of a lawn-mower off somewhere, they crouched, these two, as though they would shut their ears to the flapping of vultures' wings.

"They can't do anything to you, Izzy."

"What'll we do, Renie? What'll we do?"

"We got to find a way, Izzy."

"They can't send me up for it, Renie--say they can't!"

"No--no, dearie."

"I ain't crooked like that! It was my own uncle. They can't send me up, Renie. I'll kill myself first! I'll kill myself first!"

"Izzy, ain't you ashamed?" But it was as though the odor of death found its way to her nostrils, nauseating her. "Let me think. Let me think just a minute. Let me think." She rammed the ends of her fists tight against her eyes until Catherine wheels spun and spun against her lids. "Let me think just a minute."

"There's nobody, Renie--nobody--nobody--no way."

"Four--thousand!"

"No-body, I tell you, Renie. But I'll kill myself before I--"

Renie stood up. "Izzy! I will!"

He was whimpering frankly against her skirt. After a while she raised her face. Jeanne d'Arc might have looked like that when she beheld the vision.

"Squash!"

"What?"

"Squash! It's like he was sent out of heaven!"

"He--he ain't--"

"He's coming to-night--to ask me, Izzy. You know what I mean? Don't you see? Don't you see?"

"I--"

"Don't you see, Izzy? He's going to ask me, and--and I'm going to do it!"

"Oh, my God! Renie, you can't do that for me if--You can't do that for me."

"He's got it, Izzy. I can get ten thousand out of him if I got to."

"But, Renie--"

"I--I can rush it through and--do it before two weeks, Izzy; and we got a way out, Izzy--we got a way. We got a way!"

She threw herself in a passion of hysteria face downward on the bed and a tornado of weeping swept over her. Rooted, he stood as though face to face with an immense dawn, but with eyes that dared not see the light.

"Renie, I--can't! I--Renie, I can't let you do that for me if--if--I can't let you marry him for me if you don't--"

"Sh-h-h!"

Mrs. Shongut's voice outside the door, querulous: "Renie!"

Silence.

"Re-nie!"

"Yes, mamma."

"Why you got your door locked?"

Silence.

"Huh?"

"I-I--"

"Come right away out in the dining-room. If you 'ain't got no more regards for your parents than not to stay home for supper, anyways you got to fix for the table the flowers what I brought home from market."

"Yes, mamma." She darted to her feet, drying the tears on her cheeks with the palm of her hand. "Coming, mamma." And she slipped through the door of her room, scarcely opening it.

In the dining-room, beside the white-spread table, Mrs. Shongut unwound a paper toot of pink carnations; but the flavor of her spirit was bitter and her thin, pressed-looking lips hung at the corners.

"Maybe you can stop pouting long enough to help with things a little, even if you won't be here. I tell you it's a pleasure when papa comes home for supper with company, to have children like mine."

"Listen, mamma. I--"

"Sounds like somebody's going out of the house, Renie. Who--"

"No, no. No one has been here, mamma. It's just the breeze."

"I tell you it's a pleasure to have a daughter like mine! What excuses to make to Max Hochenheimer, a young man what comes all the way from Cincinnati to see her--"

"Listen, mamma; I--I've only been fooling--honest, I have."

"What?"

"I--aw, mamma."

Miss Shongut's face was suddenly buried in the neat lace yoke of her mother's dimity blouse, and her arms crept up about her neck.

"I've been only fooling about to-night, mamma. Don't you think I know it is just like he was sent from heaven? I've only been fooling, mamma, so that--so that you shouldn't know how happy I am."

The soul peeped out suddenly in Mrs. Shongut's face, hallowing it.

"Renie! My little Renie!"

* * * * *

On Wasserman Avenue the hand that rocks the cradle oftener than not carves the roast. Behind her platter, sovereign of all she surveyed, and skilfully, so that beneath her steel the red, oozing slices curled and fell into their pool of gravy, reigned Mrs. Shongut. And her suzerainty rested on her as lightly as a tiara of seven stars.

"Mr. Hochenheimer, you ain't eating a thing!" Mrs. Shongut craned her neck round the centerpiece of pink carnations. "Not a thing on your plate! Renie, pass Mr. Hochenheimer some more salad."

"No, no, Mrs. Shongut; just don't you worry about me."

"I hope you ain't bashful, Mr. Hochenheimer. We feel toward you just like home folks."

"Indeed, what I don't see I ask for, Mrs. Shongut."

"Renie, pass Mr. Hochenheimer some more of that red cabbage."

"No, no--please, Mrs. Shongut; I got plenty."

"Ach, Mr. Hochenheimer, you eat so little you must be in love."

"Mamma!"

"Ach, Mr. Hochenheimer knows that I only fool. Renie, pass the dumplings."

"No, no--please! I--"

"Mamma, don't force. You're not bashful, are you, Mr. Hochenheimer?"

Miss Shongut inclined her head with a saucy, birdlike motion, and showed him the full gleaming line of her teeth. He took a large mouthful of ice-water to wash down the red of confusion that suddenly swam high in his face, tingeing even his ears.

"For more dumplings I ain't bashful, Miss Renie; but there--there's other things--I am bashful to ask for."

From his place at the far end of the table Mr. Shongut laughed deep, as though a spiral spring was vibrating in the recesses of his throat.

"Bashful with the girls--eh, Hochenheimer?"

"I ain't much of a lady's man, Shongut."

"Well, I wish you was just so bashful in business--believe me! I wish you was."

"Shongut, I never got the best of you yet in a deal."

"With my girl he's bashful yet, mamma; but down to the last sausage-casing I have to pay his fancy prices. Nun, look mamma, how red she gets! What you get so red for, Renie--eh?"

"Aw, papa!"

"A little teasing from her old father she can't take. Look at her, mamma! Look at both of them--red like beets. Neither of them can stand a little teasing from an old man."

"Adolph, you mustn't! All people don't like it when you make fun. Mr. Hochenheimer, you must excuse my husband; a great one he is to tease and make his little fun."

Mr. Shongut's ancient-looking face, covered with a short, grizzled growth of beard and pale as a prophet's beneath, broke into a smile, and a minute network of lines sprang out from the corners of his eyes.

"I was bashful in my life once, too--eh, mamma?"

"Papa!"

"Please, you must excuse my husband, Mr. Hochenheimer; he likes to have his little jokes."

Mr. Hochenheimer pushed away his plate in high embarrassment; nor would his eyes meet Miss Shongut's, except to flash away under cover of exaggerated imperturbability.

"My husband's a great one to tease, Mr. Hochenheimer. My Izzy too, takes after him. I'm sorry that boy ain't home, so you could meet him again. We call him the dude of the family. Renie, pass Mr. Hochenheimer the toothpicks."

A pair of deep-lined brackets sprang out round Mr. Shongut's mouth. "Why ain't that boy home for supper, where he belongs?"

"Ach, now, Adolph, don't get excited right away. Always, Mr. Hochenheimer, my husband gets excited over nothing, when he knows how it hurts his heart. Like that boy ain't old enough to stay out to supper when he wants, Adolph! 'Sh-h-h!'"

Mrs. Shongut smiled to conceal that her heart was faint, and the saga of a mother might have been written round that smile.

"Now, now, Adolph, don't you begin to worry."

"I tell you, Shongut, it's a mistake to worry. I save all my excitement for the good things in life."

"See, Adolph; from a young man like Mr. Hochenheimer you can get pointers."

"I tell you, Shongut, over such a nice little home and such a nice little family as you got I might get excited; but over the little things that don't count for much I 'ain't got time."

Mrs. Shongut waved a deprecatory hand. "It's a nice enough little home for us, Mr. Hochenheimer, but with a grand house like I hear you built for your mother up on the stylish hilltop in Cincinnati, I guess to you it seems right plain."

"That's where you're wrong, Mrs. Shongut. Like I says to Shongut coming out on the street-car with him to-night, if it hadn't been that I thought maybe my mother would like a little fanciness after a hard life like hers, for my own part a little house and a big garden is all I ask for."

"Ach, Mr. Hochenheimer, with such a grand house like that is--sunk-in baths Mrs. Schwartz says you got! To see a house like that, I tell you it must be a treat."

"It's a fine place, Mrs. Shongut, but too big for me and my mother. When I got into the hands of architects, let me tell you, I feel I was lucky to get off with only twenty-five rooms. Right now, Mrs. Shongut, we got rooms we don't know how to pronounce."

"Twenty-five rooms! Did you hear that, Adolph? Twenty-five rooms! I bet, Mr. Hochenheimer, your mother is proud of such a son as can give her twenty-five rooms."

"We don't say much about it to each other, my mother and me; but--you can believe me or not--in our big, stylish house up there on the hill, with her servants to take away from her all the pleasure of work and her market and old friends down on Richmond Street yet, and nothing but gold furniture round her, she gets lonesome enough. If it wasn't for my garden and the beautiful scenery from my terraces, I would wish myself back in our little down-town house more than once, too. I tell you, Mrs. Shongut, fineness ain't everything."

"You should bring your mother some time to Mound City with you when you come over on business, Mr. Hochenheimer. We would do our best to make it pleasant for her."

"She's an old woman, Mrs. Shongut, and in a train or an automobile I can't get her. I guess it would be better, Mrs. Shongut, if I carry off some of your family with me to Cincinnati."

And, to belie that his words had any glittering import, he lay back in his chair in a state of silent laughter, which set his soft-fleshed cheeks aquiver; and his blue eyes, so ready yet so reluctant, disappeared behind a tight squint.

"Adolph, I guess Mr. Hochenheimer will excuse us--eh? Renie, you can entertain Mr. Hochenheimer while me and papa go and spend the evening over at Aunt Meena's. Mr. Shongut's sister, Mr. Hochenheimer, 'ain't been so well. Anyways, I always say young folks 'ain't got no time for old ones."

"You go right ahead along, Mrs. Shongut. Don't treat me like company. I hope Miss Renie don't mind if I spend the evening?"

"I should say not."

"Hochenheimer, a cigar?"

"Thanks; I don't smoke."

"My husband, with his heart trouble, shouldn't smoke, neither, Mr. Hochenheimer; it worries me enough. What me and the doctors tell him goes in one ear and out of the other."

"See, Hochenheimer, when you get a wife how henpecked you get!"

"A henpeck never drew much blood, Shongut."

"Come, Adolph; it is a long car-ride to Meena's."

They pushed back from the table, the four of them, smiling-lipped. With his short-fingered, hairy-backed hands Mr. Hochenheimer dusted at his coat lapels, then shook his bulging trousers knees into place.

The lamp of inner sanctity burns in strange temples. A carpenter in haircloth shirt first turned men's hearts outward. Who can know, who does not first cross the plain of the guide with gold, that behind the moldy panels at Ara Coeli reigns the jeweled bambino, robed in the glittering gems of sacrifice?

Who could know, as Mr. Hochenheimer stood there in the curtailed dignity of his five feet five, that behind his speckled and slightly rotund waistcoat a choir sang of love, and that the white flame of his spirit burned high?

"I tell you, Mrs. Shongut, it is a pleasure to be invited out to your house. You should know how this old bachelor hates hotels."

"And you should know how welcome you always are, Mr. Hochenheimer. To-morrow night you take supper with us too. We don't take 'no'--eh, Adolph? Renie?"

"I appreciate that, Mrs. Shongut; but I--I don't know yet--if--if I stay over."

Mr. Shongut batted a playful hand and shuffled toward the door. "You stay, Hochenheimer! I bet you a good cigar you stay. Ain't I right, Renie, that he stays? Ain't I right?"

Against the sideboard, fingering her white dress, Miss Shongut regarded her parents, and her smile was as wan as moonlight.

"Ain't I right, Renie?"

"Yes, papa."

* * * * *

On the bit of porch, the hall light carefully lowered and cushions from within spread at their feet, the dreamy quiet of evening and air as soft as milk flowed round and closed in about Miss Shongut and Mr. Hochenheimer.

They drew their rocking-chairs arm to arm, so that, behind a bit of climbing moonflower vine, they were as snug as in a bower. Stars shone over the roofs of the houses opposite; the shouts of children had died down; crickets whirred.

"Is the light from that street lamp in your eyes, Renie?"

"No, no."

The wooden floor reverberated as they rocked. A little thrill of breeze fluttered her filmy shoulder scarf against his hand. To his fermenting fancy it was as though her spirit had flitted out of the flesh.

"Ah, Miss Renie, I--I--"

"What, Mr. Hochenheimer?"

"Nothing. Your--your little shawl, it tickled my hand so."

She leaned her elbow on the arm of her chair and cupped her chin in her palm. Her eyes had a peculiar value--like a mill-pond, when the wheel is still, reflects the stars in calm and unchurned quiet.

"You look just like a little princess to-night, Miss Renie--that pretty shawl and your eyes so bright."

"A princess!"

"Yes; if I had a tin suit and a sword to match I'd ride up on a horse and carry you off to my castle in Cincinnati."

"Say, wouldn't it be a treat for Wasserman Avenue to see me go loping off like that!"

"This is the first little visit we've ever had together all by ourselves, ain't it, Miss Renie? Seems like, to a bashful fellow like me, you was always slipping away from me."

"The flowers and the candies you kept sending me were grand, Mr. Hochenheimer--and the letter--to-day."

"You read the letter, Miss Renie?"

"Yes, I--I--You shouldn't keep spoiling me with such grand flowers and candy, Mr. Hochenheimer."

"If tell you that never in my life I sent flowers or candy, or wrote a letter like I wrote you yesterday, to another young lady, I guess you laugh at me--not, Miss Renie?"

"You shouldn't begin, Mr. Hochenheimer, by spoiling me."

"Ah, Miss Renie, if you knew how I like to spoil you, if you would let me--Ach, what's the use? I--I can't say it like I want." She could hear him breathing. "It--it's a grand night, Miss Renie."

"Yes."

"Grand!"

"And look over those roofs! It seems like there's a million stars shining, don't it?"

"You're like me, Miss Renie; so many times I've noticed it. Nothing is so grand to me as nature, neither."

"Up at Green Springs, in the Ozarks, where we went for ten days last summer, honest, Mr. Hochenheimer, I used to lie looking out the window all night. The stars up there shone so close it seemed like you could nearly touch them."

"Ain't that wonderful, Miss Renie, you should be just like me again!" She smiled in the dark. "When I was a boy always next to the attic window I liked to sleep. When I built my house, Miss Renie, the first thing after I designed my rose-garden I drew up for myself a sleeping-garden on my roof. The architects fussed enough about spoiling the roof-line, but that's one of the things I wanted which I stood pat for and got--my sleeping-garden."

"Sleeping-garden!"

"Miss Renie, I just wish you could see it--all laid out in roses in summer, and a screened-in pergola, where I sleep, right underneath the stars and roses. I sleep so close to heaven I always say I can smell it."

She turned her little face, white as a spray of jasmine against a dark background of night, toward him. "Underneath a pergola of roses! I guess it's the roses you must smell. How grand!"

"Sometimes when--if you come to Cincinnati I want to show you my place, Miss Renie. If I say so myself, I got a wonderful garden; flowers I can show you grown from clippings from every part of the world. If I do say so, for a sausage-maker who never went to school two years in his life it ain't so bad. I got a lily-pond, Miss Renie, they come from all over to see. By myself I designed it."

"It must be grand, Mr. Hochenheimer."

"On Sunday, Miss Renie, I like for my boys and girls from the factory to come up to my place and make themselves at home. You should see my old mother how she fixes for them! I wish you could see them boys and girls, and old men and women. In a sausage-factory they don't get much time to listen to birds and water when it falls into a fountain. I wish, Miss Renie, you could see them with the flowers. I--well, I don't know how to say it; but I wish you could see them for yourself."

"They like it?"

"Like it! I tell you it's the greatest pleasure I get out of my place. I wish, instead of my fine house, the city would let me build my factory for them right in the garden."

"On such a stylish street they wouldn't ever let you, Mr. Hochenheimer."

"Me and my mother ain't much for style, Miss Renie. Honest, you'd be surprised, but with my fine house I don't even keep an automobile. My mother, she's old, Miss Renie, and won't go in one. Alone it ain't no pleasure; and when I don't walk down to my factory the street-cars is good enough."

"You should take it easier, Mr. Hochenheimer."

"All our lives, Miss Renie, we've been so busy, my mother and me, I tell her we got to be learnt--like children got to be learnt to walk--how to enjoy ourselves. We--we need somebody young--somebody like you in the house, Miss Renie--young and so pretty, and full of life, and--and so sweet."

She gave a gauzy laugh. "Honest, it must seem like a dream to have a rose-garden right on the place you live."

"I wish you could see, Miss Renie, a new Killarney my gardener showed me in the hothouse yesterday before I left--white-and-pink blend; he got the clipping from Jamaica. It's a pale pink in the heart like the first minute when the sun

risers; and then it gets pinker and pinker toward the outside petals, till it just bursts out as red as the sun when it's ready to set."

"And those beautiful little tan roses you sent me, Mr. Hochenheimer; I--"

"Ah, Miss Renie, the clipping from those sunset roses comes from Italy; but now I call them Renie Roses, if--if you'll excuse me. I tell you, Miss Renie, you look just enough like 'em to be related. Little satiny gold-looking roses, with a pink blush on the inside of the petals and a--a few little soft thorns on the stem."

"Aw, Mr. Hochenheimer, I ain't got thorns."

Out from the velvet shadows his face came closer. "It's thorns to me, Miss Renie, because you're so pretty and sweet, and--and seem so far away from a--plain fellow like me."

"I--"

"I'm a plain man, Miss Renie, and I don't know how to talk much about the things I feel inside of me; but--but I *feel*, all-righty."

"Looks ain't everything."

"I tell you, Miss Renie, now since I can afford it, I just don't seem to know how to do the things I got the feeling inside of me for. Even in my grand house sometimes I feel like it--it's too late for me to live like I feel."

"Nothing's ever too late, Mr. Hochenheimer."

"Just since I met you I can feel that way, Miss Renie, if you'll excuse me for saying it--just since I met you."

"Me?"

"For the first time in my life, Miss Renie, I got the feeling from a girl that, for me, life--maybe my life--is just beginning. Like a vine, Miss Renie, you got yourself tangled round my feelings."

"Oh, Mr. Hochenheimer!"

"Like I told your papa to-night on the car, I 'ain't got much to offer a beautiful young girl like you; money, I can see, don't count for so much with a fine girl like you, and I--I don't need to be told that my face and my ways ain't my fortune."

"It's the heart that counts, Mr. Hochenheimer."

"If--if you mean that, Miss Renie--if love, just love, can bring happiness, I can make for you a life as beautiful as my rose-garden. For the first time in my life, Miss Renie, I got the feeling I can do that for a woman--and that woman is you. I--Will you--will you be my wife, Miss Renie?" She could feel his breath now, scorching her cheek. "Will you, Miss Renie?"

And even as she leaned over to open her lips a figure, swift as a Greek, dashed to the veranda--up the steps three at a bound.

"Renie!"

"Izzy!" She rose, pushing back her chair, and her hand flew to her breast.

"Just a minute. Inside I gotta see you quick, Renie. Howdy, Hochenheimer? You excuse her a minute. I got to see her."

His voice was like wine that sings in the pouring.

"Yes, yes, Izzy, I'm coming." Hers was trembling and pizzicato. "Excuse me a minute, Mr. Hochenheimer--a minute."

Mr. Hochenheimer rose, mopping his brow. "It's all right, Miss Renie. I wait out here on the porch till it pleases you."

In her tiny bedroom, with the light turned up, she faced her brother; and he grasped her shoulders so that, through the sheer texture of her dress, his hands left red prints on the flesh.

"Renie, you 'ain't done it, have you?"

"No, no, Izzy; I've done nothing. Where you been?"

He gave a great laugh and sank into a chair, limp. "You don't have to, Renie. It's all right! I've fixed it. Everything is all right!"

"What do you mean?"

Then, as though the current of his returning vigor could know no bounds, he scooped her in a one-armed embrace that fairly raised her from the floor.

"All of a sudden, when you went out, Renie, I remembered Aunt Becky. You remember she was the one who made Uncle Isadore fork over to papa that time about the mortgage?"

"Yes, yes."

"All of a sudden it came over me that she was the only one who could do anything with him. I ran over to the house--all the way I ran, Renie. She was up in her room, and--and it's all right, Renie. I told her, and she's fixed it--fixed it!"

"Oh, Izzy!"

"She's fixed it. When he came home to supper we got him right away up in her room before he had his hat off. Like a mother she begged for me, Renie--like a mother. God! I--I tell you I couldn't go through it again; but she got him, Renie--she got him!"

"Go on, Izzy--go on!"

"She told him I wouldn't face the shame; she told him I--I'd kill my own father, and that the blood would be on his hands; she told him if he'd let me go to the devil without another chance--me that had been named after him--that a curse would roost on his chest. He didn't want to give in to her--he didn't want to; but she scared him, and she's a woman and she knew how to get inside of him--she knew how. They're going to send me out to his mines, where I can start over, Renie. Out West, where it'll make a new man of me; where I can begin over--start right, Renie. Start right!"

"Oh, Izzy darling!"

"I can pay up when I earn the money like a man, Renie. It would have killed me if you had sold yourself to him for me. I'd have gone to the stripes first. But I got a man's chance now, Renie, and I don't have to do that rotten thing to you and Squash. A man's chance, Renie, and--and I'm going to take it."

She sat down on the bed suddenly, as though the blood had flowed out of her heart, weakening her.

"A sister like you that would have stuck; and--and I'm going to make good to a sister like you, Renie. I am, this time. Please believe me, Renie. I am! I am!"

Her hand lay pressed to his cheek and she could feel the warm course of his tears. "Izzy, I knew you wasn't yellow; I--I knew you wasn't."

Sobs shook him suddenly and he buried his face in the pillow beside her.

"Why, Izzy! Why, Izzy darling, what--what is it, Izzy darling?"

"It's nothing. You--you get out, Renie. I'm all right; only--only it's--it's--Now that it's all over, I--I--Just let me alone a minute, Renie. Go--you--please--please!"

She closed the door behind her and fumbled through the gloom of the hallway, her hand faltering as she groped ahead.

From the recesses of the moonflower vine Mr. Hochenheimer rose to meet her; and, because her limbs would tremble, she slid quickly into her chair.

"You--you must excuse me, Mr. Hochenheimer."

"It's all right, Miss Renie. I take up where we left off. It ain't so easy, Miss Renie, to begin all over again to say it, but--but will you be my--will you be my--"

She was suddenly in his arms, burrowing against the speckled waistcoat a little resting-place for her head.

IN MEMORIAM

Toward the city Mother Earth turns a plate-glass eye and an asphalt bosom. The rhythm of her heart-beats does not penetrate through paved streets. That cadence is for those few of her billion children who have stayed by to sleep with an ear to the mossy floor of her woodlands. The prodigals, the future Tammany leaders, merchant princes, cotton kings, and society queens march on, each to an urban destiny.

Nor is the return of the prodigal to Mother Earth along a piked highway. The road back to Nature is full of her own secrets, and few who have trod the streets of the city remember the brambled return, or care.

Men who know to the centime each fluctuation of the wheat-market have no eye for the tawny beauty of a whole field of the precious product fluctuating to a breeze. Women stayed by steel and convention into the mold of form love the soft faces of flowers looking up at them from expensive corsages, but care not for their nativity. Greeks, first of men, perched their gods up on Olympus and wandered down to build cities.

Because the city is as insidious as the sleeping-draught of an Indian soothsayer, under its spell men go mad for gain and forget that to stand on the brow of a mountain at night, arms outstretched in kinship to Vega and Capella, is a golden moment of purer alloy than certified bonds. What magnate remembers where the best tackle squirms, or the taste of grass sucked in from the tender end of the blade? All progress is like that. How immediately are the yesterdays metamorphosed into memories; and memories, even the stanchest of them, mold and disintegrate.

There were times when Mrs. Simon Meyerburg, who was threescore and ten years removed from the days when her bare feet had run fleet across a plushy meadow, would pause, hand on brow, when a memory, perhaps moving as it crumpled, would pass before her in faded daguerreotype. A gallery of events--so many pictures faded from her mental walls that the gaps seemed, as it were, to separate her from herself, making of her and that swift-footed girl back there vague strangers. And yet the vivid canvases! A peasant child at a chum, switching her black braids this way and that when they dangled too far over her shoulders; a linnet dead in its cage outside a thatched doorway, and the taste of her first heart tears; a hand-made crib in a dark corner and hardly ever empty of a little new-comer.

Then gaps, except here and there a faded bit. Then again large memories close and full of color: Simon Meyerburg, with the years folded back and youth on him, wooing her beside a stile that led off a South German country road, his peasant cap fallen back off his strong black curls, and even then a seer's light in his strong black eyes. Her own black eyes more diffident now and the black braids looped up and bound in a tight coronet round her head. The voice of the mother calling her homeward through cupped hands and in the Low Dutch of the Lowlands. A moonrise and the sweet, vivid smell of evening, and once more the youth Simon Meyerburg wooing her there beside the roadside stile.

The crowded steerage of a wooden ship, her first son suckling at her breast. At the prow Simon Meyerburg again, his peasant cap pushed backward and his black eyes, with the seer's light in them, gleaming ahead for the first glimpse of the land of fulfilment. An unbelievable city sucking them immediately into its slums. Filth. A quick descent into squalor. A second son. A third. A fourth. A fifth. A girl child. Mouths too eager for black bread. Always the struggle and the sour smell of slums. Finally light. White light. The seer sees!

Then, ever green in her mind, a sun-mottled kitchen with a black iron range, and along the walls festoons of looped-up green peppers. White bread now in abundance for small mouths not so hungry. At evening, Simon Meyerburg, with rims of dirt under his nails, entering that kitchen door, the girl child turning from her breast to leap forward....

Sometimes in her stately halls, caught, as it were, in passing from room to room, Mrs. Simon Meyerburg would pause, assaulted by these memories of days so remote that her mind could not always run back to meet them. Then again the glittering present studded with the jewels of fulfilment lay on her brow like the thin line of a headache, pressing out the

past.

In Mrs. Meyerburg's bedroom a great arched ceiling, after the narrative manner of Paolo Veronese, lent such vastness to the apartment that moving across it, or sitting in her great overstuffed armchair beside a window, she hardly struck a note. Great wealth lay in canopied silence over that room. A rug out of Persia, so large that countless extra years and countless pairs of tired eyes and tired fingers had gone to make it, let noises sink noiseless into its nap. Brocade and tufting ate up sound. At every window more brocade shut out the incessant song of the Avenue.

In the overstuffed chair beside one of these windows sat Mrs. Meyerburg with her hands idle and laid out along the chair sides. They were ringless hands and full of years, with a great network of veins across their backs and the aging fingers large at the knuckles. But where the hands betrayed the eyes belied. Deep in Mrs. Meyerburg's soft and scarcely flabby face her gaze was straight and very black.

An hour by an inlaid ormolu clock she sat there, her feet in soft, elastic-sided shoes, just lifted from the floor. Incongruous enough, on a plain deal table beside her, a sheaf of blue-prints lay unrolled. She fingered them occasionally and with a tenderness, as if they might be sensitive to touch; even smiled and held the sheets one by one up against the shrouded window so that the light pressing through them might emphasize the labyrinth of lines. Dozed, with a smile printed on her lips, and awoke when her head lopped too heavily sidewise.

After an interval she slid out of her chair and crossed to the door; even in action her broad, squat figure infinitesimal to the room's proportions. When she opened the door the dignity of great halls lay in waiting. She crossed the wide vista to a closed door, a replica of her own, and knocked, waited, turned the crystal knob, knocked, waited. Rapped again, this time in three staccatos. Silence. Then softly and with her cheek laid against the imperturbable panel of the closed door:

"Becky! Becky! Open! Open!"

A muffled sound from within as if a sob had been let slip.

Then again, rattling the knob this time: "Becky, it's mamma. Becky, you should get up now; it's time for our drive. Let me in, Becky. Open!" shaking the handle.

When the door opened finally, Mrs. Meyerburg stepped quickly through the slit, as if to ward off its too heavy closing. A French maid, in the immemorial paraphernalia of French maids, stood by like a slim sentinel on stilts, her tall, small heels clicked together. Perfume lay on the artificial dusk of that room.

"Therese, you can go down awhile. When Miss Becky wants she can ring."

"Oui, madame."

"I wish, Therese, when you go down you would tell Anna I don't want she should put the real lace table-cloth from Miss Becky's party last night in the linen-room. Twice I've told her after its use she should always bring it right back to me."

"Oui, madame." And Therese flashed out on the slim heels.

In the crowded apartment, furnished after the most exuberant of the various exuberant French periods, Miss Rebecca Meyerburg lay on a Louis Seize bed, certified to have been lifted, down to the casters, from the Grand Trianon of Marie Antoinette. In a great confusion of laces and linens, disarrayed as if tossed by a fever patient, she lay there, her round young arm flung up over her head and her face turned downward to the curve of one elbow.

"Ach, now, Becky, ain't it a shame you should take on so? Ain't it a shame before the servants? Come, baby, in a half-hour it's time for our drive. Come, baby!"

Beneath the fine linen Miss Meyerburg dug with her toes into the mattress, her head burrowing deeper and the black mane of her hair rippling backward in maenadic waves. "If you don't let me alone, ma, if you don't just let me lay here in peace, I'll scream. I'll faint. Faint, I tell you," and smothered her words in the curve of her elbow.

Mrs. Meyerburg breathed outward in a sigh and sat down hesitant on the bed edge, her hand reaching out to the bare white shoulder and smoothing its high luster.

"Come, Becky, and get up like a good girl. Don't you want, baby, to come over by mamma's room and see the plans for

the Memorial?"

"No! No! No!"

"They got to be sent back to-day, Becky, before Goldfinger leaves for Boston with them. I got to get right away busy if I want the boys should have their surprise this time next year. To no one but my baby girl have I said yet one word. Don't you want, Becky, to see them before they go down by Goldfinger's office, so he can right away go ahead?"

"No! No!"

"Becky, ain't you ashamed, your own papa's Memorial?"

"Please, mamma, please. If you only won't Becky me."

"Betty."

"If you only will go and--and leave me alone."

"I ask you, Betty, should a girl what's got everything that should make her happy just like an angel, a girl what has got for herself heaven on earth, make herself right away sick the first time what things don't go smooth with her?"

"If I could only die! If I could die! Why don't I die to-day?"

The throb of a sob lay on her voice, and she sat up suddenly, pushing backward with both hands the thick rush of hair to her face. Grief had blotched her cheeks, but she was as warm and as curving as Flora. It was as if her deep-white flesh was deep-white plush and would sink to the touch. The line and the sheen of her radiated through her fine garment.

"Why don't I die?" repeating her vain question, and her eyes, darker because she was so white, looking out and past her parent and streaming their bitter tears.

"You'm a bad girl, Becky, and it's a sin you should talk so. *Gott sei dank* your poor papa ain't alive to hear such bad words from his own daughter's lips."

"If pa was living things would be different--let me tell you that."

In a flare of immediate anger Mrs. Meyerburg's head shot forward. "Du--" she cried; "du--you--you bad girl--du--"

"If he had lived they would!"

Suddenly Mrs. Meyerburg's face, with the lines in it held tight, relaxed to tears and she fell to rocking herself softly to and fro, her stiff silk shushing as she swayed.

"Ach, that I should live to hear from my own child that I 'ain't done by her like her father would want that I should do. Every hour since I been left alone, to do by my six children like he would want has been always my only thought, and now--"

"I mean it! I mean it! If he had lived he would have settled it on me easy enough when he saw what I was doing for the family. Two million if need be! He was the one in this family that made it big, because he wasn't afraid of big things."

Further rage trembled along Mrs. Meyerburg's voice, and the fingers she waggled trembled, too, of that same wrath. "You'm a bad girl, Becky! You'm a bad girl with thought only for yourself. Always your papa said by each child we should do the same. Five hundred thousand dollars to each son when he marries a fine, good girl. More as one night I can tell you I laid awake when Felix picked out for himself Trixie, just wondering what papa would want I should do it or not."

"Can't you keep from picking on that girl, mamma? It's through her, if you want to know it, that I first got in with--with the marquis and that crowd."

"Always by each child we should do the same, he said. Five hundred thousand dollars to our girl when she marries a fine, good man. Even back in days when he had not a cent to leave after him, always he said alike you should all be treated. Always, you hear? Always."

Fire had dried the tears in Mrs. Meyerburg's eyes and her face had resumed its fixity of lines. Only her finger continued to tremble and two near-the-surface nerves in her left temple.

"But, mamma, you know yourself he never dreamt we could climb up to this. That for a miserable five hundred thousand more we--"

"A miserable five hundred thousand she calls it like it was five hundred thousand cents!"

"That for a miserable five hundred thousand dollars we could raise our family up to the nobility. The Marquis Rosencrantz, ma, who--"

"Becky, it ain't that I got a word to say against this young man Rosencrantz--but--"

"Marquis Rosencrantz, mamma."

"All right then, Marquis Rosencrantz; but it's like your brother Ben says--a marquis in a country where there ain't no more any of them made could just as well be called a mister. Not a word I got to say against this young Rosencrantz, but--"

"Marquis, ma, please remember! M-a-r-q-u-i-s. Whether there are any more of them or not in France, he still goes by the title over here, and that's what he is, ma. Please remember!"

"Marquis Rosencrantz. But when a young man, Becky, don't talk my own language, it ain't so easy for me to know if I like him--"

"Like him. Huh!" Sitting there upright in bed, her large, white arms wrapped about her knees, Miss Meyerburg regarded her mother with dry eyes, but through a blur of scorn. "She don't know if she likes him! Let me tell you, ma, we can worry if he likes us, not if we like him."

"I always say, Becky, about these fine people what you meet traveling in Europe with your brother Felix and his wife with her gay ways, you--"

"A marquis comes her way and she don't know whether she likes him or not. That's rich!"

"For the price what you say he hinted to you last night he's got to have before he can get married, I guess *oser* I can say if I like him or not."

"I should think, ma, if you had any pride for the family after the way we've been spit on by a certain bunch in this town, you'd be glad to grab a marquis to wave in their stuck-up faces."

"For such things what make in life men like wild beasts fighting each other I got no time. I ain't all for style. All what I want is to see my little girl married to a fine, good--"

"Yes, yes, ma. I know all that fine, good man stuff."

"Ja, I say it again. To a fine, good man just like nearly all your brothers married fine, good women."

"The marquis, just let me tell you, ma, is a man of force--he is. Maybe those foreigners don't always show up, but I've seen him on his own ground. I've seen him in Paris and Monte Carlo and I--"

"I ain't got a word to say against this young man what followed you all the way home from Paris. What I don't know I can't talk about. Only I ask you, Becky, ain't it always in the papers how from Europe they run here thick after the girls what have got money?"

"What are you always running down Europe for, ma? Where did you come from, yourself, I'd like to know!"

"I don't run it down, baby. I don't. You know how your papa loved the old country and sent always money back home. But he always said, baby, it's in America we had all our good luck and to America what gave us so much we should give back too. Just because your brother Felix and his wife what was on the stage like such doings over there is no reason--"

"It's just those notions of yours, ma, that are keeping this family down, let me tell you that--you and Ben and Roody

and Izzy and all the rest of them with their old-fogyness."

"Your brothers, let me tell you, you bad girl, you, are as fine, steady men as your papa before them."

"We could have one of the biggest names in this town and get in on the right kind of charities, if you and they didn't--"

"Your papa, Becky, had his own ideas how to do charity and how we should not give just where our name shows big in the papers. Your brothers are like him, fine, good men, and that's why I want the Memorial should come like a surprise, so they can have before them always that their father was the finest--"

Suddenly Miss Meyerburg flung herself back on her pillows, tears gushing hot and full of salt. "Oh, what's the use? What's the use? She won't understand."

"Becky, baby, 'ain't you got everything what money can buy? A house on Fifth Avenue what even the sight-seeing automobile hollers out about. Automobiles of your own more as you can use. Brothers nearly all with grand wives and families, and such a beautiful girl like you with a grand fortune to--"

"Mamma, mamma, can't you understand there's things that money can't buy?"

"Ja, I should say so; but them is the things, Becky, that money makes you forget all about."

"Try to understand, can't you, ma, that the Rosencrantzes are a great old French family. You know for yourself how few of--of our people got titles to their names. Jacob Rosencrantz, ma, the marquis's great-grandfather back in the days when the family had big money, got his title from the king, ma, for lending money when the--"

"If all of his sons got, like this great-grandson of his asks, one million dollars with their wives, I should say he could afford to lend to the king. To two kings!"

"Please, mamma, can't you understand? It don't hurt how things are now--it's the way they used to be with those kinds of families that count, ma. I was on their estate in France, ma, with Trixie and Felix. She used to know him in Paris when she was singing there. You ought to see, ma, an old, old place that you can ride on for a day and not come to the end, and the house so moldy and ramshackly that any American girl would be proud to marry into it. Those are the things, ma, that our family needs and money can't buy."

"You mean, Becky, that five hundred thousand dollars can't buy it! It has got to be a million dollars yet! A million dollars my child asks for just like it was five dollars!"

"I'm not asking that, ma, I'm not. Five hundred thousand of it is mine by rights. I'm only asking for half a million."

"Gott in Himmel, child, much more as a million dollars I 'ain't got left altogether. With my five sons married and their shares drawn, I tell you, Becky, a million dollars to you now would leave me so low that--"

"There you go. That's what you said that time Felix had to have the hundred thousand in a hurry, but I notice you got it overnight without even turning a finger. For him you can do, but--"

"For a black sheep I got to--"

"It's not all tease with the boys, let me tell you, ma, when they sing that song at you about a whole stocking full you've got that none of us know anything about."

"Ja, you and your brothers can talk, but I know what's what. Don't think, Becky, your brother Felix and his wife with their Monte Carlo all the time and a yacht they got to have yet, and their debts, 'ain't eat a piece out of the fortune your papa built up for you children out of his own sweat."

"Don't go back to ancient history, ma."

"Those cut-upplings is for billionaires, Becky; not for one old lady as 'ain't got much more as a million left after her six dowries is paid."

"Yes, I wish I had what you've got over and above that."

"That young Rosencrantz is playing you high, Becky, because he sees how high your brother and his wife can fly. Always when people get big like us, right away the world takes us for even bigger as we are. He 'ain't got no right to

make such demands. Five hundred thousand dollars is more as he ever saw in his life. I tell you, Becky, if I could speak to that young man like you can in his own language, I would tell him what--"

"He don't make demands in so many words, ma. There--there's a way those things are done without just coming right out. I guess you think, when Selma Bernheimer married her baron, he came right out in words and said it had to be two millions. Like fun he did! But just the same, you don't think she could have said yes to him, when he asked her, unless she knew that she--she could fork over, do you?"

"I tell you in such marriages the last thing what you hear talked about is being in love."

"Oh, that had nothing to do with this, ma. The love part is there all right. You--you don't understand, ma!"

"*Gott sei dank* that I don't understand such!"

Then Miss Meyerburg leaned forward, her large, white hand on her parent's knee, her face close and full of fervor. "Ma dear, you got it in your power sitting there to make me the happiest girl in the world. I'll do more for the family in this marriage, ma dear, than all five of the boys put together. I tell you, ma, it's the biggest minute in the life of this family if you give--if you do this for me, ma. It is, dear."

"Ja, let me just tell you that your brothers and their wives will be the first to put their foot down on that the youngest should get twice as much as they."

"What do you care? And, anyways, ma, they don't need to know. What they don't know don't hurt them. Don't tell them, ma; just don't tell them. Ain't I the only girl, and the baby too? Haven't I got the chance to, raise them all up in society? Oh, ma dear, you've got so much! So much more than you can ever use, and--and you--you're old now, ma, and I--I'm so young, dear, so young!"

"Ja, like you say, maybe I'm old, but I tell you, Becky, I 'ain't got the money to throw away like--"

"Let me let the marquis ask me when he comes to-night, ma. He's ready to pop if--if I just dare to let him, ma."

"*Gott in Himmel*, I tell you how things is done now'days between young people. I should let him ask her yet, she says, like I had put on his mouth a muzzle."

"It's no use letting him ask me, ma dear, if I can't come across like I know the girl he can marry has got to. Let me let him ask me to-night, ma. And to-morrow at New-Year's dinner with all the family here, we'll break it to 'em, ma. Mamma dearie! Let me ask the marquis here to New-Year's dinner to-morrow to meet his new brothers. Ma dearie!"

She was frankly pleading, her eyes twilit, with stars shining through, her mouth so like red fruit and her beautiful brows raised.

"So help me, Becky, if I give you the million like you ask and with the Memorial yet to build, I am wiped out, Becky. Wiped out!"

"Wiped out! With five sons with their finger in every good pie in town and a daughter married into nobility?"

"I 'ain't got one word to say against my children, Becky; luckier I been as most mothers; but the day what I am dependent on one of them for my living, that day I want I should be done with living."

"You could live with us, ma dearie. Paris in season and the estate in winter. You--you could run the big estate for us, ma, order and--"

"You heard what I said, Becky."

"Well, then, ma, why--why don't you get the Memorial out of your head, dear? Pa built his own Memorial, ma. His memory lasts with everybody, anyway."

Aspen trembling laid hold of Mrs. Meyerburg, muddling her words. "You--ach--from her dead father yet she would take away the marble to his memory."

"Ma!"

"Ja, the marble to his memory! Bad girl, you! A man what lifted up with his hands those that came after so that hardly

on the ground they got to put a foot. And now du--du what gives him no thanks! A Memorial to her papa, a Home for the Old and Poor what he always dreamed of building, she begrudges, she begrudges!"

"No, no, mamma, you don't understand!"

"A man what loved so the poor while he lived, shouldn't be able to do for the poor after he is dead too. You go, you bad girl you, to your grand nobleman what won't take you if you ain't worth every inch your weight in gold, you--"

"Mamma--mamma, if you don't stop your terrible talk I--I'll faint, I tell you!"

"You go and your brother Felix and his fine wife with you, for the things what money can buy. You got such madness for money, sometimes like wolfs you all feel to me breathing on my back, you go and--"

"I tell you if--if you don't stop that terrible talk I--I'll faint, I will! Oh, why don't I die--why--why--why?"

"Since the day what he died every hour I've lived for the time when, with my children provided for, I could spend the rest of my days building to a man what deserved it such a monument as he should have. A Home for the Old and Poor with a park all around, where they can sit all day in the sun. All ready I got the plans in my room to send them down by Goldfinger this afternoon he should go right ahead and--"

"Mamma, mamma, please listen--"

But the voice of Mrs. Meyerburg rose like a gale and her face was slashed with tears. "If my last cent it takes and on the streets I go to beg, up such a Memorial goes. All you children with your feet up on his shoulders can turn away from his memory now he's gone, but up it goes if on the day what I die I got to dig dirt with my finger-nails to pay yet for my coffin."

"Listen, ma; just be calm a minute--just a minute. I don't mean that. Didn't I just say he was the grandest father in the world and--"

"You said--"

"Sh-h-h, mamma! Quiet, quiet! There isn't one of the boys wouldn't agree with me if they knew. We aren't big enough, I tell you, to sink a million in an out-of-town charity like that. In any charity, for that matter, no matter how big it shows up. You say yourself a million and a half will cripple you. Well, your first duty is to us living and not to him dead--To us living! It means my whole life, my whole life!" And she beat the pillow with hard fists.

"Ja, but--"

"With that money you can buy my happiness living, and he don't want it or need it dead."

Within the quick vise of her two hands Mrs. Meyerburg clasped her face, all quivering and racked with sobs. "I can't hear it. It's like she was sticking knives into me."

"The marquis has the kind of blood we need to give this family a boost. We can be big, ma. Big, I tell you. I can have a crest embroidered in two colors in my linens. That inside clique that looks down on us now can do some looking up then. The boys don't need to know about that million, ma. Just let me have the marquis here to-morrow to meet his new brothers, ma, like there was nothing unusual. I'll pay it back to you in a million ways. The Memorial will come in time. Everything will come in time. Make me the happiest girl in the world, ma. He'll ask me to-night if I let him. Get the Memorial plans out of your head for a while, anyway! Just for a while!"

"Not so long as I got in me the strength to send down them plans to Goldfinger's office this afternoon with my message to go ahead. I don't invite no marquis here to-morrow for family dinner if I got to get him here with a million dollars' worth of bait. I--"

"Mamma!"

"Go and tell him your stingy old mamma would rather build a Home for the Old and Poor in memory of the grandest man what ever lived than give a snip like him, what never did a lick of work in his life, a fortune so he should have with it a good time at Monte Carlo. Just go tell him! Tell him!"

She was trembling now so that she could scarcely withdraw from the bedside, but her voice had lost none of its gale-like quality.

"Go tell him! Maybe it does him good he should hear." And in spite of her ague she crossed the vast room, slamming the door so that a great shudder ran over the room.

On the bed that had been lifted bodily from the Grand Trianon of Marie Antoinette, its laces upheaved about her like billows in anger, Rebecca Meyerburg lay with her face to the ceiling, raw sobs distorting it.

Steadying herself without that door, her hand laid between her breasts and slightly to the left, as if there a sharp pain had cut her, Mrs. Meyerburg leaned to the wall a moment, and, gaining quick composure, proceeded steadily enough across the wide aisle of hall, her hand following a balustrade.

A servant intercepted her half-way. "Madam--"

"Kemp, from here when I look down in the lower hall, all them ferns look yellow on top. I want you should please cut them!"

"Yes, madam. Mrs. Fischlowitz, madam, has been waiting down in the side hall for you."

"Mrs. Fischlowitz! For why you keep her waiting in the side hall?"

"Therese said madam was occupied."

"Bring her right up, Kemp, in the elevator. Her foot ain't so good. Right away, Kemp."

"Yes, madam."

Into Mrs. Meyerburg's room of many periods, its vastness so emphasized by the ceiling after Paolo Veronese, its fluted yellow-silk bed canopy reaching up to that ceiling stately and theatric enough to shade the sleep of a shah, limped Mrs. Fischlowitz timidly and with the uncertainty with which the callous feet of the unsocialistic poor tread velvet.

"How-do, Mrs. Fischlowitz?"

"Mrs. Meyerburg, I didn't want you to be disturbed except I want to explain to you why I'm late again this month."

"Sit down! I don't want you should even explain, Mrs. Fischlowitz--that's how little I thought about it."

Mrs. Meyerburg was full of small, pleased ways, drawing off her guest's decent black cape, pulling at her five-fingered mittens, lifting the nest-like bonnet.

"So! And how's the foot?"

"Not so good and not so bad. And how is the sciatica with you, Mrs. Meyerburg?"

"Like with you, Mrs. Fischlowitz. It could be better and it could be worse. Sometimes I got a little touch yet up between my ribs."

"If it ain't one thing, Mrs. Meyerburg, it's another. What you think why I'm late again with the rent, Mrs. Meyerburg? If last week my Sollie didn't fall off the delivery-wagon and sprain his back!"

"You don't say so!"

"That same job as you got him two years ago so good he's kept, and now such a thing has to happen. *Gott sei dank*, he's up and out again, but I tell you it was a scare!"

"I should say so. And how is Tillie?"

"Mrs. Meyerburg, you should just see for yourself how that girl has got new color since that certified milk you send

her every day. Like a new girl so pretty all of a sudden she has grown. For to-morrow, Mrs. Meyerburg, a girl what never before had a beau in her life, if Morris Rinabauer, the young foreman where she works, 'ain't invited her out for New-Year's Day."

"You got great times down by Rivington Street this time of year. Not? I remember how my children used to like it with their horns *oser* like it was their own holiday."

"Ja, it's a great *gedinks* like always. Sometimes I say it gets so tough down there I hate my Tillie should come home from the factory after dark, but now with Morris Rinabauer--"

"Mrs. Fischlowitz, I guess you think it's a sin I should say so, but I tell you, when I think of that dirty little street down there and your flat what I lived in the seventeen happiest years of my life with my husband and babies--when I think back on my years in that little flat I--I can just feel myself tremble like all over. That's how happy we were down there, Mrs. Fischlowitz."

"I can tell you, Mrs. Meyerburg, when I got a place like this, at Rivington Street I wouldn't want I should ever have to look again."

"It's a feeling, Mrs. Fischlowitz, what you--you can't understand until--until you live through so much like me. I--I just want some day you should let me come down, Mrs. Fischlowitz, and visit by you in the old place, eh?"

"Ach, Mrs. Meyerburg, I can tell you the day what you visit on me down there I am a proud woman. How little we got to offer you know, but if I could fix for you Kaffeeklatsch some day and Kuchen and--"

"In the kitchen you still got the noodle-board yet, Mrs. Fischlowitz, where you can mix Kuchen too?"

"I should say so. Always on it I mix my doughs."

"He built it in for me himself, Mrs. Fischlowitz. On hinges so when I was done, up against the wall out of the way I could fold it."

"Just think,' I say to my children, 'we eat noodles off a board what Simon Meyerburg built with his own hands.' On the whole East Side it's a curiosity."

"Sometimes when I come down by your flat, Mrs. Fischlowitz, I show you how I used to make them for him. Wide ones he liked."

"Ach, Mrs. Meyerburg, like you could put your hands in dough now!"

"Mamma,' he used to say--standing in the kitchen door when he came home nights and looking at me maybe rocking Becky there by the stove and waiting supper for him--'Mamma,' he'd say, clapping his hands at me, 'open your eyes wide so I can see what's in 'em.'"

"That such a big man should play like that!"

"Come in, darling,' I'd say; 'you can't guess from there what we got.'"

"Just think, like just married you were together."

"Noodles!' he'd holler, and all the time right in back of me, spread out on the board, he could see 'em. I can see him yet, Mrs. Fischlowitz, standing there in the kitchen doorway, under the horseshoe what he found when we first landed."

"I can tell you, Mrs. Meyerburg, in that flat we 'ain't had nothing but luck, neither, with you so good to us."

"Ach, now, Mrs. Fischlowitz, for an old friend like you, what I lived next door to so many years and more as once gave my babies to keep for me when I must go out awhile, I shouldn't do a little yet."

"Little,' she calls it. With such low rent you give us I'm ashamed to bring the money. Five weeks in the country and milk for my Tillie, until it's back from the grave you snatched her. Even on my back now every stitch what I got on I got to thank you for. Such comfort I got from that black cape!"

"I was just thinking, Mrs. Fischlowitz, with your rheumatism and on such a cold day a cape ain't so good for you, neither. Right up under it the wind can get."

"Warm like toast it is, Mrs. Meyerburg."

"I got a idea, Mrs. Fischlowitz! In that chest over there by the wall I got yet a jacket from Rivington Street. Right away it got too tight for me. Like new it is, with a warm beaver collar. At auction one day he got it for me. Like a top it will fit you, Mrs. Fischlowitz."

"No, no, please, Mrs. Meyerburg. It just looks like every time what I come you got to give me something. Ashamed it makes me. Please you shouldn't."

But in the pleasant frenzy of sudden decision Mrs. Meyerburg was on her knees beside a carved chest, burrowing her arm beneath folded garments, the high smell of camphor exuding.

"Only yesterday in my hand I had it. There! See! Just your size!" She held the creased garment out from her by each shoulder, blowing the nap of the beaver collar.

"Please, no, Mrs. Meyerburg. Such a fine coat maybe you can wear it yourself. No, I don't mean that, when you got such grander ones; but for me, Mrs. Meyerburg, it's too fine to take. Please!"

Standing there holding it thrust enthusiastically forward, a glaze suddenly formed over Mrs. Meyerburg's eyes and she laid her cheek to the brown fur collar, a tear dropping to it.

"You'm right, Mrs. Fischlowitz, I--I can't give this up. I--he--a coat he bought once for me at auction when--he *oser* could afford it. I--you must excuse me, Mrs. Fischlowitz."

"That's right, Mrs. Meyerburg, for a remembrance you should keep it."

Then brightening: "But I got in the next room, Mrs. Fischlowitz, a coat better as this for you. Lined all in squirrel-skin they call it. One day by myself I bought it, and how my Becky laughs and won't even let me wear it in automobile. I ain't stylish enough, she says."

With an inarticulate medley of sounds Mrs. Fischlowitz held up a hand of remonstrance. "But--"

"Na, na, just a minute." And on the very wings of her words Mrs. Meyerburg was across the room, through the ornate door of an ornate boudoir, and out presently with the garment flung across her arm. "Na, here put it on."

"Ach, such a beau-tiful coat!"

"So! Let me help!"

They leaned together, their faces, which the years had passed over none too lightly, close and eager. Against the beaver collar Mrs. Fischlowitz's hand lay fluttering.

"Put your hands in the pockets, Mrs. Fischlowitz. Deep, eh?"

"Finer you can believe me as I ever had in my life before. I can tell you, Mrs. Meyerburg, a woman like you should get first place in heaven and you should know how many on the East Side there is says the same. I--I brought you your rent, Mrs. Meyerburg. You must excuse how late, but my Sollie--"

"Ja, ja."

Eleven! Twelve! Twelve-fifty! Mrs. Fischlowitz counted it out carefully from a small purse tucked in her palm, snapping it carefully shut over the remaining coins.

"Thank you, Mrs. Fischlowitz. You should never feel hurried. Mr. Oppenheimer will mail you a receipt."

"I guess now I must be going, Mrs. Meyerburg--to-night I promised my Sollie we have cheese-Kuchen for supper."

"Always I used to make it with a short crust for my Isadore. How he loved it!"

"Just again, Mrs. Meyerburg, I want you should let me say how--how this is the finest present what I ever had in my life. I can tell you from just how soft it is on me, I can tell how it must feel to ride in automobile."

A light flashed in brilliance up into Mrs. Meyerburg's face. "Mrs. Fischlowitz!"

"Ja, Mrs. Meyerburg?"

"I tell you what! I--this afternoon my Becky, Mrs. Fischlowitz, she--she ain't so well and like always can't take with me a ride in the Park. Such--such a cold that girl has got. How I should like it, Mrs. Fischlowitz, if you would be so kind to--to take with me my drive in--in your new coat."

"I--"

"Ja, ja, I know, Mrs. Fischlowitz, cheese Kuchen should first get cold before supper, but if you could just an hour ride by me a little? If you would be so kind, Mrs. Fischlowitz!"

Diffidence ran trembling along Mrs. Meyerburg's voice, as if she dared not venture too far upon a day blessed with tasks. "I got always so--so much time to myself now'days, Mrs. Fischlowitz, sometimes I--I get maybe a--a little lonesome."

"Ach, Mrs. Meyerburg, you don't want to be bothered with such--such a person like me when you ride so grand through the Park."

"Fit like a fiddle it will make you feel, Mrs. Fischlowitz. Button up tight that collar and right away we start. Please, right next to you, will you press that third button? That means we go right down and find outside the car waiting for us."

"But, Mrs. Meyerburg--"

"See, just like you, I put on a coat on the inside fur. This way, Mrs. Fischlowitz. Careful, your foot!"

In the great lower hall full of Tudor gloom the carved stone arches dropping in rococo stalactites from the ceiling, and a marble staircase blue-veined as a delicate woman's hand winding up to an oriole window, a man-servant swung back two sets of trellised doors; bowed them noiselessly shut again.

The quick cold of December bit them at the threshold. Opposite lay the Park, its trees, in their smooth bark whipped bare, and gray as nuns, the sunlight hard against their boles. More sunlight lay cold and glittering down the length of the most facaded avenue in the world and on the great up-and-down stream of motor-cars and their nickel-plated snouts and plate-glass sides.

Women, with heads too haughty to turn them right or left, moved past in closed cars that were perfumed and upholstered like jewel-boxes; the joggly smartness of hansom cabs, their fair fares seeing and being seen behind the wooden aprons and their frozen laughter coming from their lips in vapor! On the broad sidewalks women in low shoes that defied the wind, and men in high hats that the wind defied; nursemaids trim as deaconesses, and their charges the beautiful exotic children of pure milk and pure sunshine!

One of these deaconess-like nursemaids, walking out with a child whose black curls lay in wide sprays on each shoulder, detached herself from the up-town flow and crossed to the trellised threshold.

"Good afternoon, Madam Meyerburg. Mademoiselle, *dites bonjour a madame votre grand'maman.*"

"*Bonjour, grand'maman.*"

In the act of descending her steps, Mrs. Meyerburg's hands flew outward. "Ach, du little Aileen. Come, Aileen, to grandma. Mrs. Fischlowitz, this is Felix's little girl. You remember Felix--such a beautiful bad little boy he was what always used to fight your Sollie underneath the sink."

"*Gott in Himmel*, so this is Felix's little girl!"

"Ja, this is already his second. Come, Aileen, to grandma and say good afternoon to the lady."

The maid guided the small figure forward by one shoulder. "*Dites bonjour a madame, Mademoiselle Aileen.*"

"*Bonjour, madame.*"

"Not a word of English she can speak yet, Mrs. Fischlowitz. I tell you already my grandchildren are so smart not even their language I can understand. *Aber* for why such a child should only talk so in her own country she can't be understood, I don't know."

"I guess, Mrs. Meyerburg, it's style now'days that you shouldn't know your own language."

"Come by grandma to-morrow, Aileen, and upstairs I got in the little box sweet cakes like grandma always keeps for you. Eh, baby?"

"Say thank you, grandmother."

"*Merci bien, grand'maman.*"

And they were off into the stream again, the small white leggings at a smart trot.

At the curb a low-bodied, high-power car, with the top flung back and the wind-shield up, lay sidled against the coping.

"Get right in, Mrs. Fischlowitz. Burk, put under Mrs. Fischlowitz's both feet a heater."

A second man, in too-accentuated livery of mauve and astrakhan, flung open the wide door. A glassed-in chauffeur, in more mauve and astrakhan, threw in his clutch. The door slammed. Mrs. Fischlowitz breathed deep and grasped the nickel-plated door handle. Mrs. Meyerburg leaned out, her small plumes wagging.

"Burk, since Miss Becky ain't along to-day, I don't want in front no second man."

"Yes, madam."

"I want instead you should take the roadster and call after Mrs. Weinstein. You know, down by Twenty-third Street, the fourth floor back."

"Yes, madam."

"I want you should say, Burk, that Mrs. Meyerburg says her and her daughter should take off from their work an hour for a drive wherever they say you should take them. And tell her, Burk, she should make for me five dozens more them paper carnations. Right away I want you should go."

"Yes, madam."

They nosed slowly into the stream of the Avenue.

"Always Becky likes there should be two men stuck up in front there. I always say to look only at the backs of my servants I don't go out riding for."

Erect and as if to the fantastic requirements of the situation sat Mrs. Fischlowitz, her face of a thousand lines screwed to maintain the transiency of a great moment.

"That I should live, Mrs. Meyerburg, to see such a sight like this! In the thirty years I been in this country not but once have I walked up Fifth Avenue--that time when my Tillie paraded in the shirtwaist strike. I--I can tell you I'm proud to live to see it this way from automobile."

"Lean back, Mrs. Fischlowitz, so you be more comfortable. That's all right; you can't hurt them bottles. My Becky likes to have fancy touches all over everything. Gold-tops bottles she has to have yet by her. I can tell you, though, Mrs. Fischlowitz, if I do say it myself, when that girl sits up in here like a picture she looks. How they stare you should see."

"Such a beau-ti-ful girl! I can tell you for her a prince ain't good enough. Ach, what a pleasure it must be, Mrs. Meyerburg, for a mother to know if her child wants heaven she can nearly get it for her. I can tell you that must be the greatest pleasure of all for you, Mrs. Meyerburg, to give to your daughter everything just like she wants it."

"Ja, ja," said with little to indicate mental ferment.

They were in the Park, with the wind scampering through the skeins of bare tree branches. The lake lay locked in ice, skaters in the ecstasy of motion lunging across it. Beneath the mink lap-robe Mrs. Fischlowitz snuggled deeper and

more lax.

"*Gott in Himmel*, I tell you this is better as standing over my cheese Kuchen."

"Always I used to let my cheese drip first the night before. Right through a cheese-cloth sack hung from a nail what my husband drove in for me under the window-sill."

"Right that same nail is there yet, Mrs. Meyerburg. *Oser* we should touch one thing!"

"I can tell you it's a great comfort, Mrs. Fischlowitz, I got such a tenant as you in there."

"When you come to visit me, Mrs. Meyerburg, right to the last nail like you left it you find it. Not even from the kitchen would I let my Sollie take down the old clothes-line what you had stretched across one end."

"Ach, how many times in rainy days I used that line. It's a good little line I bet yet. Not?"

"Ja." But with no corresponding kit of emotions in Mrs. Fischlowitz's voice. She was still breathing deep the buoyant ether of the moment, and beneath the ingratiating warmth of fur utterly soothed. "*Gott*," she said, "I wish my sister-in-law, Hanna, with all her fine airs up where she lives on One Hundred and Twenty-ninth Street, could see me now. *Oser* she could stare and stare, and bow and bow, and past her I would roll like--like a rolling-pin."

From the gold-topped bottle nearest her came a long insidious whiff of frangipani. She dared to lean toward it, sniffing.

"Such a beautiful smell." And let her eyes half close.

"You market your meat yet on Fridays down by old Lavinsky's, Mrs. Fischlowitz?"

"Ja, just like always, only his liver ain't so good like it used to be. I can tell you that's a beau-ti-ful smell."

An hour they rode purringly over smooth highways and for a moment alongside the river, but there the wind was edged with ice and they were very presently back into the leisurely flow of the Avenue. From her curves Mrs. Fischlowitz unbent herself slowly.

"No, no, Mrs. Fischlowitz--you stay in."

"Ach, I get out here at your house, too, and take the street-cars. I--"

"No, no. James takes you all the way home, Mrs. Fischlowitz. I get out because my Becky likes I should get home early and get dressed up for dinner."

"But Mrs. Meyerburg--"

"No, no. Right in you stay. 'Sh-h-h, just don't mention it. Enough pleasure you give me to ride by me. Take good care your foot. Good-by, Mrs. Fischlowitz. All the way home you should take her, James."

Once more within the gloom of her Tudor hall, Mrs. Meyerburg hurried rearward and toward the elevator. But down the curving stairway the small maid on stilts came, intercepting her.

"Madame!"

"Ja."

"Madame will please come. Mademoiselle Betty this afternoon ees not so well. Three spells of fainting, madame."

"Therese!"

"Oui, not serious, madame, but what I would call hysteria and mademoiselle will not have doctor. Eef madame will come--"

With a great mustering of her strength Mrs. Meyerburg ran up the first three of the marble steps, then quite as suddenly stopped, reaching out for the balustrade. The seconds stalked past as she stood there, a fine frown sketched

on her brow, and the small maid anxious and attendant.

"Madame?"

When Mrs. Meyerburg spoke finally it was as if those seconds had been years, sapping more than their share of life from her. "I--now I don't go up, Therese. After a while I come, but--but not now. I want, though, you should go right away up to Miss Becky with a message."

"Oui, madame."

"I want you should tell her for me, Therese, that--that to-morrow New-Year's dinner with the family all here, I--I want she should invite the Marquis Rosencrantz. That everything is all right. Right away I want you should go and tell her, Therese!"

"Oui, madame."

Up in her bedroom and without pause Mrs. Meyerburg walked directly to the small deal table there beside her bed and still littered with half-curved blue-prints. These she gathered into a tight roll, snapping a rubber band about it. She rang incisively the fourth of the row of bells. A man-servant responded almost immediately with a light rap-a-tap at the door. She was there and waiting.

"Kemp, I want you should away take down this roll to Goldfinger's office in the Syndicate Building. Just say Mrs. Meyerburg says everything is all right--to go ahead."

"Yes, madam." And he closed the door after him, holding the knob a moment to save the click.

* * * * *

In a Tudor dining-hall, long as the banquet-room of a thane, faced in thrice-weathered oak and designed by an architect too eminent to endure interference--except when Miss Meyerburg had later and at her own stealthy volition installed a Pompeian colored window above the high Victorian fireplace--the wide light of a brilliant New-Year's day lay against leaded window-panes, but shut out by thick hangings.

Instead, the yellow light from a ceiling sown with starlike bulbs lay over that room. At each end of the table, so that the gracious glow fell full upon the small figure of Mrs. Meyerburg at one end and upon the grizzled head of Mr. Ben Meyerburg at the other, two braces of candles burned softly, crocheting a flickering design upon the damask.

From the foot of that great table, his place by precedence of years, Mr. Ben Meyerburg rose from his Voltairian chair, holding aloft a wineglass like a torch.

"*Masseltov, ma*," he said, "and just like we drank to the happy couple who have told us the good news to-day, so now I drink to the grandest little mother in the world. *Masseltov, ma*." And he drained his glass, holding it with fine disregard back over one shoulder for refilling.

Round that table Mrs. Meyerburg's four remaining sons, towering almost twice her height, rose in a solemn chorus that was heavier than their libations of wine.

"*Masseltov, ma*."

"Ach, boys, my sons, *ich--ich--danke*." She was quivering now in the edge of tears and grasped tightly at the arms of her chair.

"*Masseltov, ma*," said Rebecca Meyerburg, raising her glass and her moist eyes shining above it. The five daughters-in-law followed immediate suit. At Miss Meyerburg's left the Marquis Rosencrantz, with pointed features and a silhouette sharp as a knife edge, raised his glass and his waxed mustache and drank, but silently and over a deep bow.

"Mamma--mother dear, the marquis drinks to you."

Mrs. Meyerburg turned upon him with a great mustering of amiability and safely withdrawn now from her brink of tears. "I got now six sons what can drink to my health--not, Marquis?"

"She says, Marquis," translated Miss Meyerburg, ardently, to the sharp profile, "that now she has six sons to drink to her health."

"Madame me fait trop d'honneur."

"He says, mamma, that it is too great an honor to be your son."

From her yesterday's couch of mental travail Miss Meyerburg had risen with a great radiance turping out its ravages. She was Sheban in elegance, the velvet of her gown taken from the color of the ruby on her brow, and the deep-white flesh of her the quality of that same velvet with the nap raised.

"He wants to kiss your hand, ma. Give it to him. No, the right one, dearie."

"I--I'm much obliged, Marquis. I--well, for one little old woman like me, I got now six sons and six daughters, each one big enough to carry me off under his arm. Not?"

She was met with immediate acclaim from a large blond daughter-in-law, her soft, expansive bosom swathed in old lace caught up with a great jeweled lizard.

"Little old nothing, ma. I always say to Isadore you've got more energy yet than the rest of the family put together."

"Ach, Dora, always you children like to make me think I been young yet."

But she was smilingly tremulous and pushed herself backward in her heavy throne-like chair. A butler sprang, lifting it gently from her.

Immediately the great, disheveled table, brilliantly littered with crystal, frumpled napkins, and a great centerpiece of fruits and flowers, was in the confusion of disorganization.

Daughters-in-law and husbands moved up toward a pair of doors swung heavily backward by two servants.

Mrs. Isadore Meyerburg pushed her real-lace bodice into place and adjusted the glittering lizard. "Believe me," she said, exuding a sigh and patting her bosom on the swell of that deep breath, "I ate too much, but if I can't break my diet for the last engagement in the family, and to nobility at that, when will I do it?"

"I should say so," replied Mrs. Rudolph Meyerburg, herself squirming to rights in an elaborate bodice and wielding an unostentatious toothpick behind the cup of her hand; "like I told Roody just now, if I take on a pound to-day he can blame his sister."

"Say, I wish you'd look at the marquis kissing ma's hand again, will you?"

"Look at ma get away with it too. You've got to hand it to them French, they've got the manners all right. No wonder our swell Trixie tags after them."

"Say, Becky shouldn't get manners yet with her looks and five hundred thousand thrown in. I bet, if the truth is known, and since ma is going to live over there with them, that there's a few extra thousand tacked on too."

"Not if the court knows it! Like I told Roody this morning, she's bringing a title into the family, but she's taking a big wad of the Meyerburg money out of the country too."

"It is so, ain't it?"

Around her crowded Mrs. Meyerburg's five sons.

"Come with us, ma. We got a children's party up in the ballroom for Aileen this afternoon, and then Trixie and I are going to motor down to Sheepshead for the indoor polo-match. Come, ma."

"No, no, Felix. I want for myself rest this afternoon. All you children go and have your good times. I got home more as I can do, and maybe company, too."

"Tell you what, ma, come with Dora and me and the kids. She wants to go out to Hastings this afternoon to see her mother. Come with us, ma. The drive will do you good."

"No, no, Izzy. When I ride too much in the cold right away up in my ribs comes the sciatica again."

Miss Meyerburg bent radiant over her parent. "Mother," she whispered, her throat lined with the fur of tenderness, "it's reception-day out at that club, and all the cliques will be there, and I want--"

"Sure, Becky, you and the marquis should drive out. Take the big car, but tell James he shouldn't be so careless driving by them curves out there by the golf-links."

"But, ma dear, you come, too, and--"

"No, no, Becky; to-day I got not time."

"But, ma--ma, you ain't mad at me, dear? You can see now for yourself, can't you, dear, what a big thing it is for the family and how you--"

"Yes, yes, Becky. Look, go over by your young man. See how he stands there and not one word what Ben is hollering so at him can he understand."

Across the room, alongside a buffet wrought out of the powerful Jacobean period, Mr. Ben Meyerburg threw a violent contortion.

"Want to go up in the Turkish room and smoke?" he shouted, the apoplectic purple of exertion rushing into his face and round to the roll of flesh overhanging the rear of his collar.

"Pardon?"

"Smoke? Do you smoke? Smokez-vous? Cigarez-vous? See, like this. Fume. Blow. Do you smoke? Smokez-vous?"

"Pardon?" said the marquis, bowing low.

* * * * *

In the heavy solitude of Mrs. Meyerburg's bedchamber, the buzz of departures over, silence lay resumed, but with a singing quality to it as if an echo or so still lingered.

Before the plain deal table, and at her side two files bulging their contents, Mrs. Meyerburg sat with her spatulate finger conning in among a page of figures. After a while the finger ceased to move across the page, but lay passive midway down a column. After another while she slapped shut the book and took to roaming up and down the large room as if she there found respite from the spirit of her which nagged and carped. Peering out between the heavy curtains, she could see the tide of the Avenue mincing, prancing, chugging past. Resuming her beat up and down the vistas of the room, she could still hear its voice muffled and not unlike the tune of quinine singing in the head.

The ormolu clock struck, and from various parts of the house musical repetitions. A French tinkle from her daughter's suite across the hall; from somewhere more remote the deep, leisurely tones of a Nuremberg floor clock. Finally Mrs. Meyerburg dropped into the overstuffed chair beside her window, relaxing into the attitude her late years had brought her, head back, hands stretched out along the chair sides, and full of rest. An hour she sat half dozing, and half emerging every so often with a start, then lay quietly looking into space, her eyes quiet and the erstwhile brilliancy in them gone out like a light.

Presently she sat forward suddenly, and with the quick light of perception flooding up into her face; slid from her chair and padded across the carpet. From the carved chest alongside the wall she withdrew the short jacket with the beaver collar, worked her shoulders into it. From the adjoining boudoir she emerged after a time in a small bonnet grayish with age and the bow not perky. Her movements were brief and full of decision. When she opened her door it was slyly and with a quick, vulpine glance up and down the grave quiet of the halls. After a cocked attitude of listening and with an incredible springiness almost of youth, Mrs. Meyerburg was down a rear staircase, through a rear hallway, and, unseen and unheard, out into the sudden splendor of a winter's day, the side street quiet before her.

"Gott!" said Mrs. Meyerburg, audibly, breathing deep and swinging into a smart lope eastward. Two blocks along, with her head lifted and no effort at concealment, she passed her pantry-boy walking out with a Swedish girl whose cheeks were bursting with red. He eyed his mistress casually and without recognition.

At Third Avenue she boarded a down-town street-car, a bit winded from the dive across cobbles, but smiling. Within, and after a preliminary method of paying fare new and confusing to her, she sat back against the rattly sides, her feet

just lifted off the floor. She could hardly keep back the ejaculations as old streets and old memories swam into view.

"Look at the old lay-dee talking to her-sel-uph," sang an urchin across the aisle.

"Shut up," said the mother, slapping him sidewise.

At one of the most terrific of these down-town streets Mrs. Meyerburg descended. Beneath the clang and bang of the Elevated she stood confused for the moment and then, with her sure stride regained, swung farther eastward.

Slitlike streets flowed with holiday copiousness, whole families abroad on foot--mothers swayback with babies, and older children who ran ahead shouting and jostling. Houses lean and evil-looking marched shoulder to shoulder for blocks, no gaps except intersecting streets. Fire-escapes ran zigzag down the meanest of them. Women shouted their neighborhood jargon from windows flung momentarily open. Poverty scuttled along close to the scant shelter of these houses. An old man, with a beard to his chest, paused in a doorway to cough, and it was like the gripe-gripe of a saw with its teeth in hard wood. A woman sold apples from a stoop, the form of a child showing through her shawl. Yet Mrs. Meyerburg smiled as she hurried.

Midway in one of these blocks and without a pretense of hesitancy she turned into a black mouth of an entrance and up two flights. On each landing she paused more for tears than for breath. At a rear door leading off the second landing she knocked softly, but with insistence. It opened to a slight crack, then immediately swung back full span.

"*Gott in Himmel*, Mrs. Meyerburg! Mrs. Meyerburg! *Kommen Sie herein*. Mrs. Meyerburg, for why you didn't let me know? To think not one of my children home and to-day a holiday, my place not in order--"

"Now, now, Mrs. Fischlowitz, just so soon you go to one little bit of trouble, right away I got no more pleasure. Please, Mrs. Fischlowitz. Ach, if you 'ain't got on your pantry shelves just the same paper edge like my Roody used to cut out for me."

"Come, come, Mrs. Meyerburg, in parlor where--"

"Go way mit you. Ain't the kitchen where I spent seventeen years, the best years in my life, good enough yet? Parlor yet she wants to take me."

An immediate negligee of manner enveloped her like an old wrapper. A certain tulle of bewilderment had fallen. She was bold, even dictatorial.

"Don't fuss round me so much, Mrs. Fischlowitz. Just like old times I want it should seem. Like maybe I just dropped in on you a lump of butter to borrow. No, no, don't I know where to hang mine own bonnet in mine own house? Ach, the same coat nails what he drove in himself!"

"To think, Mrs. Meyerburg, all my children gone out for a good time this afternoon, my Tillie with Morris Rinabauer, who can't keep his eyes off her--"

"How polished she keeps her stove, just like I used to."

"Right when you knocked I was thinking, well, I clean up a bit. Please, Mrs. Meyerburg, let me fix you right away a cup coffee--"

"Right away, Mrs. Fischlowitz, just so soon you begin to make fuss over me, I don't enjoy it no more. Please, Mrs. Fischlowitz, right here in this old rocker-chair by the range let me, please, sit quiet a minute."

In the wooden rocker beside the warm stove she sat down quietly, lapping her hands over her waist-line.

"*Gott in Himmel*," sitting well away from the chair-back and letting her eyes travel slowly about the room, "just like it was yesterday; just like yesterday." And fell to reciting the phrase softly.

"Ja, ja," said Mrs. Fischlowitz, concealing an unwashed litter of dishes beneath a hastily flung cloth. "I can tell you, Mrs. Meyerburg, my house ain't always this dirty; only to-day not--"

"Just like it was yesterday," said Mrs. Meyerburg, musing through a tangle of memories. She fell to rocking. A narrow band of sunshine lay across the bare floor, even glinted off a pan or two hung along the wall over the sink. Along that same wall hung a festoon of red and green peppers and a necklace of garlic. Toward the back of the range a pan of hot

water let off a lazy vapor. Beside the scuttle a cat purred and fought off sleep.

"Already I got the hot water, Mrs. Meyerburg, to make you a cup coffee if--"

"Please, Mrs. Fischlowitz, let me rest like this. In a minute I want you should take me all through in the children's room and--"

"If I had only known it how I could have cleaned for you."

"Ach, my noodle-board over there! How grand and white you keep it."

"Ja, I--"

"Mrs. Fischlowitz!"

"Yes, Mrs. Meyerburg?"

"Mrs. Fischlowitz, if you want to--to give me a real treat I tell you what. I tell you what!"

"Ja, ja, Mrs. Meyerburg; anything what I can do I--"

"I want you should let me mix you on that old board a mess noodles!"

"Ach, Mrs. Meyerburg, your hands and that grand black-silk dress!"

"For why not, Mrs. Fischlowitz? Wide ones, like he used to like. Just for fun, please, Mrs. Fischlowitz. To-morrow I send you two barrels flour for what I use up."

"But, Mrs. Meyerburg, I should make for you noodles, not you for me--"

"It's good I should learn, Mrs. Fischlowitz, to get back my hand in such things. Maybe you don't believe me, but I ain't so rich like I was yesterday when you seen me, Mrs. Fischlowitz. To-day I'm a poor woman, Mrs. Fischlowitz, with--"

Mrs. Fischlowitz threw out two hands in a liberal gesture. "Such a good woman she is! In my house where I'm poor she wants, too, to play like she's a poor woman. That any one should want to play such a game with themselves! Noodles she wants to make for me, instead I should wait on her like she was a queen."

"It takes me back, Mrs. Fischlowitz, to old times. Please, Mrs. Fischlowitz, to-morrow I send you two barrels."

"Like you ain't welcome to everything what I got in the house. All right, noodles you should make and always I keep 'em for remembrance. Just let me run down to cellar and bring you up flour. No, no, you set there and let me fold down the board for you. Rock there, Mrs. Meyerburg, till I come up with the flour. Eggs plenty I got."

"And a little butter, Mrs. Fischlowitz, the size of an egg, and always a pinch of salt."

"The neighbors should see this! Mrs. Simon Meyerburg making for me noodles in my kitchen!" She was off and down a small rear stairway, a ribbon of ejaculations trailing back over one shoulder.

In her chair beside the warm range Mrs. Meyerburg sat quiescent, her head back against the rest, eyes half closed, and slanting toward the kitchen door. Against the creaking floor her chair swayed rhythmically. Tears ran down to meet the corners of her mouth, but her lips were looped up in a smile.

The cat regarded her through green eyes slit down their middle. Toward the rear of the stove the pan of water seethed.

Suddenly Mrs. Meyerburg leaned forward with a great flash across her face. "Simon," she cried, leaning to the door and stretching forward quavering arms. "Simon, my darling!" She leaned further, the rims of her eyes stretched wide. "Simon--come, my darling. Simon!"

Into the opposite doorway, smirched with flour and a white pail of it dangling, flashed Mrs. Fischlowitz, breathing hard from her climb.

"What, Mrs. Meyerburg, you want something?"

"Simon," cried Mrs. Meyerburg, her voice lifted in a paean of welcome; "come, my darling, come in. Come!" And she tried to rise, but sat back, quivering, her brow drenched in sudden sweat.

Raucous terror tore through Mrs. Fischlowitz's voice, and she let fall her pail, a white cloud rising from off the spill. "Mrs. Meyerburg, there ain't nobody there. Mrs. Meyerburg, he ain't there. Mrs. Meyerburg!"

"Simon!"

"Mrs. Meyerburg, he ain't there. Nobody's there! Ach--help--doctor--Tillie!"

Back against Mrs. Fischlowitz's frenzied arms lay Mrs. Meyerburg, very gray, her hand against her left breast and down toward the ribs.

"Gott! Gott! Please, Mrs. Meyerburg--Mrs. Meyerburg!" dragging back one of the weary eyelids and crying out at what she saw there. "Help doctor--Tillie--quick--quick--"

She could not see, poor dear, that into those locked features was crystallized the great ecstasy of reunion.

THE NTH COMMANDMENT

The Christmas ballad of the stoker, even though writ from the fiery bowels of amidships and with a pen reeking with his own sweat, could find no holiday sale; nor the story of the waiter who serves the wine he dares only smell, and weary stands attendant into the joyous dawn. Such social sores--the drayman, back bent to the Christmas box whose mysteries he must never know; the salesgirl standing on her swollen feet on into the midnight hour--such sores may run and fester, but not to sicken public eyes.

For the Christmas spirit is the white flame of love burning in men's hearts and may not be defiled. Shop-windows, magazine covers, and post-cards proclaim good-will to all men; bedtime stories crooned when little heads are drowsy are of Peace on Earth; corporations whose draymen's backs are bent and whose salesgirls' feet are swollen plaster each outgoing parcel with a Good-Will-Toward-Men stamp, and remove the stools from behind the counters to give space to more of the glittering merchandise.

In the Mammoth Store the stools have long since been removed and the holiday hysteria of Peace on Earth rose to its Christmas Eve climax, as a frenzied gale drives upward the sea into mountains of water, or scuds through black-hearted forests, bending them double in wild salaam.

Shoppers pushed through aisles so packed that the tide flowed back upon itself. A narrow-chested woman, caught in the whorl of one such vortex, fainted back against the bundle-laden arms that pressed her on. Above the thin orchestra of musical toys, the tramp of feet like an army marching, voices raucous from straining to be heard, a clock over the grand central stairway boomed nine, and the crowd pulled at its strength for a last hour of bartering, tearing, pushing, haggling, sweating.

Behind the counters workers sobbed in their throats and shifted from one swollen foot to the other. A cash-girl, her eyeballs glazed like those of a wounded hare in the torture of the chase, found a pile of pasteboard boxes behind a door, and with the indifference of exhaustion dropped on to it asleep. The tide flowed on, and ever and again back upon itself. A Santa Claus in a red canton-flannel coat lost his white canton-flannel beard, nor troubled to recover it. A woman trembling with the ague of terror drew an imitation bisque doll off a counter and into the shallow recesses of her cape, and the cool hand of the law darted after her and closed over her wrist and imitation bisque evidence. A prayer, a moan, the crowd parting and closing again.

The mammoth Christmas tree beneath the grand central stairway loped ever so slightly of its own gorgeousness, and the gold star at its apex titillated to the tramp-tramp of the army. Across the novelty leather-goods counter Mr. Jimmie Fitzgibbons leaned the blue-shaven, predacious face that head waiters and underfed salesgirls know best over a hot bird and a cold bottle. Men's hands involuntarily close into tight fists when his well-pressed sleeve accidentally brushes their wives or sisters. Six-dollar-a-week salesgirls scrape their luscious rare birds to the bone, drink thin gold wine from thin, gold-edged glasses, and curse their God when the reckoning comes.

Behind the novelty leather-goods counter Mrs. Violet Smith, whose eyes were the woodland blue her name boasted, smiled back and leaned against the stock-shelves, her face upturned and like a tired flower.

"If the rush hadn't quit right this minute I--I couldn't have lasted it out till closing, honest I couldn't."

"Poor tired little filly!"

"Even them ten minutes I got leave to go up to old Ingram's office they made up for when I came back, and put another batch of them fifty-nine-cent leatherette purses out in the bin."

"Poor little filly! What you need is a little speed. I wanna blow you to-night, Doll. You went once and you can make it twice. Come on, Doll, it ain't every little girl I'd coax like this."

"I--Jimmie--I--"

"I wanna blow you to-night, Doll. A poor little blue-eyed queenie like you, all froze up with nothing but a sick husband for a Christmas tree--a poor little baby doll like you!"

"The kid, too, Jimmie, I--oughtn't!"

"Didn't you tell me yourself it sleeps through the night like a whippersnapper? Don't be a quitter Doll, didn't you?"

"Yes, but--"

"A poor little baby doll like you! Why, there just ain't nothing too good for you. Some little time I showed you last Tuesday night--eh, Doll?"

"Yes--Jimmie!"

"Well, if you think that was some evening, you watch me to-night!"

"I--can't--go, Jimmie, him layin' there, and the kid and all!"

"Didn't I have to coax you last time just like to-night? And wasn't you glad when you looked out and seen how blasted cold and icy it was that you lemme blow you--wasn't you?"

"Yes, Jimmie, but--"

"Didn't I blow you to a bottle of bubble water to take home with you even after the big show was over, and wouldn't I have blown you to yellow instead of the red if you hadn't been a little cheap skate and wanted the red? Didn't I pin a two-dollar bunch of hothouse grapes on your hat right out of the fruit-bowl? Didn't I blow you for proper?"

"It was swell, Jimmie!"

"Well, I'm going to blow in my winnings on you to-night, Doll. It's Christmas Eve and--"

"Yes, it's Christmas Eve, Jimmie, and he--he had one of his bad hemorrhages last night, and the kid, she--she's too little to know she's getting cheated out of her Christmas, but, gee--a--a kid oughtta have something--a tree or something."

He leaned closer, hemmed in by the crowd. "It's *you* oughtta have something, Doll."

"I--I never oughtta gone with you last Tuesday night, Jimmie. When I got home, he--he was laying there like a rag."

"I like you, Doll. I'm going to blow in the stack of my winnings on you--that's how much I like you. There ain't nothing I wouldn't do for a little filly like you."

"Jimmie!"

"There ain't!"

"Aw!"

"You wouldn't be in the hole you are now, Doll, if you hadn't sneaked off two years ago and done it while I wasn't

looking. Nearly two whole years you lemme lose track of you! That ain't a nice way to treat a fellow that likes you."

"We went boarding right away, Jimmie, and I only came back to the department two months ago, after he got so bad. 'Ain't I told you how things just kinda happened?"

"I liked you myself, Doll, but you fell for a pair of shoulders over in the gents' furnishing that wasn't wide from nothing but padding. I could have told you there was all cotton batting and no lungs there. I could have told you."

"Jimmie, ain't you ashamed! Jimmie!"

"Aw, I was just kidding. But you ain't real on that true-blue stuff, Doll. I can look into your eyes and see you're bustin' to lemme blow you. That's what you get, sweetness, when you don't ask your Uncle Fuller first. If you'd have asked me I could have told you he was weak in the chest when you married him. I could have told you that you'd be back here two years later selling leatherette vanity-cases and supportin' a--"

"You! Jimmie Fitzgibbons, you--"

"Gad, Doll, go to it! When you color up like that you look like a rose--a whole bouquet of them."

"You--you don't know nothing about him. He--he never knew he had a lung till a month after the kid came, and they moved the gents' furnishing over by the Broadway door where the draught caught him."

"Sure, he didn't, Doll; no harm meant. That's right, stand by him. I like to see it. Why, a little queen across the counter from you tole me you'd have married him if he'd had three bum lungs, that crazy you was!"

"Like fun! If me or him had dreamt he wasn't sound we--I wouldn't be in this mess, I--we--I wouldn't!"

Her little face was pale as a spray of jessamine against a dark background, and, try as she would to check them, tears sprang hot to her eyes, dew trembled on her lashes.

"Poor little filly!"

More tears rushed to her eyes, as if he had touched the wellsprings of her self-compassion. "You gotta excuse me, Jimmie. I ain't cryin', only I'm dog tired from nursin' and drudgin', drudgin' and nursin'."

"Hard luck, little un!"

"Him layin' there and me tryin' to--to make things meet. You gotta excuse me, Jimmie, I'm done up."

"That's why I wanna blow you, sweetness. I can't bear to see a little filly like you runnin' with the odds dead agin her."

"You been swell to me, Jimmie."

"The sky's my limit, Doll."

"Maybe it wasn't right for me to go with you last Tuesday night, him layin' there, and the kid and all, but a girl's gotta have something, don't she, Jimmie? A girl that's got on her shoulders what I got has gotta have something--a laugh now and then!"

"That's the goods, Doll. A little filly like you has got to."

"Honest, the way I laughed when you stuck them hothouse grapes on my hat for trimming the other night, just like they didn't cost nothing--honest, the way I laughed gimme enough strength for a whole night's nursin'. Honest, I felt like in the old days before--before I was married."

"Gad! if you had treated me white in them days, Doll--if you hadn't pulled that saint stuff on me and treated me cold storage--there ain't nothing I wouldn't have done for you."

"I--I didn't mean nothing, Jimmie."

"I ain't sore, Doll. I like you and I like your style. I always did, even in the days when you turned me down, you great big beautiful doll, you!"

"Aw--you!"

"If you're the real little sport I think you are, you're going to lemme blow you to the liveliest Christmas a little queen like you ever seen. I didn't make that winnin' down in Atlanta for nothing. When I got the telegram I says to myself: 'Here goes! I'm goin' to make last Tuesday night look like a prayer-meeting, I am.' Eh, Doll?"

"I--I can't, Jimmie. I--'S-s-s-s-h!"

A tide flowed in about the counter, separating them, and she was suddenly the center of a human whorl, a battle of shoulders and elbows and voices pitched high with gluttony. Mr. Fitzgibbons skirted its edge, patient.

Outside a flake floated down out of the dark pocket of packed clouds, then another and yet another, like timid kisses blown down upon the clownish brow of Broadway. A motorman shielded his eyes from the right merry whirl and swore in his throat. A fruit-cheeked girl paused in the flare of a Mammoth Store show-window, looked up at her lover and the flaky star that lit and died on his mustache, and laughed with the musical glee of a bird. A beggar slid farther out from his doorway and pushed his hat into the flux of the sidewalk. More flakes, dancing upward like suds blown in merriment from the palm of a hand--light, lighter, mad, madder, weaving a blanket from God's own loom, from God's own fleece, whitening men's shoulders with the heavenly fabric.

Mrs. Violet Smith cast startled eyes upon the powdered shoulders and snow-clumped shoes passing down the aisleway, and her hand flew to her throat as if to choke its gasp.

"My! It ain't snowin', is it? It ain't snowin'?"

Mr. Jimmie Fitzgibbons wormed back to the counter. His voice was sunk to the golden mezzo of an amorous whisper.

"Snowin' is right, Doll! A real dyed-in-the-wool white Christmas for you and me!"

"Snowin'!"

"Don't you like snow, baby doll? Cheer up, I'm going to hire a taxicab by the hour. I'm--"

"Snowin'!"

She breathed inward, shivering, stricken, and her mouth, no older than a child's, trembled at the corners and would not be composed.

"He--he can't stand no snow-storm. That's why the doctor said if--if we could get him South before the first one, if we could get him South before the first one--South, where the sun shines and he could feel it clear through him, he--Oh, ain't I--ain't I in a mess!"

"Poor little filly!" He focused his small eyes upon her plump and throbbing throat. "Poor little filly, all winded!"

"I--oh, I--"

"There's the bell, Doll. Poor, tired little girlie, hurry and I'll buy you a taxicab. Hear it--there's the closing bell! Merry Christmas, Doll! Merry Christmas!"

A convulsion tore through the store, like the violent asthma of a thirty-thousand-ton ocean liner breathing the last breath of her voyage and slipping alongside her pier. On that first stroke of ten a girl behind the candy-counter collapsed frankly, rocking her left foot in her lap, pressing its blains, and blubbering through her lips salty with her own bitter tears. A child, qualified by legislation and his fourteen years to brace his soft-boned shoulder against the flank of life, bent his young spine double to the weight of two iron exit doors that swung outward and open. A gale of snow and whistling air danced in. The crowd turned about, faced, thinned, died.

Mrs. Violet Smith turned a rose-white face to the flurry. "Snowin'!"

"A real, made-to-order white Christmas for you and me, Doll. The kind you read about."

"It--it don't mean nothing to me, but--"

"Sure, it does; I'm goin' to blow you right, Doll. Half the money is yourn, anyways. You made that winning down in Atlanta yesterday as much as me, girlie. If I hadn't named that filly after you she'd 'a' been left at the post."

"You--you never had the right to name one of your race-horses after me. There ain't a girl ever went out with you that you 'ain't named one after. You--you never had the right to!"

"I took it, kiddo, 'cause I like you! Gad! I like you! Nix, it ain't every little girl I'd name one of my stable after. 'Violet!--some little pony that, odds ag'in her and walks off with the money."

"I--honest, I sometimes--I--just wish I was dead!"

"No, you don't, Doll. You know you just wanna go to-night, but you 'ain't got the nerve. I wanna show you a Christmas Eve that'll leave any Christmas Eve you ever spent at the post. Gad! look out there, will you? I'm going to taxicab you right through the fuzz of that there snow-storm if it costs every cent the filly won for us!"

Mrs. Smith leaned back against the shelves limp, as if the blood had run from her heart, weakening her, but her eyes the color of lake-water when summer's moment is bluest. Her lips, that were meant to curve, straightened in a line of decision.

"I'll go, Jimmie."

"That's the goods!"

"A girl's just gotta have something to hold herself together, don't she? It--it ain't like the kid and Harry was layin' awake for me--last Tuesday they was both asleep when I got home. They don't let each other get lonesome, and Harry--he-- There ain't nothing much for me to do round home."

"Now you're talkin' the English language, Doll."

"I'll go, Jimmie."

He extended his cane at a sharper angle until it bent in upon itself, threatening to snap, and flung one gray-spatted ankle across the other.

"Sure, you're going! A poor little filly like you, sound-kneed, sound-winded, and full of speed, and no thin' but trouble for your Christmas stockin'. A poor little blue-eyed doll like you!"

"A girl's gotta have something! You knew me before I was married, Jimmie, and there never was a girl more full of life."

"Sure I knew you. But you was a little cold-storage queen and turned me down."

"He--Harry, he never asks me nothing when I come in, and the kid's asleep, anyways."

"Color up there a little, Doll. Where I'm going to take you there ain't nothing but live ones. I'm going to take you to a place where the color scheme of your greenbacks has got to be yellow. Color up there, Doll. You ain't going dead, are you?"

She stretched open her eyes to wide, laughing pools, plowed through the rear-counter debris of pasteboard boxes and tissue-paper, reached for her jacket and tan, boyish hat. A blowy, corn-colored curl caught like a tendril and curled round the brim.

"Going dead! Say, my middle name is Speed! It's like Harry used to tell me when we wasn't no farther along in the marriage game than his sneaking over here from the gents' furnishing three times a day to price bill-folders--he used to say that I was a live wire before Franklin flew his kite."

"Doll!"

"I ain't tired, Jimmie. Not countin' the year and a half I was home before Harry took sick, I been through the Christmas hell just six times. The seventh don't mean nothing in my life. I've seen 'em behind these very counters cursing Christmas with tears in their eyes and spending their merry holiday in bed trying to get some of the soreness out. It takes more than one Christmas to put me out of business."

"Here, lemme tuck that curl in for you, Doll."

"Quit!"

"Doll!"

"Quit, I say!"

"Color up there, girlie. Look live!"

She rubbed her palms briskly across her cheeks to generate a glow, and they warmed to color as peaches blush to the kiss of the sun.

"See!"

"Pink as cherries!"

"That's right, kid me along."

"Tried to dodge me to-night, didn't you, kitten?"

"I--I didn't think I ought to go to-night."

"It's a good thing my feelings ain't hurt easy."

"Honest, Jimmie, I didn't try to dodge you. I--I only thought, with the girls here gabbling so much about last Tuesday night and all, it wouldn't look right. And he had a spell last night again, and the doctor said we--we ought to get him South before the first snow--South, where the sun shines. But he's got as much chance of gettin' South as I have of climbing the South Pole!"

"A pretty little thing like you climbing the South Pole! I'd be there with field-glasses all-righty!"

"I--I went up and talked and begged and begged and talked to old Ingram up at the Aid Society to-day, but the old skinflint says they can't do nothing for an employee after he's been out of his department more'n eight weeks, and--and Harry's been out twelve. He says the Society can't do nothing no more, much less send him South. Just like a machine he talked. I could have killed him!"

"Poor little filly! I was that surprised when I seen you was back in the store again! There ain't been a classy queen behind the counter since you left."

"Aw, Jimmie, no wonder the girls say you got your race-horses beat for speed."

"That's me!"

Aisles thinned and the store relaxed into a bacchanalian chaos of trampled debris, merchandise strewn as if a flock of vultures had left their pickings--a battlefield strewn with gewgaws and the tinsel of Christmastide, and reeking with foolish sweat.

"Button up there, Doll, and come on; it's a swell night for Eskimos."

Mr. Fitzgibbons folded over his own double-breasted coat, fitted his flat-brimmed derby hat on his well-oiled hair, drew a pair of gray suede gloves over his fingers, and hooked his slender cane to his arm.

"Ready, Doll?"

"The girls, Jimmie--look at 'em rubbering and gabbling like ducks! It--it ain't like I could do any good at home, it ain't."

"I'd be the first to ship you there if you could. You know me, Doll!"

His words deadened her doubts like a soporific. She glanced about for the moment at the Dionysian spectacle of the Mammoth Store ravished to chaos by the holiday delirium; at the weary stream of shoppers and workers bending into the storm as they reached the doors; at the swift cancan of snowflakes dancing whitely and swiftly without; at Mr. Jimmie Fitzgibbons standing attendant. Then she smiled.

"Come on, Jimmie!"

"Come on yourself, Doll!"

Snow beat in their faces like shot as they emerged into the merry night.

She shivered in her thin coat. "Gee! ain't it cold!"

"Not so you can notice it. Watch me, Doll!" He hailed a passing cab with a double flourish of cane and half lifted her in, his fingers closing tight over her arm. "Little Doll, now I got you! And we understand one another, don't we, Doll?"

"Yes, Jimmie."

She leaned back, quiescent, nor did his hold of her relax. A fairy etching of snow whitened the windows and windshield, and behind their security he leaned closer until she could feel the breath of his smile.

"Doll, we sure understand each other, don't we, sweetness? Eh? Answer me, sweetness, don't we? Eh? Eh?"

"Yes, Jimmie."

Over the city bells tolled of Christmas.

* * * * *

The gentle Hestia of Christmas Eve snug beside her hearth, with little stockings dangling like a badly matched row of executed soldiers, the fire sinking into embers to facilitate the epic descent from the chimney, the breathing of dreaming children trembling for their to-morrow--this gentle Hestia of a thousand, thousand Christmas Eves was not on the pay-roll of Maxwell's thousand-dollar-a-week cabaret.

A pandering management, with its finger ever on the thick wrist of its public, substituted for the little gray lady of tradition the glittering novelty of full-lipped bacchantes whose wreaths were grape, and mistletoe commingling with the grape.

An electric fountain shot upward its iridescent spray, now green, now orange, now violet, and rained down again upon its own bosom and into a gilt basin shaped like a grotto with the sea weeping round it. And out of its foam, wraithlike, rose a marble Aphrodite, white limbed, bathed in light.

On the topmost of a flight of marble steps a woman sang of love who had defiled it. At candle-shaded tables thick tongues wagged through thick aromas and over thick foods, and as the drama was born rhythmic out of the noisy dithyramb, so through these heavy discords rose the tink of Venetian goblets, thin and pure--the reedy music of grinning Pan blowing his pipes.

Rose-colored light lay like a blush of pleasure over a shining table spread beside the coping of the fount. A captain bowed with easy recognition and drew out two chairs. A statue-like waiter, born but to obey and, obeying, sweat, bowed less easy recognition and bent his spine to the backaching, heartbreaking angle of servitude. And through the gleaming maze of tables, light-footed as if her blood were foaming, Mrs. Violet Smith, tossing the curling ribbon of a jest over one shoulder. Following her Mr. Jimmie Fitzgibbons, smiling.

"Here, sit on this side of the table, Doll, so you can see the big show."

"Gee!"

"It's the best table in the room to see the staircase dancing."

"Gee!"

"Told you I was going to show you a classy time to-night, didn't I, Doll?"

"Yeh, but--but I ain't dressed for a splash like this, Jimmie, I--I ain't."

"Say, they know me round here, Doll. They know I'd fall for a pair of eyes like yours, if you was doing time on a rock-pile and I had to bring you in stripes."

"I'm--a--sight!"

"If you wasn't such a little pepper-box I'd blow you to a feather or two."

"Ain't no pepper-box!"

"You used to be, Doll. Two years back there wasn't a girl behind the counter ever gimme the cold storage like you did. I liked your nerve, too, durned if I didn't!"

"I--I only thought you was guyin'."

"I ain't forgot, Doll, the time I asked you out to dinner one night when you was lookin' pretty blue round the gills, and you turned me down so hard the whole department gimme the laugh. It's a good thing I ain't got no hard feelings."

"Honest, Jimmie, I--"

"That was just before you stole the march on me with the Charley from the gents' furnishing. I ain't holding it against you, Doll, but you gotta be awful nice to me to make up for it, eh?"

A shower of rose-colored rain from the fountain threw its soft blush across her face.

"Aw, Jimmie, don't rub it in! Ain't I tryin' hard enough to--to square myself? I--I was crazy with the heat two years ago. I--aw, I--Now it's different. I--It's like you say, Jimmie, you 'ain't got no hard feelings." She swallowed a rising in her throat and took a sip of clear, cold water. A light film of tears swam in her eyes. "You 'ain't, have you, Jimmie?"

He leaned across the table and out of the hearing of the attendant waiter. "Not if we understand each other, Doll. You stick to me and you'll wear diamonds. Gad! I bet if I had two more fillies like Violet I'd run Diamond Pat Cassidy's string of favorites back to pasture, you little queenie, you!"

Her timid glance darted like the hither and thither of a wind-blown leaf. "I ain't much of a looker for a Broadway palace like you've brought me to, Jimmie. Look at 'em, all dolled up over there. Honest, Jimmie, I--I feel ashamed."

"Just you stick to me, peaches, and there ain't one at that table that's got on anything you can't have twice over. I know that gang--the pink queen and all. 'Longside of you they look like stacks o' bones tied up in a rag o' satin."

"Aw, Jimmie, look at 'em, so blond and all!"

"They're a broken-winded bunch. Look at them bottles on their table! We're going to have twice as many and only one color in our glasses, kiddo. Yellow, the same yellow as your hair, the kinda yellow that's mostly gold. That's the kind of bubble water we're going to buy, kiddo!"

"Jimmie, such a spender!"

"That's me!"

"It's sure like the girls say--the sky's your limit."

"Look, Doll, there's the swellest little dancer in this town--one swell little pal and a good sport. Watch her, kiddo--watch her do that staircase dance. Ain't she a lalaloo!"

A buxom nymph of the grove, whose draperies floated from her like flesh-colored mist, spun to the wild passion of violins up the eight marble steps of the marble flight. A spotlight turned the entire range of the spectrum upon her. She was like a spinning tulip, her draperies folding her in a cup of sheerest petals, her limbs shining through.

"Classy, ain't she, Doll?"

"Well, I guess!"

"Wanna meet her? There ain't none of 'em that 'ain't sat at my table many a time."

"I like it better with just you, Jimmie."

"Sweetness, don't you look at me like that or you'll get me so mixed up I'll go out and buy the Metropolitan Tower for your Christmas present. Whatta you want for Christmas--eh, Doll?"

"Aw, Jimmie, I don't want nothing. I 'ain't got no right to take nothing from you!" She played with the rich, unpronounceable foods on her plate and took a swallow of golden liquid to wash down her fiery confusion. "I--'ain't got no right."

"When I get to likin' a little girl there ain't nothing she 'ain't got a right to."

"Aw, Jimmie, when you talk like that I feel so--so--"

"So what, Doll?"

"So--so--"

"Gowann, Doll."

"Aw, I can't say it. You'll think I'm fresh."

But she regarded him with the nervous eyes of a gazelle and the red swam high up into her hair, and he drained his glass down to the bottom of its hollow stem and leaned his warming face closer.

"You treat me white, sweetness, and understand me right, and you won't be sorry for nothing you say. Drink, Doll, drink to you 'n' me--you 'n' me."

Their bubble-thin glasses met in a tink and a pledge and her ready laughter rose in duet with his. She caught the lilt of a popular song from the tenpiece orchestra and sang upward with the tiralira of a lark, and the group at the adjoining table threw her a shout. Mr. Fitzgibbons beat a knife-and-fork tattoo on his plate and pinched her cheek lightly, gritting his teeth in a fine frenzy of delight.

"That's the way to make 'em sit up and take notice, Doll, that's the way I like 'em. Live! As live and frisky as colts!"

An attendant placed a souvenir of the occasion beside her plate--a white wool bear, upright and with bold bead eyes and a flare of pink bow beneath its chin.

"Oh-h-h!"

"See, Doll, a Teddy bear! By Gad! a Teddy bear with his arms stretched out to hug her! Gad! if I was that Teddy I'd hug the daylight out of her, too! Gad! wouldn't I!"

Mrs. Violet Smith wafted the bead-eyed toy a kiss, then slapped him sharply sidewise, toppling him in a heap, and her easy laughter mingled with her petulance.

"I wanna big grizzly, Jimmie; a great big brown grizzly bear with a grin. I wanna big brown grizzly."

"Ain't you got one, Doll? A little white one with a pink bow. Here, let's give him a drink!"

But the petulance grew upon her, nor would she be gainsaid. "I wanna big brown grizzly--a great big brown one with a grin."

"Aw, Doll, look at this little white one--a classy little white one. Look at his nose, cutie, made out of a button. Look, ain't that some nose! Look, ain't--"

"A big brown one that I can dance with, Jimmie. I wanna dance. Gee! who could dance with a little dinky devil like that! I wanna dance, Jimmie, honest I could dance with a great big brown one if he was big enough. I--Gee, I wanna dance. Jimmie, honest, I could dance with a great big brown one if he was big enough. I--Gee! I wanna dance, Jimmie! Gee, I wanna--"

He whacked the table and flashed the twinkle of a wink to the waiter.

"Gad! Doll, if you look at me with them frisky eyes I--"

"I wanna bear, Jimmie, a great big brown--"

"Waiter!"

"A great big brown one, Jimmie, with a grin. Tell him a great big brown one!"

"Waiter, that ain't no kind of a souvenir to bring a lady--a cheap bunch o' wool like that. Bring her a great big brown one--"

"A great big brown one with a grin, tell him, Jimmie."

"We have no brown ones, sir; only the small white ones for the ladies."

"Get one, then! Get out and buy the biggest one they got on Broadway. Get out and get one then!"

"But, sir, the--"

"If the stores ain't open, bust 'em open! I ain't the best customer this joint has got not to get service when my lady friend wants to dance with a great big brown bear. If my lady friend can't get a great big brown bear--"

"With a grin, Jimmie."

"--with a grin, there are other places where she can get two great big brown bears if she wants 'em."

"I'll see, sir. I'll see what I can do."

Mr. Fitzgibbons brought a fist down upon the table so that the dishes rattled and the wine lopped out of the glasses. "Sure you'll see, and quick, too! A great big brown bear, d'you hear? My lady friend wants to dance, don't you, Doll? You wanna dance, and nothing but a great big brown bear won't do--eh, Doll?"

"With a grin, Jimmie!"

"With a grin, d'ye hear?" He whacked at her hand in delight and they laughed in right merry duet.

"Oh, Jimmie, you're killing!"

"The sky's my limit!"

She nibbled at a peach whose cheeks were pink as her own, and together from the great overflowing bowl of fruits they must trim her hat with its boyish brim. First, a heavy bunch of black hothouse grapes that she pinned deftly to the crown, a cluster of cherries, a purple plum, a tangerine stuck at a gay angle. They surveyed their foolish labor of caprice with little rills of laughter that rose and fell, and when she replaced her hat the cherries bobbed and kissed her cheek and the adjoining group leaned to her in the kinship of merriment.

"It's a sweller trimming than I gave it last Tuesday, Jimmie. Look how tight it's all pinned on. Look at the cherries! I'm going to blow 'em right off and then eat 'em--eat 'em! Pf-f-f-f!"

She made as if to catch them with pursed lips, but they bobbed sidewise, and he regarded her with a swelling pride, then glanced about the room, pleased at the furor that followed her little antics.

"Gad, Doll, you're a winner! I can pick 'em every time! You ain't dolled up like the rest of 'em, but you're a winner!"

"Oh-oh-oh!"

"That's the ticket, waiter! I knew there wasn't nothing round here that tin wouldn't buy. I guess that ain't some great big brown grizzly with a grin for you, Doll!"

"Oh-oh-oh!"

"I guess they didn't rustle round when your Uncle Fuller began to get sore, and get a great big brown one for you! Gad! the biggest I ever seen--almost as big as you, Doll! That's the ticket! There ain't anything in this town tin can't buy!"

"Oh-oh-oh!" She lifted the huge toy off the silver tray held out to her and buried her shining face in the soft, silky wool. "Ain't he a beauty? Ain't he the softest, brownest beauty?"

"Now, peaches, now cherries, now you little fancy-fruit stand, there goes the music. Let's see that dance!"

"Aw, Jimmie, I--I was only kiddin'!"

"Kiddin' nothing! Come now, Doll, I blew me ten bucks if I blew me a cent for that bunch of wool. Come now, let's see that dance you been blowing about! Go as far as you like, Doll!"

"I--honest, I was only guyin', Jimmie."

"Don't be a quitter and make me sore, Doll! I wanna show 'em I pick the live ones every time. There's the music!"

"Aw, I--"

"Go as far as you like, Doll. Here, gimme your hat! Go to it, sister. If you land in the fountain by mistake I'll blow you to the swellest new duds on the Avenue."

"I don't know no dances no more, Jimmie. I--I can't dance with this big old thing anyways. Look, he's almost as big as me!"

"Go it alone, then, Doll; but get up and show 'em. Get up and show 'em that I don't pick nothing but the livest! Get up and show 'em, Doll; get up and show 'em!"

She set down her glass suddenly and pirouetted to her feet.

"Here--I--go--Jimmie!"

"Go to it, Doll!"

She leaped forward in her narrow little skirt, laughing. Chairs scraped back and a round of applause went with her. Knives and forks beat tattoo on frail glasses; a tinsel ball flung from across the room fell at her feet. She stooped to it, waved it, and pinned it to her bosom. Her hair, rich as Australian gold, half escaped its chignon and lay across her shoulders. She danced light as the breeze up the marble stairway, and at its climax the spotlight focused on her, covering her with the sheen of mica; then just as lightly down the steps again, so rapidly that her hair was tossed outward in a fairy-like effect of spun gold.

"Go to it, Doll. I'm here to back you!"

"Dare me, Jimmie?"

"Dare what?"

"Dare me?"

"Yeh, I dare you to do anything your little heart desires. Gad! you--Gad! if she 'ain't!"

Like a bird in flight she danced to the gold coping, paused like an audacious Undine in a moment of thrilled silence, and then into the purple and gold, violet and red rain of the electric fountain, her arms outstretched in a radiant *tableau vivant*, water crowding in about her knees, spray dancing on her upturned face.

"Gad! the little daredevil! I didn't think she had it in her. Gad! the little devil!"

Clang! Clang! Tink! Tink! "Bravo, kiddo! Who-o-o-p!"

Shaking the spray out of her eyes, her hair, she emerged to a grand orchestral flare. The same obsequious hands that applauded her helped her from the gold coping. Waiters dared to smile behind their trays. Up to her knees her dark-cloth skirt clung dankly. Water glistened on her shoulders, spotted her blouse. Mr. Jimmie Fitzgibbons lay back in his chair, weak from merriment.

"Gad! I didn't think she had it in her! Gad! I didn't!"

"Bo-o-o-o!" She shook herself like a dainty spaniel, and he grasped the table to steady himself against his laughter.

"Gad! I didn't!"

"Fine weather for ducks!"

"Gad!"

"I'm a nice girl and they treat me like a sponge."

"Gad!"

"April weather we're havin', ain't it?"

"You ain't much wet, are you, Doll?"

"Bo-o-o-o!"

"Here, waiter, get the lady a coat or something. Gad! you're the hit of the place, Doll! Aw, you ain't cold, hon? Look, you ain't even wet through--what you shaking about?"

She drew inward little breaths of shivery glee. "I ain't wet! Say, whatta you think that fountain's spouting--gasoline? I--ain't--wet! Looka my hair curling up like it does in a rain-storm! Feel my skirt down here at the hem! Can you beat it? I ain't wet, he says!"

"Here, drink this, Doll, and warm up."

"No."

She threw a dozen brilliant glances into the crowd, tossed an invitational nod to the group adjoining, and clapped her hands for the iridescent Christmas ball that dangled over their table.

"Here, send 'er over--here, give you leave. I'm some little catcher myself."

It bounded to her light as air, and she caught it deftly, tossed it ceilingward until it bounced against an incandescent bulb, tossed it again, caught it lightly, nor troubled to heed the merry shouts for its return.

From across the room some one threw her a great trailing ribbon of gilt paper. She bound it about her neck like a ruff. A Christmas star with a fluted tissue-paper edge floated into her lap. She wore it like an earring, waggling it slyly so that her curls were set a-bobbing.

"Gimme my bear."

She hugged the woolly image to her as if she would beg its warmth, her teeth clicking the while with chill.

"Take a little swallow or two to warm you up, Doll!"

"Gee! I took your dare, Jimmie--and--and--br-r-r-r!"

"A little swallow, Doll!"

"I took your dare, Jimmie, and I--I can feel my skirt shrinking up like it was rigging. I--I guess I'll have to go to work next week in a sheet."

"Didn't I tell you I was backing this toot, sister?"

"I didn't have no right to dive in there and spoil my duds, Jimmie. I--"

"Who had a better right?"

"Ain't it just like a nut like me? But I 'ain't had a live time for so long I--I lost my head. But I 'ain't got no right to spoil the only duds I got to my back. Looka this waist; the color's running. I ought to--I--Oh, like I wasn't in enough of a mess already without--without--acting the crazy nut!"

"Aw, Doll, cut the tragedy! Didn't I tell you I was going to blow you to anything your little heart desires?"

"But the only duds I got to my back, Jimmie! Oh, ain't I a nut when I get started, Jimmie! Ain't I a nut!"

She regarded him with tears in her eyes and the wraith of a smile on her lips. A little drop escaped and she dashed it away and her smile broke out into sunshine.

"Ain't I a nut, though!"

"You're a real, full-blooded little winner, that's what you are, and you can't say I ain't one, neither, Doll. Here's your damages. Now go doll yourself up like a Christmas tree!"

He tossed a yellowback bill lightly into her lap, and she made a great show of rejecting it, even pushing it toward him across the table and to the floor.

"I--Aw, what kind of a girl do you think I am? There, take your money. I--honest, I--What kind of a girl do you think I am?"

"Now, now, sister, don't we understand each other? Them's damages, kiddo. Wasn't it me dared you? Ain't it my fault you doused your duds?"

"Yes, but--"

"Aw, come now, Doll, don't pull any of that stuff on me! You and me understand each other--not?"

"Yes, but--"

"Take and forget it. You won it. That ain't even interest on the filly's winnings. Take it. I never started nothing in my life I couldn't see the finish to. Take it and forget it!" He crammed the bill into her reluctant fingers, closed them over it, and sealed her little fist with a grandiose pat. "Forget it, Doll!"

But her lids fluttered and her confusion rose as if to choke her.

"I--honest, I--Aw, what kind of a girl do you think I am?"

"I told you I think you're the sweetest, livest little queen I know."

"Aw!"

"Come on, little live wire. Put on your swell, hothouse-trimmed hat. I'm going to take you to a place farther up the street where there are two staircases and a fountain twice as big for you to puddle your little footsies in. Waiter--here--check--get a cab! Here, little Doll, quit your shivering and shaking and lemme help you on--lemme help you."

She was suddenly pale, but tense-lipped like a woman who struggles on the edge of a swoon. "Jimmie, honest, I--I'm shaking with chills! Jimmie--I--I can't go in these duds, neither. I--I gotta go home now. He'll be wakin' and I--I gotta go home now. I'm all shaking." In spite of herself her lips quivered and an ague shot through her body. "I--I gotta go home now, Jimmie. Look at me shivering, all shivering!"

"Home now!" His eyes retreated behind a network of calculating wrinkles and she paled as she sat. "Home now? Say, Doll, I thought--"

"Honest, I wanna go to the other place, but I'm cold, Jimmie, and--wet through. I gotta keep well, Jimmie, and I--I oughtta go home."

"Pah!" he said, spluttering out the end of a bitten cigar. "If I'd 'a' known you was a puny Doll like that!"

"I ain't, Jimmie; I--"

"If I'd 'a' known you was that puny! It's like I been sayin', Doll, it ain't like you and me don't understand each other. I--"

"Sure we do, Jimmie. Honest, I--To-morrow night I--I can fix it so that--that the sky's my limit. I'll meet you at Hinkley's at eight, cross my heart on a wishbone, Jimmie."

"Cross it!"

"There!"

"To-night, Jimmie, I'm chilled--all in. Look at me in these duds,

Jimmie. I'm cold. Oh, Jimmie, get me a cab quick, please; I'm co-old!"

She relaxed frankly into a chill that rumbled through her and jarred her knees together. A little rivulet of water oozed from her hair, zigzagged down her cheek and seeped into her blouse, but her blue-lipped smile persisted.

"Ain't I a nut, though! But wait till you see me dolled up to-morrow night, Jimmie! Eight at Hinkley's. I didn't have a hunch how cold--how cold that water was. Next time they gotta--heat it."

"Got to heat it is good, Doll! All I got to do is ask once, and my word's law round here. Here, take a swallow and warm up, hon. You don't need to go home if you warm up right."

But the glass tinked against her teeth.

"I--I can't"

"Gowann, kiddo!"

"I'll take some home with me to warm me up when I get in bed, Jimmie. I--Not that kind, give it to me red like you did last Tuesday night, without the sparkles. That's the kind to warm me up. Order a bottle of red without the sparkles, Jimmie--without the sparkles. I--I can't stand no more bubbles to-night."

He helped her into her coat, and she leaned to him with a little movement of exhaustion that tightened his hold of her.

"Hurry a cab, waiter, the lady's sick!"

"Ain't I a nut, though!"

"Poor wet little Doll, I didn't think you was much more'n damp! You gotta make up for this to-morrow night, Doll. Eight sharp, Doll, and no funny business to-morrow night."

"Eight sharp!"

"Swell little sport you are, gettin' the chills! But we understand each other, don't we, Doll?"

"Sure, Jimmie!"

"Come on, hon. Shakin' like a leaf, ain't you? Wait till I get you out in the cab, I'll warm you up. You look just like a Christmas doll, all rigged up in that hat and that star and all--just like a Christmas doll."

"My grizzly, my brown grizzly! Gee, I nearly forgot my grizzly!"

And she packed the huge toy under her arm, along with the iridescent ball and the gewgaws of her plunder, and out into the cab, where an attendant tucked a bottle of the red warming wine between them.

"Ready, Doll?"

"Ready."

The silent storm had continued its silent work, weaving its blanket softer, deeper. The straggling pedestrians of early morning bent their heads into it and drove first paths through the immaculate mantle. The fronts of owl cars and cabs were coated with a sugary white rime. Broadway lay in a white lethargy that is her nearest approach to sleep.

Snow-plows were already abroad clearing tracks, dry snow-dust spinning from under them. At Longacre Square the flakes blew upward in spiral flurries, erratic, full of antics. The cab snorted, plunged, leaped forward. Mr. Fitzgibbons inclined toward the little huddle beside him.

"Sweetness, now I got you! You little sweetness you, now I got you, sweetness!"

"Jimmie! Quit! Quit! You--you old--you--you--"

The breath of a forgotten perfume and associations webby with age stir through the lethargy of years. Memories faded as flowers lift their heads. The frail scent of mignonette roused with the dust of letters half a century old, and eyes too dim and watery to show the glaze of tears turn backward fifty years upon the mignonette-bowered scene of love's

young dream. A steel drawing-room car rolling through the clean and heavy stench of cow pasture, and a steady-eyed, white-haired capitalist, rolling on his rolling-stock, leans back against the upholstery and gazes with eyes tight closed upon a steady-eyed, brown-haired youngster herding in at eventide. The whiff of violets from a vender's tray, and a young man dreams above his ledger. The reek of a passing brewer's wagon, and white faces look after, suddenly famished.

When the familiar pungency of her boarding-house flowed in and round Mrs. Violet Smith, she paused for a moment and could not push through the oppression. Then, with the associations of odor crowding in about her, she stripped herself of her gewgaws, as if here even the tarnished tinsel of pleasure could have no place, and tiptoed up the weary wind of three unlighted flights and through the thick staleness of unaired halls.

At the third landing a broom and a dirty tangled debris of scrub-cloths lay on the topmost stair, as if an aching slavey had not found the strength to remove them. They caught the heel of her shoe, pitching her forward so that she fell sharply against her own door. In the gloom she paused for a palpitating moment, her hands pressing her breast, listening; then deposited her laden hat, the little pile of tinsel and the woolen bear on the floor outside the door.

"Vi! Vi! That you, dear?"

She pulled at her strength and opened the door suddenly, blowing in like a gale. "It's me, darlin'."

She was suddenly radiant as morning, and a figure on the bed in the far corner of the dim-lit room raised to greet her with vague, white-sleeved arms outstretched. She flew to their haven.

"Darlin', darlin', how you feeling?"

"Vi, poor tired little girl!"

"Harry, how you feeling, darlin'? They worked the force all night--first time ever. How you feeling, darlin'--how?" And she burrowed kisses on the poor, white face, and then deep into the tiny crib and back again into the vague white arms. "Oh, my babies, both of you! How you feeling, darlin'? So worried I've been. And the kid! Oh, God, darlin', I--I been so busy rightin' stock and all--all night they kept the force. I got such news, darlin'. We should worry that it's snowing! Such news, darlin'! The kid, Harry--did Mrs. Quigley bring her milk on time? How you feeling, darlin'! You 'ain't coughed, have you?"

He kissed her damp hair and turned her face up like a flower, so that his deep-sunk eyes read into hers. "I 'ain't coughed once since noon, darlin'. We should worry if it snows is right! A doctor's line of talk can't knock me out. I can buck up without going South. I 'ain't coughed once since noon, Vi; I--"

A strangling paroxysm shook him in mockery of his words, and she crouched low beside the bed, her face etched in the agony of bearing each rack and pain with him.

"Oh, my darlin'! Oh--oh--"

"It's--all right now, Vi! It's all right! It's all right!"

"Oh, my darlin', yes, yes, it's all right now! All right now!"

She ran her hands over his face, as if to reassure herself of his very features, nor would she let him read into her streaming eyes.

"Lay quiet, Harry darlin'; it's all right! Oh, my darlin'!"

"S-s-s-s-h, Vi dear! Sure it's all right. 'S-s-s-s-h! Don't cry, Vi!"

"I--I-oh--oh--"

"S-s-s-s-h, darlin'! Don't!"

"I--oh, I can't help it; but I ain't cryin', Harry, I ain't!"

"All worn out and cold and wet, that's what's a-hurtin' you. All worn out and hysterical and all! Poor little Vi-dee!"

"I--I ain't."

"It's all over now, Vi. See, I'm all right! Everything's all right! Just my luck to have the first one since noon right when you get home. It's all over now, Vi. Everything's over, Christmas rush and all. Don't you worry about the snow, neither, darlin'. I knew it would scare you up, but it takes more than a doctor's line of talk to down-and-out me."

"I--I ain't worryin', darlin'."

"You're the one I been worryin' about, Vi. It's just like the kid was worried too--cried when Mrs. Quigley sung her to sleep."

"Oh, my baby! Oh, my baby!"

"Don't worry, dear. She don't even know it's Christmas--a little thing like her. And, anyways, look, Vi-dee, Mrs. Quigley brought her up that little stuffed lamb there. But she don't even know it's Christmas, dear; she don't even know. You poor, tired little kiddo!"

"I ain't tired."

"I been lying here all night, sweet, thinking and thinking--a little doll like you hustling and a big hulk like me lying here."

"S-s-s-h! Honest, Harry, it's fun being back in the store again till you get well--honest!"

"I never ought to let you done it in the beginning, darlin'. Remember that night, even when I was strong enough to move a ox team, I told you there was bum lungs 'way back somewhere in my family? I never ought to let you take a chance, Vi-dee--I never ought!"

"S-s-s-h! Didn't I say I'd marry you if you was playin' hookey from the graveyard? Wasn't that the answer I give you even when you was strong as a whole team?"

"I didn't have no right to you, baby--the swellest little peach in the store! I--I didn't have no right to you! Vi-dee, what's the matter? You look like you got the horrors--the horrors, hon! Vi-dee!"

"Oh, don't, Harry, don't. I--I can't stand it, hon. I--I'm tired, darlin', darlin', but don't look like that, darlin'. I--got news--I got news."

"S-s-s-h, baby, you're all hysterical from overwork and all tired out from worry. There ain't no need to worry, baby. Quigley'll say it can go over another week. She ain't dunning for board, she ain't, baby."

"I--oh--I--"

"Shaking all over, baby, just like you got the horrors! I bet you got scared when you see the snow coming and tackled Ingram to-day, and you're blue. What you got the horrors about, baby--Ingram?"

"No! No!"

"I told you not to ask the old skinflint. I told you they won't do nothing after twelve weeks. I ain't bluffed off by snow-storm, Vi. I don't need South no more'n you do, I don't, baby. I ain't a dead one by a long shot yet! Vi, for God's sake, why you got the horrors?"

She tried to find words and to smile at him through the hot rain of her tears, and the deep-rooted sobs that racked her subsided and she snuggled closer and burrowed into his pillow.

"I--I can't keep it no longer, darlin'. I ain't cryin', I--I 'ain't got the horrors. I'm laffin'. I--I seen him, Harry--Ingram--I seen him just before closin', and--and--oh, Harry, you won't believe it, he said--he--I--I'm laffin' for joy, Harry!"

"What? What, Vi? What?"

She fumbled into the bosom of her blouse and slid a small folded square of yellowback bill into his hand.

"What? What, Vi? What?"

"A cool hundred, darlin'. Ingram--the Aid Society, because it's Christmas, darlin'. They opened up--a cool hundred! We--we can light out To-morrow, darlin'. A cool hundred! Old Ingram, the old skinflint, he opened up like--like a oyster."

South, all of us, to-morrow, darlin'; it ain't nothing for me to get a job South. When I seen it was snowin' I'd 'a' killed somebody to get it. I--I had to have it and we got it, darlin', we--we got it--a cool hundred!"

He lay back on the pillow, suddenly limp, the bill fluttering to the coverlet, and she slid her arm beneath his head.

"You could have knocked me down, too, darlin'. Easy, just like that he forked over. 'What's a Aid Society for?' he kept sayin'. 'What's a Aid Society for?'"

"Vi, I--"

"Don't cry, darlin', don't cry. I just can't stand it!"

"I--"

"S-s-s-s-h! Easy, just like that he gimme it, darlin'."

"And me lying here hatin' him for a skinflint and his store for a bloodsucker and the Aid Society for a fake!"

"Yes, yes, darlin'."

"I feel new already, Vi. I can feel the sun already shining through me. If he was here, I--I could just kiss his hand; that's how it feels for a fellow to get his nerve back. I got my chance now, Vi; there ain't nothing can keep me down. Just like he says--I'll be a new man out there. Look, hon, just talking about it! Feel how I got some strength back already. An hour ago I couldn't hold you like this."

"Oh, my darlin'!"

He sat up suddenly in bed and drew her into his arms and she laid her cheek against his, and in the silence, from the trundle crib beside them, the breathing of a child rose softly, fell softly.

"I--I blew us to a real Christmas, darlin', us and the kid. I--I couldn't help it. I couldn't bear to have her wake up without it, Harry, her and you--and me."

"A real Christmas, baby!"

"Red wine for you, darlin', like I brought you last Tuesday night and warmed you up so nice. The kind the doctor says is so grand for you, darlin'--red wine without bubbles like he says you gotta have."

"Red wine!"

"Yeh, and black grapes like I brought you last Tuesday, and like he says you oughtta have--black grapes and swell fruit that's good for you, darlin'."

"A real blow-out, Vi-dee."

"A bear for the kid, Harry!"

"Vi!"

"Yeh, a real brown grizz, with the grin and all, like she cried for in the window that Sunday--a real big brown one with the grin and all."

"That cost a real bunch of money, sweet!"

"Yeh, I blew me like sixty for it, hon, but she cried for it that Sunday and she had to have a Christmas, didn't she, darlin', even if she is too little. It--it would 'a' broke my heart to have her wake up to-morrow without one."

He regarded her through the glaze of tears. "My little kiddo!"

"S-s-s-s-h!"

"It just don't seem fair for you to have to--"

"S-s-s-s-h! Everything's fair, darlin', in love and war. All the rules for the game of living ain't written down--the Eleventh Commandment and the Twelfth Commandment and the Ninth Commandment."

"My little kiddo!"

"To-morrow, Harry, to-morrow, Harry, we're going! South, darlin', where he says the sun is going to warm you through and through. To-morrow, darlin'!"

"The next day, sweetness. You're all worn out and to-morrow's Christmas, and--"

But the shivering took hold of her again, and when she pressed her hand over his mouth he could feel it trembling.

"To-morrow, darlin', to-morrow before eight. Every day counts. Promise me, darlin'. I--I just can't live if you don't. To-morrow before eight. Promise me, darlin'! Oh, promise me, darlin'!"

"Poor, tired little kiddo, to-morrow before eight, then, to-morrow before eight we go."

Her head relaxed.

"You're tired out, darlin'. Get to bed, baby. We got a big day to-morrow. We got a big day to-morrow, darlin'! Get to bed, Vi-dee."

"I wanna spread out her Christmas first, Harry. I want her to see it when she wakes up. I couldn't stand her not seem' it."

She scurried to the hall and back again, and at the foot of the bed she spread her gaudy wares: An iridescent rubber ball glowing with six colors; a ribbon of gilt paper festooned to the crib; a gleaming Christmas star that dangled and gave out radiance; a huge brown bear standing upright, and with bead eyes and a grin.

T.B.

The figurative underworld of a great city has no ventilation, housing or lighting problems. Rooks and crooks who live in the putrid air of crime are not denied the light of day, even though they loathe it. Cadets, social skunks, whose carnivorous eyes love darkness, walk in God's sunshine and breathe God's air. Scarlet women turn over in wide beds and draw closer velvet curtains to shut out the morning. Gamblers curse the dawn.

But what of the literal underworld of the great city? What of the babes who cry in fetid cellars for the light and are denied it? What of the Subway track-walker, purblind from gloom; the coal-stoker, whose fiery tomb is the boiler-room of a skyscraper; sweatshop workers, a flight below the sidewalk level, whose faces are the color of dead Chinese; six-dollar-a-week salesgirls in the arc-lighted subcellars of six-million-dollar corporations?

This is the literal underworld of the great city, and its sunless streets run literal blood--the blood of the babes who cried in vain; the blood from the lungs of the sweatshop workers whose faces are the color of dead Chinese; the blood from the cheeks of the six-dollar-a-week salesgirls in the arc-lighted subcellars. But these are your problems and my problems and the problems of the men who have found the strength or the fear not to die rich. The babe's mother, who had never known else, could not know that her cellar was fetid; she only cried out in her anguish and hated vaguely in her heart.

Sara Juke, in the bargain basement of the Titanic Department Store, did not know that lint from white goods clogs the lungs, and that the air she breathed was putrefied as from a noxious swamp. Sometimes a pain, sharp as a hat-pin, entered between her shoulder-blades. But what of that? When the heart is young the heart is bold, and Sara could laugh upward with the musical glee of a bird.

There were no seasons, except the spring and fall openings and semiannual clearing-sales, in the bargain basement of the Titanic Store. On a morning when the white-goods counter was placing long-sleeve, high-necked nightgowns in its bargain bins, and knit underwear was supplanting the reduced muslins, Sara Juke drew her little pink-knitted jacket closer about her narrow shoulders and shivered--shivered, but smiled. "Br-r-r! October never used to get under my skin

like this."

Hattie Krakow, room-mate and co-worker, shrugged her bony shoulders and laughed; but not with the upward glee of a bird--downward, rather, until it died in a croak in her throat. But then Hattie Krakow was ten years older than Sara Juke; and ten years in the arc-lighted subcellar of the Titanic Department Store can do much to muffle the ring in a laugh.

"Gee! you're as funny as your own funeral, you are! You keep up the express pace you're going and there won't be another October left on your calendar."

"That's right; cheer me up a bit, dearie. What's the latest style in undertaking?"

"You'll know sooner 'n me if--"

"Aw, Hat, cut it! Wasn't I home in bed last night by eleven?"

"I ain't much on higher mathematics."

"Sure I was. I had to shove you over on your side of the bed; that's how hard you was sleeping."

"A girl can't gad round dancing and rough-housing every night and work eight hours on her feet, and put her lunch money on her back, and not pay up for it. I've seen too many blue-eyed dolls like you get broken. I--"

"Amen!"

Sara Juke rolled her blue eyes upward, and they were full of points of light, as though stars were shining in them; and always her lips trembled to laugh.

"There ain't nothing funny, Sara."

"Oh, Hat, with you like a owl!"

"If I was a girl and had a cough like I've seen enough in this basement get; if I was a girl and my skirtband was getting two inches too big, and I had to lie on my left side to breathe right, and my nightie was all soaked round the neck when I got up in the morning--I wouldn't just laugh and laugh. I'd cry a little--I would."

"That's right, Hat; step on the joy bug like it was a spider. Squash it!"

"I wouldn't just laugh and laugh, and put my lunch money on my back instead of eggs and milk inside of me, and run round all hours to dance-halls with every sporty Charley-boy that comes along."

"You leave him alone! You just cut that! Don't you begin on him!"

"I wouldn't get overheated, and not sleep enough; and--"

"For Pete's sake, Hat! Hire a hall!"

"I should worry! It ain't my grave you're digging."

"Aw, Hat!"

"I 'ain't got your dolly face and your dolly ways with the boys; but I got enough sense to live along decent."

"You're right pretty, I think, Hat."

"Oh, I could daub up, too, and gad with some of that fast gang if I didn't know it don't lead nowheres. It ain't no cinch for a girl to keep her health down here, even when she does live along decent like me, eating regular and sleeping regular, and spending quiet evenings in the room, washing out and mending and pressing and all. It ain't no cinch even then, lemme tell you. Do you think I'd have ever asked a gay bird like you to come over and room with me if I hadn't seen you begin to fade like a piece of calico, just like my sister Lizzie did?"

"I'm taking that iron-tonic stuff like you want and spoiling my teeth, ain't I, Hat? I know you been swell to me and all."

"You ain't going to let up until somebody whispers T.B. in your shell-pink ear; and maybe them two letters will bring

you to your senses."

"T.B.?"

"Yes, T.B."

"Who's he?"

"Gee! you're as smart as a fish on a hook! You oughtta bought a velvet dunce-cap with your lunch money instead of that brown poke-bonnet. T.B. was what I said--T.B."

"Honest, Hat, I dun'no'--"

"For Heaven's sake! *Too Berculosis* is the way the exhibits and the newspapers say it. L-u-n-g-s is another way to spell it. T.B."

"Too Berculosis!" Sara Juke's hand flew to her little breast. "Too Berculosis! Hat, you--you don't--"

"Sure I don't. I ain't saying it's that--only I wanna scare you up a little. I ain't saying it's that; but a girl that lets a cold hang on like you do and runs round half the night, and don't eat right, can make friends with almost anything, from measles to T.B."

Stars came out once more in Sara Juke's eyes, and her lips warmed and curved to their smile. She moistened with her forefinger a yellow spit--curl that lay like a caress on her cheek. "Gee! you oughtta be writing scare heads for the *Evening Gazette!*"

Hattie Krakow ran her hand over her smooth salt-and-pepper hair and sold a marked-down flannelette petticoat.

"I can't throw no scare into you so long as you got him on your mind. Oh, lud! There he starts now--that quickstep dance again!"

A quick red ran up into Miss Juke's hair, and she inclined forward in the attitude of listening.

"The silly! Honest, ain't he the silly? He said he was going to play that for me the first thing this morning. We dance it so swell together and all. Aw, I thought he'd forget. Ain't he the silly--remembering me?"

The red flowed persistently higher.

"Silly ain't no name for him, with his square, Charley-boy face and polished hair; and--"

"You let him alone, Hattie Krakow! What's it to you if--"

"Nothing--except I always say October is my unlucky month, because it was just a year ago that they moved him and the sheet music down to the basement. Honest, I'm going to buy me a pair of earmuffs! I'd hate to tell you how unpopular popular music is with me."

"Huh! You couldn't play on a side-comb, much less play on the piano like Charley does. If I didn't have no more brains than some people--honest, I'd go out and kill a calf for some!"

"You oughtta talk! A girl that 'ain't got no more brains than to gad round every night and every Sunday in foul-smelling, low-ceilinged dance-halls, and wear paper-soled slippers when she oughtta be wearing galoshes, and cheese-cloth waists that ain't even decent, instead of wool undershirts! You oughtta talk about brains--you and Charley Chubb!"

"Yes, I oughtta talk! If you don't like my doings, Hattie Krakow, there ain't no law says we gotta room together. I been shifting for myself ever since I was cash-girl down at Tracy's, and I ain't going to begin being bossed now. If you don't like my keeping steady with Charley Chubb--if you don't like his sheet-music playing--you gotta lump it! I'm a good girl, I am; and if you got anything to in-sinuate; if--"

"Sara Juke, ain't you ashamed!"

"I'm a good girl, I am; and there ain't nobody can cast a reflection on--on--"

Tears trembled in her voice, and she coughed from the deep recesses of her chest, and turned her head away, so that her profile was quivering and her throat swelling with sobs.

"I--I'm a good girl, I am."

"Aw, Sara, don't I know it? Ain't that just where the rub comes? Don't I know it? If you wasn't a good girl would I be caring?"

"I'm a good girl, I am!"

"It's your health, Sara, I'm kicking about. You're getting as pale and skinny as a goop; and for a month already you've been coughing, and never a single evening home to stick your feet in hot water and a mustard plaster on your chest."

"Didn't I take the iron tonic and spoil my teeth?"

"My sister Lizzie--that's the way she started, Sara; right down here in this basement. There never was a prettier little queen down here. Ask any of the old girls. Like you in looks and all; full of vim, too. That's the way she started, Sara. She wouldn't get out in the country on Sundays or get any air in her lungs walking with me evenings. She was all for dance-halls, too, Sara. She--she--'Ain't I told you about her over and over again? 'Ain't I?"

"Sh-h-h! Don't cry, Hat. Yes, yes; I know. She was a swell little kid; all the old girls say so. 'Sh-h-h!'"

"The--the night she died I--I died, too; I--"

"Sh-h-h, dearie!"

"I ain't crying, only--only I can't help remembering."

"Listen! That's the new hit Charley's playing--'Up to Snuff!' Say, 'ain't that got some little swing to it? Dum-dum-tum-tee-tum-m-m! Some little quickstep, ain't it? How that boy reads off by sight! Looka, will you? They got them left-over ribbed undervests we sold last season for forty-nine cents out on the grab table for seventy-four. Looka the mob fighting for 'em! Dum-dum-tum-tee-tum-m-m!"

The day's tide came in. Slowly at first, but toward noon surging through aisles and around bins, up-stairs and down-stairs--in, around, and out. Voices straining to be heard; feet shuffling in an agglomeration of discords--the indescribable roar of humanity, which is like an army that approaches but never arrives. And above it all, insistent as a bugle-note, reaching the basement's breadth, from hardware to candy, from human hair to white goods, the tinny voice of the piano--gay, rollicking.

At five o'clock the patch of daylight above the red-lighted exit door turned taupe, as though a gray curtain had been flung across it; and the girls, with shooting pains in their limbs, braced themselves for the last hour. Shoppers, their bags bulging and their shawls awry, fumbled in bins for a last remnant; hatless, sway-backed women, carrying children, fought for mill ends. Sara Juke stood first on one foot and then on the other to alternate the strain; her hands were hot and dry as flannel, but her cheeks were pink--very pink.

At six o'clock Hattie Krakow untied her black alpaca apron, pinned a hat as nondescript as a bird's nest at an unrakish angle, and slid into a warm, gray jacket.

"Ready, Sara?"

"Yes, Hat." But her voice came vaguely, as through fog.

"I'm going to fix us some stew to-night with them onions Lettie brought up to the room when she moved--mutton stew, with a broth for you, Sara."

"Yes, Hat."

Sara's eyes darted out over the emptying aisles; and, even as she pinned on her velveteen poke-bonnet at a too-swagger angle, and fluffed out a few carefully provided curls across her brow, she kept watch and with obvious subterfuge slid into her little unlined silk coat with a deliberation not her own.

"Coming, Sara?"

"Wait, can't you? My--my hat ain't on right."

"Come on; you're dolled up enough."

"My--my gloves--I--I forgot 'em. You--you can go on, Hat." And she burrowed back beneath the counter.

Miss Krakow let out a snort, as fiery with scorn as though flames were curling on her lips. "Hanging round to see whether he's coming, ain't you? To think they shot Lincoln and let him live! Before I'd run after any man living, much less the excuse of a man like him! A shiny-haired, square-faced little rat like him!"

"I ain't, neither, waiting. I guess I have a right to find my gloves. I--I guess I gotta right. He's as good as you are, and better. I--I guess I gotta right." But the raspberry red of confusion dyed her face.

"No, you ain't waiting! No, no; you ain't waiting," mimicked Miss Krakow, and her voice was like autumn leaves that crackle underfoot.

"Well, then, if you ain't waiting here he comes now. I dare you to come on home with me now, like you ought to."

"I--You go on! I gotta tell him something. I guess I'm my own boss. I have to tell him something."

Miss Krakow folded her well-worn hand-bag under one arm and fastened her black cotton gloves.

"Pf-f-f! What's the use of wasting breath?"

She slipped into the flux of the aisle, and the tide swallowed her and carried her out into the bigger tide of the street and the swifter tide of the city--a flower on the current, her blush withered under the arc-light substitution for sunlight, the petals of her youth thrown to the muddy corners of the city streets.

Sara Juke breathed inward, and under her cheaply pretentious lace blouse a heart, as rebellious as the pink in her cheeks and the stars in her eyes, beat a rapid fantasia; and, try as she would, her lips would quiver into a smile.

"Hello, Charley!"

"Hello yourself, Sweetness!" And, draping himself across the white-goods counter in an attitude as intricate as the letter S, behold Mr. Charley Chubb! Sleek, soap-scented, slim--a satire on the satyr and the haberdasher's latest dash. "Hello, Sweetness!"

"How are you, Charley?"

"Here, gimme your little hand. Shake."

She placed her palm in his, quivering.

You of the classes, peering through lorgnettes into the strange world of the masses, spare that shrug. True, when Charley Chubb's hand closed over Sara Juke's she experienced a flash of goose flesh; but, you of the classes, what of the Van Ness ball last night? Your gown was low, so that your neck rose out from it like white ivory. The conservatory, where trained clematis vines met over your heads, was like a bower of stars; music, his hand, the white glove off, over yours; the suffocating sweetness of clematis blossoms; a fountain throwing fine spray; your neck white as ivory, and--what of the Van Ness ball last night?

Only Sara Juke played her poor little game frankly, and the cards of her heart lay on the counter.

"Charley!" Her voice lay in a veil.

"Was you getting sore, Sweetness?"

"All day you didn't come over."

"Couldn't, Sweetness. Did you hear me let up on the new hit for a minute?"

"It's swell, though, Charley; all the girls was humming it. You play it like lightning, too."

"It must have been written for you, Sweetness. That's what you are, Up to Snuff, eh, Queenie?" He leaned closer, and above his tall, narrow collar dull red flowed beneath the sallow, and his long, white teeth and slick-brushed hair shone in the arc-light. "Eh, Queenie?"

"I gotta go now, Charley. Hattie's waiting home for me." She attempted to pass him and to slip into the outgoing stream of the store, but with a hesitation that belied her. "I--I gotta go, Charley."

He laughed, clapped his hat slightly askew on his polished hair, and slid his arm into hers.

"Forget it! But I had you going, didn't I, sister? Thought I'd forgot about to-night, didn't you, and didn't have the nerve to pipe up? Like fun I forgot!"

"I didn't know, Charley; you not coming over all day and all. I thought maybe your friend didn't give you the tickets like he promised."

"Didn't he? Look! See if he didn't!"

He produced a square of pink cardboard from his waistcoat pocket and she read it, with a sudden lightness underlying her voice:

HIBERNIAN MASQUE AND HOP SUPPER WARDROBE FREE ADMIT GENT AND LADY FIFTY CENTS

"Oh, gee, Charley! And me such a sight in this old waist and all. I didn't know there was supper, too."

"Sure! Hurry, Sweetness, and we'll catch a Sixth Avenue car. We wanna get in on it while the tamales are hot."

She grasped his arm closer, and straightening her velveteen poke-bonnet so that the curls lay pat, together they wormed through the sidewalk crush; once or twice she coughed, with the hollow resonance of a chain drawn upward from a deep well.

"Gee! I bet there'll be a jam!"

"Sure! There's some live crowd down there."

They were in the street-car, swaying, swinging, clutching; hemmed in by frantic, home-going New York, nose to nose, eye to eye, tooth to tooth. Around Sara Juke's slim waist lay Charley Chubb's saving arm, and with each lurch they laughed immoderately, except when she coughed.

"Gee! ain't it the limit? It's a wonder they wouldn't open a window in this car!"

"Nix on that. Whatta you wanna do--freeze a fellow out?"

Her eyes would betray her. "Any old time I could freeze you, Charley."

"Honest?"

"You're the one that freezes me all the time. You're the one that keeps me guessing and guessing where I stand with you."

A sudden lurch and he caught her as she swayed.

"Come, Sweetness, this is our corner. Quit your coughing, there, hon; this ain't no T.B. hop we're going to."

"No what?"

"Come along; hurry! Look at the crowd already."

"This ain't no--what did you say, Charley?"

But they were pushing, shoving, worming into the great lighted entrance of the hall. More lurching, crowding, jamming.

"I'll meet you inside, kiddo, in five minutes. Pick out a red domino; red's my color."

"A red one? Gee! Looka; mine's got black pompons on it. Five minutes, Charley five minutes!"

Flags of all nations and all sizes made a galaxy of the Sixth Avenue hall. An orchestra played beneath an arch of them. Supper, consisting of three-inch-thick sandwiches, tamales, steaming and smelling in their buckets, bottles of beer and soda-water, was spread on a long picnic-table running the entire length of the balcony.

The main floor, big as an armory, airless as a tomb, swarmed with dancers.

After supper a red sateen Pierrette, quivering, teeth flashing beneath a sucky half-mask, bowed to a sateen Pierrot, whose face was as slim as a satyr's and whose smile was as upturned as the eye-slits in his mask.

"Gee! Charley, you look just like a devil in that costume--all red, and your mouth squinted like that!"

"And you look just like a little red cherry, ready to bust."

And they were off in the whirl of the dance, except that the close-packed dancers hemmed them in a swaying mob; and once she fell back against his shoulder, faint.

"Ain't there a--a up-stairs somewheres, Charley, where they got air? All this jam and no windows open! Gee! ain't it hot? Let's go outside where it's cool--let's."

"There you go again! No wonder you got a cold on you--always wanting air on you! Come, Sweetness; this ain't hot. Here, lemme show you the dip I get the girls crazy with. One, two, three--dip! One, two, three--dip! Ugh!"

"Gee! ain't it a jam, though?"

"One, two, three!"

"That's swell, Charley! Quit! You mustn't squeeze me like that till--till you've asked me to be engaged, Charley. We--we ain't engaged yet, are we, Charley?"

"Aw, what difference does that make? You girls make me sick--always wanting to know that."

"It--it makes a lot of difference, Charley."

"There you go on that Amen talk again. All right, then; I won't squeeze you no more, stingy!"

Her step was suddenly less elastic and she lagged on his arm. "I--I never said you couldn't, Charley. Gee! ain't you a great one to get mad so quick! Touchy! I only said not till we're engaged."

He skirted the crowd, guiding her skilfully. "Stingy! Stingy! I know 'em that ain't so stingy as you."

"Charley!"

"What?"

"Aw, I'm ashamed to say it."

"Listen! They're playing the new one--'Up to Snuff!' Faster! Don't make me drag you, kiddo. Faster!"

They were suddenly in the center of the maze, as tight-packed as though an army had conspired to close round them. She coughed, and in her effort of repression, coughed again.

"Charley, I--honest, I--I'm going to keel. I--I can't stand it packed in here--like this."

She leaned to him, with the color drained out of her face; and the crowd of black and pink and red dominoes, gnomes gone mad, pressed, batted, surged.

"Look out, Sweetness! Don't give out in here! They'll crush us out. 'Ain't you got no nerve? Here; don't give out now! Gee! Watch out, there! The lady's sick. Watch out! Here; now sit down a minute and get your wind."

He pressed her shoulders downward and she dropped whitely on a little camp-chair hidden underneath the balcony.

"I gotta get out, Charley; I gotta get out and get air. I feel like I'm going to suffocate in here. It's this old cough takes the breath out of me."

In the foyer she revived a bit and drank gratefully of the water he brought; but the color remained out of her cheeks and the cough would rack her.

"I guess I oughtta go home, Charley."

"Aw, cut it! You ain't the only girl I've seen give out. Sit here and rest a minute and you'll be all right. Great Scott! I came here to dance."

She rose to her feet a bit unsteadily, but smiling. "Fussy! Who said I didn't?"

"That's more like it."

And they were off again to the lilt of the music, but, struggle as she would, the coughing and the dizziness and the heat took hold of her, and at the close of the dance she fainted quietly against his shoulder.

When she finally caught at consciousness, as it passed and repassed her befuddled mind, she was on the floor of the cloak-room, her head pillowed on the skirt of a pink domino.

"There, there, dearie; your young man's waiting outside to take you home."

"I--I'm all right!"

"Certainly you are. The heat done it. Here; lemme help you out of your domino."

"It was the heat done it."

"There; you're all right now. I gotta get back to my dance. You fainted right up against him, dearie; and I seen you keel."

"Gee! ain't I the limit!"

"Here; lemme help on with your coat. Right there he is, waiting."

In the foyer Sara Juke met Charley Chubb shamefacedly. "I spoilt everything, didn't I?"

"I guess you couldn't help it. All right?"

"Yes, Charley." She met the air gratefully, worming her little hand into the curve of his elbow. "Gee! I feel fine now."

"Come; here's a car."

"Let's walk up Sixth Avenue, Charley; the air feels fine."

"All right."

"You ain't sore, are you, Charley? It was so jammed dancing, anyway."

"I ain't sore."

"It was the heat done it."

"Yeh."

"Honest, it's grand to be outdoors, ain't it? The stars and--and chilliness and--and--all!"

"Listen to the garden stuff!"

"Silly!" She squeezed his arm, and drew back, shamefaced.

His spirits rose. "You're a right loving little thing when you wanna be."

They laughed in duet; and before the plate-glass window of a furniture emporium they paused to regard a monthly-payment display, designed to represent the \$49.50 completely furnished sitting-room, parlor, and dining-room of the home felicitous--a golden-oak room, with an incandescent fire glowing right merrily in the grate; a lamp redly diffusing the light of home; a plaster-of-Paris Cupid shooting a dart from the mantelpiece; and last, two figures of connubial bliss, smiling and waxen, in rocking-chairs, their waxen infant, block-building on the floor, completing the picture.

"Gee! it looks as snug as a bug in a rug! Looka what it says too: 'You Get the Girl; We'll Do the Rest!' Some little advertisement, ain't it? I got the girl all right--'ain't I, hon?'"

"Aw!"

"Look at the papa--slippers and all! And the kid! Look at the kid, Sweetness."

Her confusion nearly choked her and her rapid breath clouded the window-glass. "Yeh, Charley! Looka the little kid! Ain't he cute?"

An Elevated train crashed over their heads, drowning out her words; but her smile, which flickered like light over her face, persisted and her arm crept back into his. At each shop window they lingered, but the glow of the first one remained with her.

"Look, Sweetness--'Red Swag, the Train King! Performance going on now.' Wanna go in?"

"Not to-night. Let's stay outside."

"Anything your little heart de-sires."

They bought hot chestnuts, city harbingers of autumn, from a vender, and let fall the hulls as they walked. They drank strawberry ice-cream soda, pink with foam. Her resuscitation was complete; his spirits did not wane.

"I gotta like a queen pretty much not to get sore at a busted evening like this. It's a good thing the ticket didn't cost me nothing."

"Ain't it, though?"

"Look! What's in there--a exhibit?"

They paused before a white-lighted store-front, and read, laboriously:

FREE TUBERCULOSIS EXHIBIT

TO EDUCATE THE PEOPLE HOW TO PREVENT CONSUMPTION

"Oh!" She dragged at his arm.

"Aw, come on, Sweetness; nothing but a lot of T.B.'s."

"Let's--let's go in. See, it's free. Looka! it's all lit up and all; see, pictures and all."

"Say, ain't I enough of a dead one without dragging me in there? Free! I bet they pinch you for something before you get out."

"Come on, Charley. I never did see a place like this."

"Aw, they're all over town."

He followed her in surlily enough and then, with a morbid interest, round a room hung with photographs of victims in various emaciated stages of the white plague.

"Oh! Oh! Ain't it awful? Ain't it awful? Read them symptoms. Almost with nothing it--it begins. Night--sweats and losing weight and coughing, and--oh--"

"Look! Little kids and all! Thin as matches."

"Aw, see, a poor little shaver like that! Look! It says sleeping in that dirty room without a window gave it to him. Ugh! that old man! Self-indulgence and intemperance.' Looka that girl in the tobacco--factory. Oh! Oh! Ain't it awful! Dirty shops and stores, it says; dirty saloons and dance-halls--weak lungs can't stand them."

"Let's get out of here."

"Aw, look! How pretty she is in this first picture; and look at her here--nothing but a stack of bones on a stretcher. Aw! Aw!"

"Come on!"

"Courage is very important, it says. Consumptives can be helped and many are cured. Courage is--"

"Come on; let's get out of this dump. Say, it's a swell night for a funeral."

She grasped at his coat sleeve, pinching the flesh with it, and he drew away half angrily.

"Come on, I said."

"All right!"

A thin line filed past them, grim-faced, silent. At the far end of the room, statistics in red inch-high type ran columnwise down the wall's length. She read, with a gasp in her throat:

1. Ten thousand people died from tuberculosis in the city of New York last year.
2. Two hundred thousand people died from tuberculosis in the United States last year.
3. Records of the Health Department show 31,631 living cases of tuberculosis in the city of New York.
4. Every three minutes some one in the United States dies from consumption.

"Oh, Charley, ain't it awful!"

At a desk a young man, with skin as pink as though a strong wind had whipped it into color, distributed pamphlets to the outgoing visitors--a thin streamlet of them; some cautious, some curious, some afraid.

"Come on; let's hurry out of here, Sweetness. My lung's hurting this minute."

They hurried past the desk; but the young man with the clear, pink skin reached over the heads of an intervening group, waving a long printed booklet toward the pair.

"Circular, missy?"

Sara Juke straightened, with every nerve in her body twanging like a plucked violin-string, and her eyes met the clear eyes of the young clerk.

Like a doll automaton she accepted the booklet from him; like a doll automaton she followed Charley Chubb out into the street, and her limbs were trembling so she could scarcely stand.

"Gotta hand it to you, Sweetness. Even made a hit on the fellow in the lung-shop! He didn't hand me out no literachure. Some little hit!"

"I gotta go home now, Charley."

"It's only ten."

"I better go, Charley. It ain't Saturday night."

At the stoop of her rooming-house they lingered. A honey-colored moon hung like a lantern over the block-long row of shabby-fronted houses. On her steps and to her fermenting fancy the shadow of an ash-can sprawled like a prostrate human being.

"Charley!" She clutched his arm.

"Whatcha scared about, Sweetness?"

"Oh, Charley, I--I feel creepy to-night."

"That visit to the morgue was enough to give anybody the blind staggers."

Her pamphlet was tight in her hand. "You ain't mad at me, Charley?"

He stroked her arm, and the taste of tears found its way to her mouth.

"I'm feeling so silly-like to-night, Charley."

"You're all in, kiddo." In the shadow he kissed her.

"Charley, you--you mustn't, unless we're--engaged." But she could not find the strength to unfold herself from his arms. "You mustn't, Charley!"

"Great little girl you are, Sweetness--one great little girl!"

"Aw, Charley!"

"And, to show you that I like you, I'm going to make up for this to-morrow night. A real little Saturday-night blow! And don't forget Sunday afternoon--two o'clock for us, down at Crissey's Hall. Two o'clock."

"Two o'clock."

"Good!"

"Oh, Charley, I--"

"What, Sweetness?"

"Oh, nothing; I--I'm just silly to-night."

Her hand lay on his arm, white in the moonlight and light as a leaf; and he kissed her again, scorching her lips.

"Good night, Sweetness."

"Good night, Charley."

Then up three flights of stairs, through musty halls and past closed doors, their white china knobs showing through the darkness, and up to the fourth-floor rear, and then on tiptoe into a long, narrow room, with the moonlight flowing in.

Clothing lay about in grotesque heaps--a woman's blouse was flung across the back of a chair and hung limply; a pair of shoes stood beside the bed in the attitude of walking--tired-looking shoes, run down at the heels and skinned at the toes. And on the far side of the three-quarter bed the hump of an outstretched figure, face turned from the light, with sparse gray-and-black hair flowing over the pillow.

Carefully, to save the slightest squeak, Sara Juke undressed, folded her little mound of clothing across the room's second chair, groping carefully by the stream of moonlight. Severe as a sibyl in her straight-falling nightdress, her hair spreading over her shoulders, her bare feet pattered on the cool matting. Then she slid into bed lightly, scarcely raising the covers. From the mantelpiece the alarm-clock ticked with emphasis.

An hour she lay there. Once she coughed, and smothered it in her pillow. Two hours. She slipped from under the covers and over to the littered dresser. The pamphlet lay on top of her gloves; she carried it to the window and, with

her limbs trembling and sending ripples down her nightgown, read it. Then again, standing there by the window in the moonlight, she quivered so that her knees bent under her.

After a while she raised the window slowly and without a creak, and a current of cool air rushed in and over her before she could reach the bedside.

On her pillow Hattie Krakow stirred reluctantly, her weary senses battling with the pleasant lethargy of sleep; but a sudden nip in the air stung her nose and found out the warm crevices of the bed. She stirred and half opened her eyes.

"For Gawd's sake, Sara, are you crazy? Put that window down! Tryin' to freeze us out? Opening a window with her cough and all! Put it down! Put--it--down!"

Sara Juke rose and slammed it shut, slipping back into the cold bed with teeth that clicked. After a while she slept; but lightly, with her mouth open and her face upturned. And after a while she woke to full consciousness all at once, and with a cough on her lips. Her gown at the yoke was wet; and her neck, where she felt it, was damp with cold perspiration.

"Oh--oh--Hattie! Oh--oh!"

She burrowed under her pillow to ease the trembling that seized her. The moon had passed on, and darkness, which is allied to fear, closed her in--the fear of unthinking youth who knows not that the grave is full of peace; the fear of abundant life for senile death; the cold agony that comes in the night-watches, when the business of the day is but a dream and Reality visits the couch.

Deeper burrowed Sara Juke, trembling with chill and night-sweat.

Drowsily Hattie Krakow turned on her pillow, but her senses were too weary to follow her mind's dictate.

"Sara! 'Smatter, Sara? 'Smat-ter?" Hattie's tired hand crept toward her friend; but her volition would not carry it across and it fell inert across the coverlet. "'Smatter, dearie?"

"N-nothing."

"'Smat-ter, dear-ie?"

"N-nothing."

* * * * *

In the watches of the night a towel flung across the bedpost becomes a gorilla crouching to spring; a tree-branch tapping at the window an armless hand, beckoning. In the watches of the night fear is a panther across the chest, sucking the breath; but his eyes cannot bear the light of day, and by dawn he has shrunk to cat size. The ghastly dreams of Orestes perished with the light; phosphorus is yellowish and waxlike by day.

So Sara Juke found new courage with the day, and in the subbasement of the Titanic Store, the morning following, her laughter was ready enough. But when the midday hour arrived she slipped into her jacket, past the importunities of Hattie Krakow, and out into the sun-lashed noonday swarm of Sixth Avenue.

Down one block--two, three; then a sudden pause before a narrow store-front liberally placarded with invitatory signs to the public, and with a red cross blazoning above the doorway. And Sara Juke, whose heart was full of fear, faltered, entered.

The same thin file passed round the room, halting, sauntering, like grim visitors in a grim gallery. At a front desk a sleek young interne, tiptilted in a swivel chair, read a pink sheet through horn-rimmed glasses.

Toward the rear the young man whose skin was the wind-lashed pink sorted pamphlets and circulars in tall, even piles on his desk.

Round and round the gallery walked Sara Juke; twice she read over the list of symptoms printed in inch-high type; her heart lay within her as though icy dead, and her eyes would blur over with tears. Once, when she passed the rear desk, the young man paused in his stacking and regarded her with a warming glance of recognition.

"Hello!" he said. "You back?"

"Yes." Her voice was the thin cry of quail.

"You must like our little picture-gallery, eh?"

"Oh! Oh!" She caught at the edge of his desk, and tears lay heavy in her eyes.

"Eh?"

"Yes; I--I like it. I wanna buy it for my yacht." Her ghastly simulacrum of a jest died in her throat; and he said, quickly, a big blush suffusing his face:

"I was only fooling, missy. You 'ain't got the scare, have you?"

"The scare?"

"Yes; the bug? You ain't afraid you've ate the germ, are you?"

"I--I dun'no'."

"Pshaw! There's a lot of 'em comes in here more scared than hurt, missy. Never throw a scare till you've had a examination. For all you know, you got hay fever, eh! Hay fever!" And he laughed as though to salve his words.

"I--I got all them things on the red-printed list, I tell you. I--I got 'em all, night-sweats and all. I--I got 'em."

"Sure you got 'em, missy; but that don't need to mean nothing much."

"I got 'em, I tell you."

"Losing weight?"

"Feel."

He inserted two fingers in her waistband. "Huh!"

"You a doctor?"

He performed a great flourish. "I ain't in the profesh, missy. I'm only chief clerk and bottle-washer round here; but--"

"Where is the doctor? That him reading down there? Can I ask him? I--Oh! Ain't I scared!"

He placed his big, cool hand over her wrist and his face had none of its smile. "I know you are, little missy. I seen it in you last night when you and--and--"

"My--my friend."

--your friend was in here. There's thousands come in here with the scare on, and most of 'em with a reason; but I picked you out last night from the gang. Funny thing, but right away I picked you. 'A pretty little thing like her--if you'll excuse me for saying it--'a pretty little thing like her,' I says to myself. 'And I bet she 'ain't got nobody to steer her!'"

"Honest, did you?"

"Gee! it ain't none of my put-in; but when I seen you last night--funny thing--but when I seen you, why, you just kinda hit me in the eye; and, with all that gang round me, I says to myself: 'Gee! a pretty little thing like her, scared as a gazelle, and so pretty and all; and no one to give her the right steer!'"

"Aw, you seen me?"

"Sure! Wasn't it me reached out the pamphlet to you? You had on that there same cutey little hat and jacket and all."

"Does it cost anything to talk to the doctor down there?"

"Forget it! Go right down and he'll give you a card to the Victoria Clinic. I know them all over there and they'll look you

over right, little missy, and steer you. Aw, don't be scared; there ain't nothing much wrong with you--maybe a sore spot, that's all. That cough ain't a double-lunger. You run over to the clinic."

"I gotta go back to the store now."

"After store, then?"

"Free?"

"Sure! Old Doc Strauss is on after five, too. If I ain't too nervy I'm off after six myself. I could meet you after and we could talk over what he tells you--if I ain't too nervy?"

"I--"

"Blaney's my name--Eddie Blaney. Ask anybody round here about me. I--I could meet you, little missy, and--"

"I can't to-night, Mr. Blaney. I gotta go somewheres."

"Aw!"

"I gotta."

"To-morrow? To-morrow's Sunday, little missy. There's a swell lot of country I bet you 'ain't never seen, and Old Doc Strauss is going to tell you to get acquainted with it pretty soon."

"Country?"

"Yes. That's what you need--outdoors; that's what you need. You got a color like all indoors--pretty, but putty."

"You--you don't think there's nothing much the matter with me, do you, Mr. Blaney?"

"Sure I don't. Why, I got a bunch of Don'ts for you up my sleeve that'll color you up like drug-store daub."

Tears and laughter trembled in her voice. "You mean that the outdoor stuff will do it, Mr. Blaney?"

"That's the talk!"

"But you--you ain't the doctor."

"I ain't, but I 'ain't been deaf and dumb and blind round here for three years. I can pick 'em every time. You're taking your stitch in time. You 'ain't even got a wheeze in you. Why, I bet you 'ain't never seen red!"

"No!" she cried, with quick comprehension.

"Sure you 'ain't!"

More tears and laughter in her voice. "I'm going to-night, then--at six, Mr. Blaney."

"Good! And to-morrow? There's a lot of swell country and breathing-space round here I'd like to introduce you to. I bet you don't know whether Ingleside Woods is kindling or a breakfast food. Now do you?"

"No."

"Ever had a chigger on you?"

"Huh?"

"Ever sleep outdoors in a bag?"

"Say, whatta you think I am?"

"Ever seen the sun rise, or took the time to look up and see several dozen or a couple of thousand or so stars glittering

all at once?"

"Aw, come off! We ain't doing team-work in vaudeville."

"Gee! wouldn't I like to take you out and be the first one to make you acquainted with a few of the things that are happening beyond Sixth Avenue--if I ain't too nervy, little missy?"

"I gotta go somewhere at two o'clock to-morrow afternoon, Mr.--Mr. Blaney; but I can go in the morning--if it ain't going to look like I'm a freshie."

"In the morning! Swell! But where--who--" She scribbled on a slip of paper and fluttered it into his hand. "Sara Juke! Some little name. Gee! I know right where you live. I know a lot of cases that come from round there. I used to live near there myself, round on Third Avenue. I'll call round at nine, little missy. I'm going to introduce you to the country, eh?"

"They won't hurt at the clinic, will they, Mr. Blaney? I'm losing my nerve again."

"Shame on a pretty little thing like you losing her nerve! Gee! I've seen 'em come in here all pale round the gills and with nothing but the whooping-cough. There was a little girl in here last week who thought she was ready for Arizona on a canvas bed; and it wasn't nothing but her rubber skirtband had stretched. Shame on you, little missy! Don't you get scared! Wait till you see what I'm going to show you out in the country to-morrow--leaves turning red and all. We're going to have a heart-to-heart talk out there--eh? A regular lung-to-lung talk!"

"Aw, Mr. Blaney! Ain't you killing!" She hurried down the room, laughing.

* * * * *

At Sharkey's on Saturday night the entire basement cafe and dance-hall assumed a hebdomadal air of expectancy; extra marble-topped tables were crowded about the polished square of dancing-space; the odor of hops and sawdust and cookery hung in visible mists over the bar.

Girls, with white faces and red lips and bare throats, sat alone at tables or tete-a-tete with men too old or too young, and ate; but drank with keener appetite.

A self-playing piano performed beneath a large painting of an undraped Psyche; a youth with yellow fingers sang of Love. A woman whose shame was gone acquired a sudden hysteria at her lone table over her milky-green drink, and a waiter hustled her out none too gently.

In the foyer at seven o'clock Sara Juke met Charley Chubb, and he slid up quite frankly behind her and kissed her on the lips. At Sharkey's a miss is as good as her kiss!

"You--you quit! You mustn't!"

She sprang back, quivering, her face cold-looking and blue; and he regarded her with his mouth quirked.

"Huh! Hoity-toity, ain't you? Hoity-toity and white-faced and late, all at once, ain't you? Say, them airs don't get across with me. Come on! I'm hungry."

"I didn't mean to yell, Charley--only you scared me. I thought maybe it was one of them fresh guys that hang round here; all of 'em look so dopey and all. I--You know I never was strong for this place, Charley."

"Beginning to nag, are you?"

"No, no, Charley. No, no!"

They drew up at a small table.

"No fancy keeling act to-night, kiddo. I ain't taking out a hospital ward, you know. Gad! I like you, though, when you're white-looking like this! Why'd you dodge me at noon to-day and to-night after closing? New guy? I won't stand for it, you know, you little white-faced Sweetness, you!"

"I hadda go somewheres, Charley. I came near not coming to-night, neither, Charley."

"What'll you eat?"

"I ain't hungry."

"Thirsty, eh?"

"No."

He regarded her over the rim of the smirchy bill of fare. "What are you, then, you little white-faced, big-eyed devil?"

"Charley, I--I got something to--to tell you. I--"

"Bring me a lamb stew and a beer, light. What'll you have, little white-face?"

"Some milk and--"

"She means with suds on, waiter."

"No--no; milk, I said--milk over toast. Milk toast--I gotta eat it. Why don't you lemme talk, Charley? I gotta tell you."

He was suddenly sober. "What's hurting you? One milk toast, waiter. Tell them in the kitchen the lady's teeth hurt her. What's up, Sweetness?" And he leaned across the table to imprint a fresh kiss on her lips.

"Don't--don't--don't! For Gawd's sake, don't!"

She covered her face with her hands; and such a trembling seized her that they fell pitifully away again and showed her features, each distorted. "You mustn't, Charley! Mustn't do that again, not--not for three months--you--you mustn't."

He leaned across the table; his voice was like sleet--cold, thin, cutting: "What's the matter--going to quit?"

"No--no--no!"

"Got another guy you like better?"

"Oh! Oh!"

"A queenie can't quit me first and get away with it, kiddo. I may be a soft-fingered sort of fellow, but a queenie can't quit me first and get away with it. Ask 'em about me round here; they know me. If anybody in this little duet is going to do the quitting act first it ain't going to be you. What's the matter? Out with it!"

"Charley, it ain't that--I swear it ain't that!"

"What's hurting you, then?"

"I gotta tell you. We gotta go easy for a little while. We gotta quit doing the rounds for a while till--only for a little while. Three months he said would fix me. A grand old doc he was!

"I been to the clinic, Charley. I hadda go. The cough--the cough was cutting me in two. It ain't like me to go keeling like I did. I never said much about it; but, nights and all, the sweats and the cough and the shooting pains was cutting me in two. We gotta go easy for a while, Charley; just--"

"You sick, Sara?" His fatty-white face lost a shade of its animation.

"Sick?"

"But it ain't, Charley. On his word he promised it ain't! A grand old doc, with whiskers--he promised me that. I--I am just beginning; but the stitch was in time. It ain't a real case yet, Charley. I swear on my mother's curl of hair it ain't."

"Ain't what? Ain't what?"

"It ain't! Air, he said, right living--early hours and all. I gotta get out of the basement. He'll get me a job. A grand old man! Windows open; right living. No--no dancing and all, for a while, Charley. Three months only, Charley; and then--"

"What, I say--"

"It ain't, Charley! I swear it ain't. Just one--the left one--a little sore down at the base--the bottom. Charley, quit looking at me like that! It ain't a real case--it ain't; it ain't!"

"It ain't what?"

"The--the T.B. Just the left one; down at--"

"You--you--" An oath as hot as a live coal dropped from his lips, and he drew back, strangling. "You--you got it, and you're letting me down easy. You got it, and it's catching as hell! You got it, you white devil, and--and you're trying to lie out of it--you--you--"

"Charley! Charley!"

"You got it, and you been letting me eat it off your lips! You devil, you! You devil, you! You devil, you!"

"Charley, I--"

"I could kill you! Lemme wash my mouth! You got it; and if you got it I got it! I got it! I got it! I--I--"

He rushed from the table, strangling, stuttering, staggering; and his face was twisted with fear.

For an hour she sat there, waiting, her hands folded in her lap and her eyes growing larger in her face. The dish of stew took on a thin coating of grease and the beer died in the glass. The waiter snickered. After a while she paid for the meal out of her newly opened wage-envelope and walked out into the air.

Once on the street, she moaned audibly into her handkerchief. There is relief in articulation. Her way lay through dark streets where figures love to slink in the shadows. One threw a taunt at her and she ran. At the stoop of her rooming-house she faltered, half fainting and breathing deep from exhaustion, her head thrown back and her eyes gazing upward.

Over the narrow street stars glittered, dozens and myriads of them.

* * * * *

Literature has little enough to say of the heartaches and the heartburns of the Sara Jukes and the Hattie Krakows and the Eddie Blaneys. Medical science concedes them a hollow organ for keeping up the circulation. Yet Mrs. Van Ness's heartbreak over the death of her Chinese terrier, Wang, claims a first-page column in the morning edition; her heartburn--a complication of midnight terrapin and the strain of her most recent role of correspondent--obtains her a *suite de luxe* in a private sanitarium.

Vivisectionists believe the dog is less sensitive to pain than man; so the social vivisectionists, in problem plays and best sellers, are more concerned with the heartaches and heartburns of the classes. But analysis would show that the sediment of salt in Sara Juke's and Mrs. Van Ness's tears is equal.

Indeed, when Sara Juke stepped out of the streetcar on a golden Sunday morning in October, her heart beat higher and more full of emotion than Mrs. Van Ness could find at that breakfast hour, reclining on her fine linen pillows, an electric massage and a four-dollars-an-hour masseuse forcing her sluggish blood to flow.

Eddie Blaney gently helped Sara to alight, cupping the point of her elbow in his hand; and they stood huddled for a moment by the roadway while the car whizzed past, leaving them in the yellow and ochre, saffron and crimson, countryside.

"Gee! Gee whiz!"

"See! I told you. And you not wanting to come when I called for you this morning--you trying to dodge me and the swellest Indian-summer Sunday on the calendar!"

"Looka!"

"Wait! We 'ain't started yet, if you think this is swell."

"Oh! Let's go over in them woods. Let's." Her lips were apart and pink crept into her cheeks, effacing the dark rims of pain beneath her eyes.

"Let's hurry."

"Sure; that's where we're going--right over in there, where the woods look like they're on fire; but, gee! this ain't nothing to the country places I know round here. This ain't nothing. Wait!"

The ardor of the inspired guide was his, and with each exclamation from her the joy of his task doubled itself.

"If you think this is great, wait--just you wait. Gee! if you like this, what would you have said to the farm? Wait till we get to the top of the hill."

Fallen leaves, crisp as paper, crackled pleasantly under their feet; and through the haze that is October's veil glowed a reddish sun, vague as an opal. A footpath crawled like a serpent through the woods and they followed it, kicking up the leaves before them, pausing, darting, exclaiming.

"I--Honest, Mr. Blaney, I--"

"Eddie!"

"Eddie, I--I never did feel so--I never was so--so--Aw, I can't say it."

Tears sprang to her eyes.

"Sure you never was. I never was, neither, before--before--"

"Before what?"

"Before I had to."

"Had to?"

"Yeh; both of them. Bleeding all the time. Didn't see nothing but red for 'leven months."

"You!"

"Yeh; three years ago. Looked like Arizona on a stretcher for me."

"You--so big and strong and all!"

He smiled at her and his teeth flashed. "Gad! little girl, if you got a right to be scared, whatta you think I had? I seen your card over at the clinic last night, and you 'ain't got no right to have that down-and-out look on you had this morning. If you think you got something to be scared at you looka my old card at the clinic some day; they keep it for show. You oughtta seen me the day I quit the shipping-room, right over at the Titanic, too, and then see whether you got something to be scared at."

"You--you used to work there?"

"Six years."

"I--I ain't scared no more, Eddie; honest, I ain't!"

"Gee! I should say not! They ain't even sending you up to the farm."

"No, no! They're going to get me a job. A regular outdoor, on-the-level kind of a job. A grand old doc, with whiskers! I ain't a regular one, Eddie; just the bottom of one lung don't make a regular one."

"Well, I guess not, poor little missy. Well, I guess not."

"Three months, he said, Eddie. Three months of right living like this, and air and all, and I'll be as round as a peach, he said. Said it hisself, without me asking--that's how scared I was. Round as a peach!"

"You can't beat that gang over there at the clinic, little missy. They took me out of the department when all the spring-water I knew about ran out of a keg. Even when they got me out on the farm--a grown-up guy like me--for a week I thought the crow in the rooster was a sidewalk faker. You can't beat that, little missy."

"He's a grand old man, with whiskers, that's going to get me the job. Then in three months I--"

"Three months nothing! That gang won't let you slip back after the three months. They took a extra shine to me because I did the prize-pupil stunt; but they won't let anybody slip back if they give 'em half a chance. When they got me sound again, did they ship me back to the shipping department in the subbasement? Not muchy! Looka me now, little missy! Clerk in their biggest display; in three months a raise to ninety dollars. Can you beat it? Ninety dollars would send all the shipping-clerks of the world off in a faint."

"Gee! it--it's swell!"

"And--"

"Look! Look!"

"Persimmons!" A golden mound of them lay at the base of a tree, piled up against the hole, bursting, brown.

"Persimmons! Here; taste one. They're fine."

"Eat 'em?"

"Sure!"

She bit into one gently; then with appetite. "M-m-m! Good!"

"Want another?"

"M-m-m--my mouth! Ouch! My m-mouth!"

"Gee! you cute little thing, you! See, my mouth's the same way, too. Feels like a knot. Gee! you cute little thing, you--all puckered up and all."

And linking her arm in his they crunch-crunched over the brittle leaves and up a hillside to a plateau of rock overlooking the flaming country; and from the valley below smoke from burning mounds of leaves wound in spirals, its pungency drifting to them.

"See that tree there? It's a oak. Look; from a little acorn like this it grew. See, this is a acorn, and in the start that tree wasn't no bigger than this little thing."

"Quit your kidding!" But she smiled and her lips were parted sweetly; and always unformed tears would glaze her eyes.

"Here, sit here, little lady. Wait till I spread this newspaper out. Gee! Don't I wish you didn't have to go back to the city by two o'clock, little lady! We could make a great day of it here, out in the country; lunch at a farm and see the sun set and all. Some day of it we could make if--"

"I--I don't have to go back, Eddie."

His face expanded into his widest smile. "Gee! that's great! That's just great!"

Silence.

"What you thinking of, little lady, sitting there so pretty and all?"

"N-nothing."

"Nothing? Aw, surely something!"

A tear formed and zigzagged down her cheek. "Nothing, honest; only I--I feel right happy."

"That's just how you oughtta feel, little lady."

"In three months, if--Aw, ain't I the nut?"

"It'll be a big Christmas, won't it, little missy, for both of us? A big Christmas for both of us; you as sound and round as a peach again, and me shooting up like a skyrocket on the pay-roll."

A laugh bubbled to her lips before the tear was dry. "In three months I won't be a T.B., not even a little bit."

"Sh-h-h! On the farm we wasn't allowed to say even that. We wasn't supposed to even know what them letters mean."

"Don't you know what they mean, Eddie?"

"Sure I do!" He leaned toward her and placed his hand lightly over hers.

"T.B.--True Blue--that's what they mean, little lady."

She could feel the veins in his palm throbbing.

SUMMER RESOURCES

At seven o'clock the Seaside Hotel struggled into full dress--ladies emerged from siestas and curlpapers, dowagers wormed into straight fronts and spread the spousal vestments of boiled shirt, U-shaped waistcoat *et al.* across the bed. Slim young men in the swelter of their inside two-fifty-a-day rooms carefully extracted their braided-at-the-seams trousers from beneath the mattresses and removed trees from patent-leather pumps.

At seven-thirty young girls fluttered in and out from the dining-room like brilliant night moths, the straight-front dowagers, U-vested spouses, and slim young men in braided trousers seams crowded about the desk for the influx of mail, and read their tailor and modiste duns with the rapt and misleading expression that suggested a love rune rather than a "Please remit." Interested mothers elbowed for the most desirable veranda rockers; the blather of voices, the emph-umph-umph of the three-nights-a-week orchestra and the remote pound of the ocean joined in united effort.

At eight o'clock Miss Myra Sternberger yawned in her wicker rocker and raised two round and bare-to-the-elbow arms high above her head.

"Gee!" she said. "This place is so slow it gets on my nerves--it does!"

Mrs. Blondheim, who carried toast away from the breakfast-table concealed beneath a napkin for her daughter who remained abed until noon, paused in her Irish crochet, spread a lace wheel upon her ample knee, and regarded it approvingly.

"What you got to kick about, Miss Sternberger? Didn't I see you in the surf this morning with that shirtwaist drummer from Cincinnati?"

"Mr. Eckstein--oh, I been meetin' him down here in July for two years. He's a nice fellow an' makes a good livin'--but he ain't my style."

"Girls are too particular nowadays. Take my Bella--why, that girl's had chances you wouldn't believe! But she always says to me, she says, 'Mamma, I ain't goin' to marry till Mr. Right comes along.'"

"That's just the same way with me."

"My Bella's had chances--not one, but six. You can ask anybody who knows us in New York the chances that goil has had."

"I ain't in a hurry to take the first man that asks me, neither."

Mrs. Blondheim wrapped the forefinger of her left hand with mercerized cotton thread, and her needle flashed deftly.

"What about the little Baltimore fellow that went away yesterday? I seen he was keepin' you pretty busy."

"Aw, Mrs. Blondheim, can't a girl have a good time with a fellow without gettin' serious?"

But she giggled in pleased self-consciousness and pushed her combs into place--Miss Sternberger wore her hair oval about her face like Mona Lisa; her cheeks were pink-tinted, like the lining of a conch-shell.

"My Bella always says a goil can't be too careful at these here summer resorts--that's why she ain't out every night like some of these goils. She won't go out with a young man till she knows he comes from nice people."

Miss Sternberger patted the back of her hand against her mouth and stifled a yawn.

"One thing I must say for my Bella--no matter where I take that goil, everybody says what a nice, retirin' goil she is!"

"Bella does retire rather early," agreed Miss Sternberger in tones drippingly sweet.

"I try to make her rest up in summer," pursued Mrs. Blondheim, unpunctured. "You goils wear yourselves out--nothin' but beaus, beaus all the time. There ain't a night in New York that my Bella ain't out with some young man. I always say to her, 'Bella, the theaters ought to give you a commission.'"

Miss Sternberger rocked.

"Where did you say you live in New York, Miss Sternberger?"

"West One Hundred and Eleventh Street."

"Oh yes--are you related to the Morris Sternbergers in the boys'-pants business?"

"I think--on my father's side."

"Honest, now! Carrie Sternberger married my brother-in-law; and they're doin' grand, too! He's built up a fine business there. Ain't this a small woild after all!"

"It is that," agreed Miss Sternberger. "Why, last summer I was eatin' three meals a day next to my first cousin and didn't know it."

"Look!" said Mrs. Blondheim. "There's those made-up Rosenstein goils comin' out of the dinin'-room. Look at the agony they put on, would you! I knew 'em when they were livin' over their hair-store on Twenty-thoid Street. I wonder where my Bella is!"

"That's a stylish messaline the second one's got on, all right. I think them beaded tunics are swell."

"If it hadn't been for the false-hair craze old man Rosenstein wouldn't--"

Mrs. Blondheim leaned forward in her chair; her little flowered-silk work-bag dropped to the floor. "There's Bella now! Honest, that Mr. Arnheim 'ain't left her once to-day, and he only got here this morning, too! Such a fine young man, the clerk says; he's been abroad six months and just landed yesterday--and been with her all day. When I think of the chances that goil had. Why, Marcus Finberg, who was down here last week, was crazy about her!"

"Did you say that fellow's name was Arnheim?"

"Yes. 'Ain't you heard of the Arnheim models? He's a grand boy, the clerk says, and the swellest importer of ladies' wear in New York."

Miss Sternberger leaned forward in her chair. "Is that Simon Arnheim?"

"Sure. He's the one that introduced the hobble skoit. My Bella was one of the foist to wear one. There ain't a fad that he don't go over to Europe and get. He made a fortune off the hobble skoit alone."

"Is that so?"

"Believe me, if he wasn't all right my Bella wouldn't let him hang on that way."

"I've heard of him."

"I wish you could see that Babette Dreyfous eying my Bella! She's just green because Bella's got him."

"Do you use the double stitch in your crochet, Mrs. Blondheim? That's a pretty pattern you're workin' on."

"Yes. I've just finished a set of doilies you'd pay twenty-five dollars for anywhere."

Miss Sternberger rose languidly to her feet. "Well," she said, "I guess

"I'll take a stroll and go up to bed."

"Don't be so fidgety, Miss Sternberger; sit down by me and talk."

Miss Sternberger smiled. "I'll see you later, Mrs. Blondheim; and don't forget that preparation I was tellin' you about--Sloand's Mosquito Skit. Just rub the bottle stopper over your pillow and see if it don't work."

She moved away with the dignity of an emperor moth, slim and supple-hipped in a tight-wrapped gown.

The Seaside Hotel lobby leaned forward in its chairs; young men moved their feet from the veranda rail and gazed after her; pleasantries fell in her pathway as roses before a queen.

A splay-mouthed youth, his face and neck sunburnt to a beefy red, tugged at her gold-colored scarf as she passed.

"Oh, you Myra!" he sang.

"Quit your kiddin', Izzy!" she parried back. "Who was that blonde I seen you with down at the beach this mornin'?"

A voluptuous brunette in a rose-pink dress and diamonds dragged her down to the arm of her rocker.

"I got a trade--last for you, Myra."

"For me?"

"Yes."

"Give it to me, Clara."

"No, I said a trade--and a dandy, too!"

"Who from--man?"

"Yes."

"Well, I got one for you, too--Leon Eckstein says he thinks you're an awfully sweet girl and will make some man a grand wife."

Clara giggled and fingered the gold-fringe edging of Miss Sternberger's sleeve. She spoke slowly and stressed each word alike.

"Well, there's a fellow just got here from Paris yesterday--says you sure know how to dress and that you got a swell figure."

"Who said it?"

"Guess."

"I should know!"

"That fellow over there with Bella Blondheim--the one with the smooth face and grayish hair. I hear he's a swell New York fellow in the importin' business."

"How'd Bella grab him?"

"She's been holdin' on to him like a crawfish all day. She won't let anybody get near him--neither will her mother."

"Here comes Izzy over here after me! If there's one fellow I can't stand it's him."

Miss Sternberger moved away with her chin tilted at a sharp angle. At a turn in the veranda she came suddenly upon Miss Bella Blondheim and a sleek, well-dressed young man with grayish hair. Miss Blondheim's hand was hooked with a deadlock clutch to the arm of her companion.

Miss Sternberger threw herself before them like a melodrama queen flagging a train. "Hello, Bella!" she said in a voice as low as a cello.

Miss Blondheim, who had once sold the greatest number of aprons at a charity bazar, turned cold eyes upon the intruder.

"Hello, Myra!" she said in cool tones of dismissal.

There was a pause; the color swept up and surged over Miss Blondheim's face.

"Are you finished with *Love in a Cottage*, Bella? I promised it to Mrs. Weiss when you're finished with it."

"Yes," said Bella. "I'll bring it down to-night."

There was another pause; the young man with the grayish hair coughed.

"Mr. Arnheim, let me introduce you to my friend, Miss Sternberger."

Miss Sternberger extended a highly groomed hand. "Pleased to meet you," she said.

"Howdy-do, Miss Sternberger?" His arm squirmed free from the deadlock clutch. "Won't you join us?"

"Thanks," said Myra, smiling until an amazing quantity of small white teeth showed; "but I just stopped by to tell Bella that Mrs. Blondheim was askin' for her."

There was a third pause.

"Won't you come along, Mr. Arnheim? Mamma's always so worried about me; and I'd like for you to meet mamma," said Bella, anxiously.

With a heroic jerk Mr. Arnheim managed to free himself entirely.

"Thanks," he said; "but I think I'll stay out and have a smoke."

Miss Blondheim's lips drooped at the corners. She entered the bright, gabbling lobby, threading her way to her mother's stronghold. The maternal glance that greeted her was cold and withering.

"I knew if I couldn't hold her she'd get him away. That's why I didn't go and play lotto with the ladies."

"Well, I couldn't help it, could I? You're always nosin' after me so--anybody could say you want me and not be lyin'!"

"That's the thanks I get for tryin' to do the right thing by my children. When I was your age I had more gumption in my little finger than you got in your whole hand! I'd like to see a little piece like her get ahead of me. No wonder you ain't got no luck!"

Miss Blondheim sat down wearily beside her mother. "I wish I knew how she does it."

"Nerve! That's how. 'Ain't I been preachin' nerve to you since you could talk? You'd be married to Marcus Finberg now if you'd 'a' worked it right and listened to your mother."

"Aw, maw, lemme alone. I couldn't make him pop, could I? I don't see other girls' mothers always buttin' in."

Out in the cool of the veranda Miss Sternberger strolled over to the railing and leaned her back against a white wooden column. Her eyes, upslanting and full of languor, looked out over the toiling, moiling ocean. She was outlined as gently as a Rembrandt.

"A penny for your thoughts, Miss Sternberger."

Mr. Arnheim, the glowing end of a newly lighted cigar in one corner of his mouth, peered his head over her shoulder.

"Oh, Mr. Arnheim, how you scared me!" Miss Sternberger placed the well-groomed left hand, with a seal ring on the third finger, upon the thread-lace bosom of her gown. "How you frightened me!"

"It's a nice night, Miss Sternberger. Want to walk on the beach?"

"Don't mind if I do," she said.

They strolled the length of the veranda, down the steps to the boardwalk and the beach beyond.

Mrs. Blondheim rolled her crochet into a tight ball and stuck her needle upright. "Come on, Bella; let's go to bed."

They trailed past the desk like birds with damp feathers.

"Send up some ice-water to three-hundred-and-eighteen," said Miss Bella over the counter, her eyes straining meanwhile past the veranda to the beach below.

Without, a moon low and heavy and red came out from the horizon; it cast a copper-gold band across the water.

"Let's go down to the edge, kiddo."

Mr. Arnheim helped Miss Sternberger plow daintily through the sand.

"If I get sand in my shoes I'll blame you, Mr. Arnheim."

"Little slippers like yours can't hold much."

She giggled.

They seated themselves like small dunes on the white expanse of beach; he drew his knees up under his chin and nursed them.

In the eery light they might have been a fay and a faun in evening dress.

"Well," said Mr. Arnheim, exhaling loudly, "this is something like it."

"Ain't that a grand moon, though, Mr. Arnheim?"

"The moon 'ain't got a show when you're round, little one."

"I'll bet you say that to every girl you meet."

"Nix I do; but I know when a girl looks good to me."

"I wish I knew if you was jollyin' me or not."

He tossed his cigar into the surf that curled at their very feet, leaving a rim of foam and scum. The red end died with a fizz. Then he turned his dark eyes full upon her with a steady focus.

"If you knew me better you'd know that I ain't that sort of a fellow.
When I say a thing I mean it."

His hand lay outstretched; she poured rivulets of white sand between the fingers. They watched the little mounds of sand which she patted into shape.

"I'll bet you're a New York girl."

"Why?"

"I can tell them every time--style and all."

"I'll bet you're a New York fellow, too."

"Little New York is good enough for me. I've been over in Paris four months, now, and, believe me, it looked good yesterday to see the old girlie holdin' her lamp over the harbor."

Miss Sternberger ran her hand over the smooth sheen of her dress; her gown was chaste, even stern, in its simplicity--the expensive simplicity that is artful rather than artless.

"That's a neat little model you're wearin'."

"Aw, Mr. Arnheim, what do you know about clothes?"

Mr. Arnheim threw back his head and laughed long and loud. "What do I know about clothes? I only been in the biz for eight years. What I don't know about ladies' wear ain't in the dictionary."

"Well," said Miss Sternberger, "that's so; I did hear you was in the business."

"I'm in the importin' line, I am. Why, girl, I've put through every fad that's taken hold in the last five years--brought them over myself, too, I've dressed Broadway and Fifth Avenue in everything from rainy-day to harem skirts."

"Honest?"

"Sure! I've imported more good sellers than any dealer in New York. I got a new model now passin' customs that's to be a bigger hit than the sheath was. Say, when I brought over the hobble every house on the Avenue laughed in my face; and when I finally dumped a consignment on to one of them, the firm was scared stiff and wanted to countermand; but I had 'em and they couldn't jump me."

"Just think!"

"By Jove! it wasn't two weeks before that very model was the talk of New York and Lillian Russell was wearin' one in the second act of her show; and when she wears a model it's as good as made."

"Gee!" she said. "I could just sit and listen to you talk and talk."

He hunched close. "I sold the first dozen pannier dresses for a sum that would give you the blind staggers. I was just as scared as she was, too, but all you got to do with women is to get a few good-lookin' bell-sheep to lead and the others will follow fast."

She regarded him in the wan moonlight. "If there's anything I admire," she said, "it's a smart man."

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "I've just got a little better judgment than the next fellow. Those things come natural, that's all. In my line a fellow's got to know human nature. If I'd sprung the hobble on the Avenue five years ago I'd gone broke on the gamble; but I sprung the idea on 'em at just the right time."

Her hand, long and slim, lay like a bit of carved ivory on the sand; he leaned forward and covered it with his.

"I want to see a great deal of you while I'm down here."

She did not reply, but drew her hand away with a shy diffidence.

"I'll bet I could show you some things that would warm you up all right. I'm goin' into New York with the swellest bunch of French novelties you ever seen. I've got a peach-colored Piquette model I've brought over that's goin' to be the talk of the town."

"A Piquette?"

He laughed delightedly. "Sure! You never heard of the firm? Wait till you see 'em on show at the openin'. It's got the new butterfly back; and, believe me, it wasn't no cinch to grab that pattern, neither. I laid low in Paris two months before I even got a smell at it."

"You talk just like a story-book," she said.

He stretched himself full length on the sand and looked up into her face. "I'll show you a thing or two when we get back to New York, little one."

"You ain't like most of the boys I know, Mr. Arnheim. You got something different about you."

"And you got a face like the kind you see painted on fans--on the order of a Japanese dame. I got some swell Japanese imports, too."

"Everybody says that about me. I take after paw."

"Say, little one, I want your telephone number when I get back to New York."

"I'll be pleased to have you call me up, Mr. Arnheim."

"Will I call you up? Well, rather!"

"I know some nice girls I'll introduce you to."

He looked at her insinuatingly. "I know one nice girl, and that's enough," he said.

"Aw, Mr. Arnheim, of all the jolliers I ever knew you got 'em beat." She rose to her feet like a gold-colored phoenix from a mound of white sand. "When I meet a fellow I like I don't want him to tell me nothin' but the truth."

"That's just the way with me--when I meet a girl that looks good I want to treat her white, and I want her to do the same by me."

They strolled along the edge of the beach. Once the foaming surf threatened to lap over her slippers; he caught her deftly and raised her high above the swirl.

"Oh," she cried, a little breathlessly, "ain't you strong!" Then she laughed in a high-pitched voice.

They dallied until the moon hardened from a soft, low ball to a high, yellow disk and the night damp seeped into their clothes. Miss Sternberger's yellow scarf lay like a limp rag on her shoulders.

"You're a perfect thirty-six, ain't you, little one?"

"That's what they say when I try on ready-mades," she replied, with sweet reticence.

"Gee!" he said. "Wouldn't I like you in some of my models! Maybe if you ain't no snitch I'll show you the colored plates some day."

"I ain't no snitch," she said. Her voice was like a far-away echo.

They climbed the wooden steps to their hotel like glorified children who had been caught in a silver weft of enchantment.

The lobby was semi-dark; they asked for their keys in whispers and exchanged good-nights in long-drawn undertones.

"Until to-morrow, little one."

"Until to-morrow."

She entered the elevator with a smile on her lips and in her eyes. They regarded each other through the iron framework until she shot from sight.

* * * *

At breakfast next morning Mrs. Blondheim drew up before her "small steak, French-fried potatoes, jelly omelet, buttered toast, buckwheat cakes, and coffee."

"Well, of all the nerve!" she exclaimed to her vis-a-vis, Mrs. Epstein.

"If there ain't Myra Sternberger eatin' breakfast with that Mr. Arnheim!"

Mrs. Epstein opened a steaming muffin, inserted a lump of butter, and pressed the halves together. "I said to my husband last night," she remarked, "I'm glad we 'ain't got no daughters'; till they're married off and all, it ain't no fun. With my Louie, now, it's different. When he came out of the business school my husband put him in business, and now I 'ain't got no worry."

"My Bella 'ain't never given me a day's worry, neither. I ain't in no hurry to marry her off. She always says to me, 'Mamma,' she says, 'I ain't in no hurry to marry till Mr. Right comes along.'"

"My Louie is comin' down to-day or to-morrow on his vacation if he can get away from business. Louie's a good boy--if I do say so myself."

"I don't want to talk--but I often say what my Bella gets when she marries is enough to give any young man a fine start in a good business."

"I must have my Louie meet Miss Bella. The notes and letters Louie gets from girls you wouldn't believe; he don't pay no attention to 'em. He's an awful mamma-boy, Mrs. Blondheim."

"It will be grand for them to meet," said Mrs. Blondheim. "If I do say it, my Bella's had proposals you wouldn't believe! Look at Simon Arnheim over there--he only met her yesterday, and do you think he would leave her side all day? No, siree. Honest, it makes me mad sometimes. A grand young man comes along and Bella introduces him to every one, but she won't have nothin' to do with him."

"Try some of this liver and onions, Mrs. Blondheim; it's delicious."

Mrs. Blondheim partook and nibbled between her front teeth. "I got a grand recipe for süss und sauer liver. When we're at home my Bella always says, 'Mamma, let's have some liver and *gedamftes fleisch* for lunch.'"

"Do you soak your liver first?" inquired Mrs. Epstein. "My Louie won't eat nothin' süss und sauer. It makes me so mad. I got to cook different for every one in my family. Louie won't eat this and his father won't eat that!"

"I'll give you the recipe when I give you the one for the noodles. Bella says it's the best she ever ate. My husband gets so mad when I go down in the kitchen--me with two grand girls and washerwoman two days a week! But the girls can't cook to suit me."

"Excuse me, too, from American cookin'."

Mrs. Blondheim's interest and gaze wandered down the dining-hall. "I wish you'd look at that Sternberger girl actin' up! Ain't it disgusting?"

"Please pass the salt, Mrs. Blondheim. That's the trouble with hotel cooking--they don't season. At home we like plenty of it, too. I season and season, and then at the table my husband has to have more."

"She wouldn't have met him at all if it hadn't been for Bella," pursued Mrs. Blondheim.

The object of Mrs. Blondheim's solicitude, fresh as spring in crisp white linen, turned her long eyes upon Mr. Arnheim.

"You ought to feel flattered, Mr. Arnheim, that I let you come over to my table."

Mr. Arnheim regarded her through a mist of fragrant coffee steam. "You betcher life I feel flattered. I'd get up earlier than this to have breakfast with a little queen."

"Ain't you ever goin' to quit jollyin'?"

He leaned across the table. "That ain't a bad linen model you're wearin'--it's domestic goods, too. Where'd you get it?"

"At Lipman's."

"I sold them a consignment last year; but, say, if you want to see real classy white goods you ought to see some ratine cutaways I'm bringing over. I've brought a model I'm goin' to call the Phoebe Snow. It's the niftiest thing for early fall you ever saw."

"Ratine?"

"You never heard of it? That's where I get my work in--it's the new lines, the novelty stuff, that gets the money."

"Are you goin' in the surf this morning, Mr. Arnheim?"

"I'm goin' where you go, little one." He dropped two lumps of sugar into her coffee-cup. "Sweets to the sweet," he said.

"Silly!" But she giggled under her breath.

They pushed back their chairs and strolled down the aisle between the tables. She smiled brightly to her right and left.

"Good morning, Mrs. Blondheim. Is it warm enough for you?"

"Good morning," replied Mrs. Blondheim, stabbing a bit of omelet with vindictive fork.

Mrs. Epstein looked after the pair with warming eyes. "She is a stylish dresser, ain't she?"

"I wish you'd see the white linen my Bella's got. It's got sixteen yards of Cluny lace in the waist alone--and such Cluny, too! I paid a dollar and a half a yard wholesale."

"Just look at this waist I'm wearin', Mrs. Blondheim. You wouldn't think I paid three and a half for the lace, would you?"

"Oh yes; I can always tell good stuff when I see it, and I always say it pays best in the end," said Mrs. Blondheim, feeling the heavy lace edge of Mrs. Epstein's sleeve between discriminating thumb and forefinger.

Suddenly Mrs. Epstein's eyes widened; she rose to her feet, drawing a corner of the table-cloth awry. "If it ain't my Louie!"

Mr. Louis Epstein, a faithful replica of his mother, with close black hair that curled on his head like the nap of a Persian lamb, imprinted a large, moist kiss upon the maternal lips.

"Hello, maw! Didn't you expect me?"

"Not till the ten-o'clock train, Louie. How's papa?"

"He'th fine. I left him billing thom goods to Thpokane."

"How's business, Louie?"

"Not tho bad, but pa can't get away yet for a week. The fall goods ain't all out yet."

"Ain't it awful, the way that man is all for business, Mrs. Blondheim? This is my son Louie."

"Well, well, Mr. Epstein. I've heard a lot about you. I want you to meet my daughter Bella. You ought to make friends."

"Yeth'm," said Mr. Epstein.

* * * * *

Out on the clean-washed beach the sun glinted on the water and sent points of light dancing on the wavelets like bits of glass. Children in blue rompers burrowed and jangled their painted spades and pails; nursemaids planted umbrellas in the sand and watched their charges romp; parasols flashed past like gay-colored meteors.

In the white-capped surf bathers bobbed and shouted, and all along the shore-line the tide ran gently up the beach and down again, leaving a smooth, damp stretch of sand which soughed and sucked beneath the steps of the bathers.

Far out, where the waters were highest and the whitecaps maddest, Mr. Arnheim held Miss Sternberger about her slim waist and raised her high over each rushing breaker. They caught the swells and lay back against the heavy tow, letting the wavelets lap up to their chins.

Mr. Arnheim, with little rivulets running down his cheeks, shook the water out of his grayish hair and looked at her with salt-bitten, red-rimmed eyes.

"Gee!" he wheezed. "You're a spunky little devil! Excuse me from the beach-walkers; I like 'em when they're game like you."

She danced about like an Amphitrite. "Who would be afraid of the water with a dandy swimmer like you?"

"This ain't nothin'," said Mr. Arnheim. "You ought to see me in still water. At Arverne last summer I was the talk of the place."

They emerged from the water, dripping and heavy-footed. She wrung out her brief little skirts and stamped her feet on

the sand. Mr. Arnheim hopped on one foot and then on the other, holding his head aslant. Then they stretched out on the white, sunbaked beach. Miss Sternberger loosened her hair and it showered about her.

"Gee! 'Ain't you got a swell bunch of hair!"

She shook and fluffed it. "You ought to seen it before I had typhoid. I could sit on it then."

"That Phoebe Snow model that I got in mind for Lillian Russell would make you look like a queen, with that hair of yours!"

She buried his arm in the sand and patted the mound. "Now," she said, "I got you, and you can't do anything without askin' me."

"You got me, anyway," he said, with an expressive glance.

"Yes," she purred, "that's what you say now; but when you get back to New York you'll forget all about the little girl you met down at the shore."

"That's all you know about me. I don't take up with every girl."

"I'm glad you don't," she said.

"But I'll bet you got a different fellow for every day when you're in New York."

"Nothin' like that," she said; "but, anyway, there's always room for one more."

Two young men without hats passed. Miss Sternberger called out her greeting.

"Hello, Manny! Wasn't the water grand? What? Well, you tell Leo he don't know nothin'. No, we don't want to have our pictures taken! Mr. Arnheim, I want to introduce you to Mr. Landauer, a neckwear man out of Baltimore, and Mr. Manny Sinai, also neckwear, out of New York."

They posed, with the white sunlight in their eyes.

"I hope we won't break the camera," said Arnheim.

The remark was greeted with laughter. The little machine clicked, the new-comers departed, and then Miss Sternberger and Mr. Arnheim turned to each other again.

"You ain't tired, are you--Myra?"

"No--Simon"--she danced to her feet and tossed the hair back from her face--"I ain't tired."

They walked down the beach toward the bathhouse, humming softly to themselves.

"I'll be out in ten minutes," she said, pausing at the door of her locker.

"Me too," he said.

When they met again they were regroomed and full of verve. She was as cool as a rose. They laughed at their crinkly finger-tips--wrinkled by the water like parchment; and his neck, where it rose above the soft high collar, was branded by the sun a flaming red.

"Gee!" she cried. "Ain't you sunburnt!"

"I always tan red," he said.

"And me, I always tan tan."

They exchanged these pithy and inspired bits of autobiography in warm, intimate tones. At their hotel steps she sighed with a delicious weariness.

"I wish I could do everything for you, little one--even walk up-stairs."

"I ain't tired, Simon; only--only--Oh, I don't know."

"Little one," he said, softly.

In the lobby Miss Bella Blondheim leaned an elbow on the clerk's desk and talked to a stout young man with a gold-mounted elk's tooth on his watch-fob, and black hair that curled close to his head.

They made a group of four for a moment, Miss Blondheim regarding the arrivals with bright, triumphant eyes.

"My friend, Mr. Louis Epstein," she said.

The men shook hands.

"Related to the Epstein & Son Millinery Company, Broadway and Spring?"

"Thertainly am. I happen to be the thon mythelf."

"Was you in the surf this mornin', Bella? It was grand!"

"No, Myra," replied her friend. "Mr. Epstein and me took a trip to Ocean View."

"You missed the water this mornin'. It was fine and dandy!" volunteered Mr. Arnheim.

"Me and Mr. Epstein are goin' this afternoon--ain't we?"

"We thertainly are," agreed Mr. Epstein, regarding Miss Blondheim with small, admiring eyes.

Miss Sternberger edged away. "Pleased to have met you, Mr. Epstein."

Mr. Arnheim edged with her and they moved on their way toward the dining-room.

Mrs. Blondheim from her point of vantage--the wicker rocker--leaned toward her sister-in-law.

"Look, Hanna! that's Louie Epstein, of the Epstein & Son Millinery Company, with Bella. He's a grand boy. I meet his mother at Doctor Bergenthal's lecture every Saturday morning. Epstein & Son have got a grand business, and Bella could do a whole lot worse."

"Well, I wish her luck," said Mrs. Blondheim's sister-in-law.

"I smell fried smelts. Let's go in to lunch."

Mrs. Blondheim stabbed her crochet needle into her spool. "I usually dip my smelts in bread crumbs. Have you ever tried them that way, Hanna?"

"Julius don't eat smelts."

They moved toward the dining-room.

Late that afternoon Miss Sternberger and Mr. Arnheim returned from a sail. Their faces were flushed and full of shy, sweet mystery.

"I can't show you the models the way I'd like to, dearie, but I got 'em in colors just like the real thing."

"Oh, Simon, you're doin' a thing like this for me without me even askin' you!"

His hold of her arm tightened. "I wouldn't show these here to my own sister before the twenty-fifth of the month. Now you know how you stand with me, little one."

"Oh," she cried, "I'm so excited! It's just like lookin' behind the scenes in a theayter."

He left her and returned a few moments later with a flat, red-covered portfolio. They sought out an unmolested spot and snuggled in a corner of a plush divan in one of the deserted parlors. He drew back the cover and their heads bent low.

At each turn of the pages she breathed her ecstasy and gave out shrills and calls of admiration.

"Oh, Simon, ain't that pink one a beauty! Ain't that skirt the swellest thing you ever seen!"

"That's the Piquette model, girlie. You and all New York will be buyin' it in another month. Ain't it the selectest little thing ever?"

Her face was rapt. "It's the swellest thing I've ever seen!" she declared.

He turned to another plate.

"Oh-h-h-h-h!" she cried.

"Ain't that a beauty! That there is going to be the biggest hit I've had yet. Watch out for the Phoebe Snow! I've got the original model in my trunks. That cutaway effect can't be beat."

"Oh-h-h-h-h!" she repeated.

They passed slowly over the gay-colored plates.

"There's that flame-colored one I'd like to see you in."

"Gee!" she said. "There's some class to that."

After a while the book was laid aside and they talked in low, serious tones; occasionally his hand stroked hers.

The afternoon waned; the lobby thinned; the dowagers and their daughters asked for room keys and disappeared for siestas and more mysterious processes; children trailed off to rest; the hot land-breezes, dry and listless, stirred the lace curtains of the parlor--but they remained on the plush divan, rapt as might have been Paolo and Francesca in their romance-imbued arbor.

"How long will you be down here?" she asked.

"As long as you," he replied, not taking his eyes from her face.

"Honest?"

"Sure. I don't have to go in to New York for a week or ten days yet. My season ain't on yet."

She leaned her head against the back of the divan. "All nice things must end," she said, with the 'cello note in her voice.

"Oh, I don't know!" he replied, with what might have been triple significance.

They finally walked toward the elevator, loath to part for the interim of dressing.

That evening they strolled together on the beach until the last lights of the hotel were blinking out. Then they stole into the semi-dark lobby like thieves--but soft-voiced, joyous thieves. A few straggling couples like themselves came in with the same sheepish but bright-eyed hesitancy. At the elevator Miss Blondheim and Mr. Epstein were lingering over good-nights.

The quartette rode up to their respective floors together--the girls regarding each other with shy, happy eyes; the men covering up their self-consciousness with sallies.

"Ain't you ashamed to keep such late hours, Miss Blondheim?" said Mr. Arnheim.

"I don't see no early-to-bed-early-to-rise medals on none of us," she said, diffidently.

"These thummer rethorts sure ain't no plathe for a minither's thon," said Mr. Epstein.

Laughter.

"Remember, Mr. Arnheim, whoever's up first wait in the leather chair opposite the elevator."

"Sure thing, Miss Sternberger."

Her last glance, full of significance, was for Mr. Arnheim. The floor above he also left the elevator, the smile still on his lips.

Left alone, Mr. Epstein turned to Miss Blondheim.

"Good night, dearie," he whispered. "Thweet dreamth."

"Good night, Louie," she replied. "Same to you."

Mr. Arnheim awoke to a scudding rain; his ocean-ward window-sill dripping and a great patch of carpet beneath the window dark and soggy. Downstairs the lobby buzzed with restrained energies; a few venturesome ones in oils and turned-up collars paced the veranda without.

Mr. Arnheim, in his invariable soft collar and shadow-checked suit, skirted the edge of the crowd in matinal ill humor and deposited his room key at the desk. The clerk gave him in return a folded newspaper and his morning mail.

Mr. Arnheim's morning aspect was undeniable. He suggested too generous use of soap and bay rum, and his eyes had not lost the swollen heaviness that comes with too much or too little sleep. He yawned and seated himself in the heavy leather chair opposite the elevator.

His first letter was unstamped and addressed to him on hotel stationery; the handwriting was an unfamiliar backhand and the inclosure brief:

DEAR MR. ARNHEIM: I am very sorry we could not keep our date, but I got a message and I got to go in on the 7:10 train. Hope to see you when I come back.

Sincerely, MYRA STERNBERGER.

Mr. Arnheim replaced the letter slowly in the envelope. There were two remaining--a communication from a cloak-manufacturing firm and a check from a banking-house. He read them and placed them in his inside coat pocket. Then he settled the back of his neck against the rim of the chair, crossed one leg over the other, rattled his newspaper open, and turned to the stock-market reports.

One week later Mr. Simon Arnheim, a red portfolio under one arm, walked into the mahogany, green-carpeted, soft-lighted establishment of an importing house on Fifth Avenue.

Mrs. S.S. Schlimberg, senior member, greeted him in her third-floor office behind the fitting-rooms.

"Well, well! *Wie geht's*, Arnheim? I thought it was gettin' time for you."

Mr. Arnheim shook hands and settled himself in a chair beside the desk. "You know you can always depend upon me, madame, to look you up the minnit I get back. Don't I always give you first choice?"

Mrs. Schlimberg weighed a crystal paper-weight up and down in her pudgy, ringed hands. "None of your fancy prices for me this season, Arnheim. There's too many good things lyin' loose. That's why I got my openin' a month sooner. I got a designer came in special off her vacation with some good things."

Mr. Arnheim winked. "Schlim, I got some models here to show you that you can't beat. When you see 'em you'll pay any price."

"I can't pay your fancy prices no more. I paid you too much for that plush fad last winter, and it never was a go."

Mr. Arnheim chuckled. "When you see a couple of the designs I brought over this trip you'll be willin' to pay me twice as much as for the hobble. Come on--own up, Schlim; you can't beat my styles. Why, you can copy them for your import-room and make ninety per cent, on any one of 'em!"

"They won't pay the prices, I tell you. Some of my best customers have gone over to other houses for the cheaper goods."

"You can't put over domestic stuff on your trade, Schlim. You might as well admit it. You gotta sting your class of trade in order to have 'em appreciate you."

"Now, just to show you that I know what I'm talking about, Arnheim, I got the best lines of new models for this season I've had since I'm in business--every one of them domestics too. I'm puttin' some made-in-America models in the import-room-to-day that will open your eyes."

Mr. Arnheim laughed and opened his portfolio. "I'll show you these till my trunks come up," he said.

"Just a minute, Arnheim. I want to show you some stuff--Miss Sternberger!" Mrs. Schlimberg raised her voice slightly, "Miss Sternberger!"

Almost immediately a svelte, black-gowned figure appeared in the doorway; she wore her hair oval about her face, like a Mona Lisa, and her hands were long and the dusky white of ivory.

"Mr. Arnheim, I want to introduce you to a designer we've got since you went away. Mr. Arnheim--Miss Sternberger."

The whir of sewing-machines from the workrooms cut the silence.

"How do you do?" said Miss Sternberger.

"How do you do?" said Mr. Arnheim.

"Miss Sternberger is like you, Mr. Arnheim--she's always out after novelties; and I will say for her she don't miss out! She put out a line of uncut velvets last winter that was the best sellers we had."

Mr. Arnheim bowed. Mrs. Schlimberg turned to Miss Sternberger.

"Miss Sternberger, will you bring in some of those new models that are going like hot cakes? Just on the forms will do."

"Certainly." She disappeared from the doorway.

Mrs. Schlimberg tapped her forefinger on the desk. "There's the finest little designer we've ever had! I got her off a Philadelphia house, and I ain't never regretted the money I'm payin' her. She's done more for the house in eight months than Miss Isaacs did in ten years!"

Miss Sternberger returned; a stock-boy wheeled in the new models on wooden figures while Mrs. Schlimberg and her new designer arranged them for display. Mrs. Schlimberg turned to Mr. Arnheim.

"How's the wife and boys, Arnheim? I ain't seen 'em since you brought 'em all in to see the Labor Day parade from the store windows last fall. Them's fine boys you got there, Arnheim!"

"Thanks," said Arnheim.

"Now, Arnheim, I'm here to ask you if you can beat these. Look at that there peach-bloom Piquette--look! Can you beat it? That there's the new butterfly skirt--just one year ahead of anything that's being shown this season." Mrs. Schlimberg turned to a second model. "Look at this here ratine cutaway. If the Phoebe Snow ain't the talk of New York before next week, then I don't know my own name. Ain't it so, Miss Sternberger?"

Miss Sternberger ran her smooth hand over the lace shoulder of the gown.

"This is a great seller," she replied, smiling at Mr. Arnheim. "Lillian Russell is going to wear it in the second act of her new play when she opens to-morrow night."

"I guess we're slow in here," chuckled Mrs. Schlimberg, nudging Mr. Arnheim with the point of her elbow.

Miss Sternberger spread the square train of a flame-colored robe full length on the green carpet and drew back a corner of the hem to display the lacy avalanche beneath. Then she bowed slightly and turned toward the door.

Mrs. Schlimberg laid a detaining hand on her sleeve. "Just a minute, Miss Sternberger. Mr. Arnheim's brought in some models he wants us to look at."

SOB SISTER

Physics can answer whence goes the candle-flame when it vanishes into blackness and what becomes of sound when the great maw of silence digests it. But what science can know the destiny of the pins and pins and pins, and what is the oblivion which swallows that great army of street-walking women whose cheeks are too pink and who dwell outside the barbed-wire fence of respectability?

Let the pins go, unless one lies on the sidewalk point toward you, and let this be the story of Mae Munroe, herself one of the pink-cheeked grenadiers of that great army whose destiny is as vague as the destiny of pins, and who in more than one vain attempt to climb had snagged her imitation French embroidery petticoats on the outward side of that barbed-wire fence.

Then, too, in the years that lead up to this moment Mae Munroe had taken on weight--the fair, flabby flesh of lack of exercise and no lack of chocolate bonbons. And a miss is as good as a mile, or a barbed-wire fence, only so long as she keeps her figure down and her diet up. When Mae Munroe ran for a street-car she breathed through her mouth for the first six blocks after she caught it. The top button of her shoe was no longer equal to the span. But her eyes were still blue, rather like sky when you look straight up; her hair yellow to the roots; and who can gainsay that a dimple in the chin is not worth two in the cheeks?

In the florid disorder of a red velvet sitting-room cluttered with morning sunshine and unframed, unsigned photographs of stage favorites, empty bottles and dented-in cushions, Mae Munroe stirred on her high mound of red sateen sofa-pillows; placed her paper-bound book face down on the tabouret beside her; yawned; made a foray into an uncovered box of chocolate bonbons; sank her small teeth into a creamy oozing heart and dropped a particle of the sweet into the sniffling, upturned snout of a white wool dog cuddled in the curve of her arm; yawned again.

"No more tandy! Make ittise Snookie Ookie sick! Make muvver's ittise bittise bow-wow sick! No! No!"

Each admonition she accompanied with a slight pat designed to intimidate further display of appetite. The small bunch in her arms raised his head and regarded her with pink, sick little eyes, his tongue darting this way and that in an aftermath of relish; then fell to licking her bare forearm with swift, dry strokes.

"Muvver's ittise bittise Snookie! Him love him poor muvver! Him poor, poor muvver!"

A cold tear oozed through one of Miss Munroe's closed eyes, zigzagged down her face, and she laid her cheek pat against the white wool.

"Muvver just wishes she was dead, Snookie. God! don't she just!"

An hour she lay so. The morning sunshine receded, leaving a certain grayness in the cluttered room. From the rear of the flat came the clatter of dishes and the harsh sing of water plunging from a faucet. The book slid from its incline on the pillow to the floor and lay with its leaves crumpled under. The dog fell to snoring. Another while ticked past--loudly. And as if the ticking were against her brain like drops of water, she rose to a half-sitting posture, reached for the small onyx clock on the mantelpiece and smothered it beneath one of the red sateen sofa-pillows. When she relaxed again two fresh tears waggled heavily down her cream-colored cheeks. Then for a while she slept, with her mouth ever so slightly open and revealing the white line of her teeth. The tears slid off her cheeks to the mussed frills of her negligee and dried there.

The little dog emerged from his sleep gaping and stretching backward his hind legs. Mae Munroe yawned, extending her arms at full length before her; regarded her fair ringed fingers and the four dimples across the back of each hand; reached for a cigarette and with the wry face of nausea tossed it back into its box; swung to a sitting posture on the side of the sofa, the dog springing from the curve of her arm to the floor, shaking himself.

Her blowsy hair, burned at the ends but the color of corn-silk, came unloosed of its morning plait and she braided it over one shoulder, her blue eyes fixed on space. Tears would come.

Then she rose and crossed to the golden-oak piano between the windows, her negligee open its full length and revealing her nightdress; crossed with a slight limp and the dog yapping at the soiled and lacy train; fell to manipulating the self-playing attachment, peddling out a metallic avalanche of popular music.

At its conclusion she swung around on the bench, her back drooping as if under pressure of indolence; yawned; crossed to the window and between the parted lace curtains stood regarding the street two stories beneath, and, beyond the patches of intervening roofs, a limited view of the Hudson River, a barge of coal passing leisurely up center stream, a tug suckling at its side.

From the hallway and in the act of mopping a margin of floor, a maid-of-all-work swung back from all-fours and sat upright on her heels, inserting a head of curl-papers through the open doorway.

"Play that over again, Miss Mae. That Mustard Glide' sure does tickle my soles."

Miss Munroe turned to the room with the palm of her hand placed pat against her brow. "God!" said she, "my head!"

"Aw, Miss Mae, can't you get yourself in a humor? What's the matter with you and me going to a movie this afternoon, eh?"

"Movie! The way every damn thing gets on my nerves, I'd be a hit at a movie, wouldn't I? I'd be a hit anywheres!"

"I tell you, Miss Mae, all this worry ain't going to get you nowhere. He'll come around again all right if you only give him time. And if he don't, you should worry! I tell you there ain't one of 'em breathes is worth more than his bank-book."

"God! my head!"

The figure on all-fours rose to full height, drying each forearm on her apron.

"Lay down, dearie, and just don't you worry. I've seen 'em get spells or get holy and stay away for two months on a stretch, and the checks not coming in regular as clockwork like yours, neither. Two months at a time I've seen 'em stick away. Why, when I worked on the lower West Side they used to stick away two and three months like that and then come loafing in one night just like nothing hadn't happened. You ain't got no kick coming, Miss Mae."

A layer of tears rose immediately to Miss Munroe's eyes, dimming them. She wiped them away with one of her sleeve frills.

"Max ain't like that and you know it. You've seen for yourself how he 'ain't missed his every other night in three years. You seen for yourself."

"They're all alike, I tell you, Miss Mae. The best way to handle 'em is to leave 'em alone."

"How he's been falling off. Loo, all--"

"Sh-h-h, now, Miss Mae, don't begin getting excited--all last night while I was rubbing your head that's what you kept mumbling and mumbling even after you fell asleep. That--don't help none."

"All last month so irregular and now only once last week, and--and not at all this week. Good heavens! I just wonder, I--just wonder."

"Now, just whatta you bet he'll be up to supper to-night, Miss Mae? If I was you, dearie, I wouldn't be scared, I'd just go right to the telephone and--"

"He gets so sore, Loo. You remember that time I telephoned him about that case of wine he sent up and it came busted, and his mother--his old woman was in the office. He raises hell if I try to telephone him during business."

"Just the same, I got a hunch he'll be up to supper to-night, and when I get a hunch things happen."

"It's his old woman, I tell you. It's his old woman is sniffing things again. Say, if he'd ever let me clap eyes on that old hag, wouldn't I learn her how to keep her nose out of his business alrighty. Wouldn't I just learn her! God! my head!"

"Lay down on the sofa, dearie, and rest up your red eyes. Take my tip he'll be up to supper to-night. I'm going to order him a double sirloin and a can of them imported--"

"Ugh! For Pete's sake cut it, Loo! If anybody mentions bill of fare to me I'll yell. Take them empty bottles out of here, Loo, and choke that damn clock with another pillow. My head'll just bust if I don't get some sleep."

"There, there, dearie! Here, lemme pull down the shades. Just try to remember there ain't one of them is worth more than his bank-book. I ain't going down to the dance with Sharkey to-night; I'm going to stay right here and--"

"No, no, Loo. You go. You can have that blue silk waist I promised you and wear them red satin roses he--he brought me that time from Hot Springs. Wear 'em, but be careful of 'em."

"Aw, Miss Mae, with you here like a wet rag, and if he comes who'll fix--"

"He--he ain't coming, Loo, and if he does I'm the one he likes to fix his things, anyway. I wanna be alone, Loo. I--I just wanna be alone."

"That's just it, Miss Mae, you're too much alone; you--"

"For Pete's sake, Loo, cut it or I'll holler. Cut the conversation, dearie!"

"I'll fix the candied sweet-potatoes this morning, anyway, Miss Mae, so if he does come--"

"I tell you I'm going to yell, Loo, if you mention bill of fare to me. Cover up my feet, like a good girl, and take them bottles out and lemme sleep. My head'll bust if I don't get some sleep."

"I tell you, Miss Mae, there ain't one of 'em is worth more than his bank-book. You're always giving away everything you got, Miss Mae. Honest, you'd give your best blue silk coat off your back if--"

"If that's what you're hinting for, Loo, for pity's sake take it! I don't want it. It's too tight for me in the arms. Take it, Loo. I don't want it. I don't want anything but to be let alone."

"Aw, now, Miss Mae, I didn't mean--"

"Get out, I tell you! Get out!"

"Yes, Miss Mae." With a final pat to the rug across Mae Munroe's feet she scooped the litter of empty bottles under one arm and hurried out smiling and closing the door softly behind her and tiptoeing down the hallway to the kitchen.

On the couch Mae Munroe lay huddled with her face to the wall, her cheeks crumpled against the white wool of the dog in her arms, her lips dry, each breath puffing them outward. Easy tears would flow, enhancing her lacy disorder. Noon slipped into afternoon.

The dusk of the city which is so immediately peppered with lights came gradually to press against the drawn blinds. On the very crest of her unrest, as if her mental travail had stimulated a cocaine courage, Mae Munroe kicked aside the rug from her feet; rose and advanced to the wall telephone; unhooked the receiver; hooked it up again; unhooked it this time with a resolution that tightened and whitened her lips and sent the color high into her face; placed her mouth close to the transmitter.

"Broad three-six." And tapped with one foot as she stood.

"Zincas Importing Company? I want to speak to Mr. Max Zincas."

Wrinkles crawled about her uncertain lips.

"This is his--his mother. Yes, Mrs. Zincas."

She closed her eyes as she waited.

"Hello, Max? That you, Max?"

She grasped at the snout of the instrument, tiptoeing up to it.

"It's me, dear. But--I had to get you to the 'phone somehow. I--I--No, no, don't hang up, Max! Don't hang up, dear, I--I got to tell you something; I got to, dear."

She raised herself closer to the mouthpiece for a tighter clutch of it.

"I'm sick, dearie. I--I'm dog sick, dearie. 'Ain't been about in a week. The limp is bad and I'm sick all over. I am, dear. Come up to supper to-night, dearie. You 'ain't been near for--for a week. I got to see you about something. Just a quiet talk, dearie. I--I just got to see you, Max. I--I'm sick, dog sick."

Her voice slipped up and away for the moment, and she crammed her lacy frizzle of a handkerchief tight against her lips, tiptoeing closer to the transmitter.

"No, no, Max, I swear to God I won't! Just quiet and no rough stuff. For my sake come home to supper to-night, dearie! I swear. It's my thigh, and I got a fever, dearie, that's eating me. What? Eight! No, that ain't too late. Any time you can come ain't too late. I'll wait. Sure? Good-by, dearie. At eight sharp. Good-by, dearie."

When she replaced the receiver on its hook, points of light had come out in her eyes like water-lilies opening on a lake. The ashen sheaf of anxiety folded back from her, color ran up into her face, and she flung open the door, calling down the length of hallway.

"Loo! Oh, Loo!"

"Huh?"

"Put a couple of bottles of everything on ice before you go, dearie; order a double porterhouse; open a can of them imported sausages he sent up last month, and peel some sweet-potatoes. Hurry, Loo, I wanna candy 'em myself. Hurry, dearie!"

She snatched up her furry trifle of a dog, burying her warming face in his fleece.

"M-m-muvver loves her bow-bow. Muvver loves whole world. Muvver just loves whole world. M-m-m-m, chocolate? Just one ittise bittsie piece and muvver eat half--m-m-m! La-la! Bow-wow! La! La!"

Along that end of Riverside Drive which is so far up that rents begin to come down, night takes on the aspect of an American Venetian carnival. Steamboats outlined in electric lights pass like phosphorescent phantoms up and down the Hudson River, which reflects with the blurry infidelity of moving waters light for light, deck for deck. Running strings of incandescent bulbs draped up into festoons every so often by equidistant arc-lights follow the course of the well-oiled driveway, which in turn follows the course of the river as truly as a path made by a canal horse. A ledge of park, narrow as a terrace, slants to the water's edge, and of summer nights lovers drag their benches into the shadow of trees and turn their backs to the lampposts and to the world.

From the far side of the river, against the night sky and like an ablutionary message let slip from heaven, a soap-factory spells out its product in terms of electric bulbs, and atop that same industrial palisade rises the dim outline of stack and kiln. Street-cars, reduced by distance to miniature, bob through the blackness. At nine o'clock of October evenings the Knickerbocker River Queen, spangled with light and full of pride, moves up-stream with her bow toward Albany. And from her window and over the waves of intervening roofs Mae Munroe cupped her hands blinker fashion about her eyes and followed its gay excursions passage, even caught a drift of music from its decks.

Motionless she stood there, bare-necked and bare-armed, against the cold window-pane, inclosed from behind with lace curtains and watching with large-pupiled eyes the steamer slip along into the night; the black-topped trees swaying in the ledge of park which slanted to the water's edge; the well-oiled driveway and its darting traffic of two low-sliding lines of motor-cars with acetylene eyes.

At five minutes past eight Max Zincas fitted his key into the door and entered immediately into the front room. On that first click of the lock Mae Munroe stepped out from between the lace curtains, her face carefully powdered and bleached of all its morning inaccuracies, her lips thrust upward and forward.

"Max!"

"Whew!"

He tossed his black derby hat to the red velvet couch and dropped down beside it, his knees far apart and straining his well-pressed trousers to capacity; placed a hand on each well-spread knee, then ran five fingers through his thinning hair; thrust his head well forward, foreshortening his face, and regarded her.

"Well, girl," he said, "here I am."

"I-I--"

"Lied to me, eh? Pretty spry for a sick one, eh? Pretty slick! I knew you was lying, girl."

"I been sick as a dog, Max. Loo can tell you."

"What's got you? Thigh?"

"God! I dun'no! I dun'no!"

She paused in the center of the room, her lips trembling and the light from the chandelier raining full upon her. High-hipped and full-busted as Titian loved to paint them, she stood there in a black lace gown draped loosely over a tight foundation of white silk, and trying to compose her lips and her throat, which arched and flexed, revealing the heartbeats of her and the shortness of her breath.

"Is this the way to say hello to--to your Maizie, Max? Is--is this the way?" Then she crossed and leaned to him, printing a kiss on his brow between the eyes. "I been sick as a dog, Max. Ain't you going to--to kiss me?"

"Come, come, now, just cut that, Mae. Let's have supper and get down to brass tacks. What's eating you?"

"Max!"

"Come, come, now, I'm tired, girl, and got to stop off at Lenox Avenue to-night after I leave here. Where's your clock around here, anyways, so a fellow knows where he's at?"

"There it is under the pillow next to you, Max. I smothered it because it gets on my nerves all day. Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock, right into my head like it was saying all the time: 'Oh-Mae! Oh-Mae! Oh-Mae!' till I nearly go crazy, Max. Tick-tock--God! it--it just gets me!"

He reached for the small onyx clock, placing it upright on the mantel, and shrugged his shoulders loosely.

"Gad!" he said, "you wimmin! Crazy as loons, all of you and your kind. Come, come, get down to brass tacks, girl. I'm tired and gotta get home."

"Home, Max?"

"Yes, home!"

"Max, ain't--ain't this home no more, ain't it?"

He leaned forward, an elbow on each knee and striking his left hand solidly into his right palm. "Now if that's the line of talk you got me up here for, girl, you can cut it and cut it quick!"

"No, no, Max, it ain't my line of talk. Here, sit down, dearie, in your own chair and I'll go and dish up."

"Where's Loo?"

"Her night off, poor girl. Four nights straight she's rubbed my head and--"

"Where's my--"

"Right here, dearie, is your box of pills, underneath your napkin. There, dearie! See? Just like always."

She was full of small movements that were quick as grace notes: pinning the black lace train up and about her hips; drawing out his chair; darting with the scarcely perceptible limp down the narrow hall, back with dishes that exuded aromatic steam; placing them with deft, sure fingers. Once she paused in her haste, edged up to where he stood with one arm resting on the mantelpiece, placed an arm on each of his shoulders and let her hands dangle loose-wristed down his back.

"Tired boy, to-night! Huh? Maizie's poor tired boy!"

"Now, now!"

He removed her hands, but gently, and strolled over to where the table lay spread beside the cold, gilded radiator, a potted geranium in its center, a liberal display of showy imitation pearl-handled cutlery carefully laid out, and at each place a long-stemmed wineglass, gold-edged and the color of amber.

"Come," he said, "let's eat and get it over."

She made no sign, but with the corners of her lips propped bravely upward in her too red smile made a last hurried foray into the kitchen, returning with a covered vegetable-dish held outright from her.

"Guess!" she cried.

"Can't," he said, and seated himself.

"Gowan, guess like you used to, dearie."

He fell immediately to sampling with short, quick stabs of his fork the dish of carmine-red pickled beets beside his plate.

"Aw, gowan, Max, give a guess. What did you used to pay for with six big kisses every time I candied them for you? Guess, Max"

"Sit down," he said, and with his foot shoved a small stool before her chair.

"Lordy!" she said, drawing up en tete-a-tete, unpinning and spreading her lacy train in glory about her, "but you're some little sunbeam to have around the house."

"What these beets need is a little sugar."

She passed him the bowl; elevated her left foot in its slightly soiled white slipper to the footstool; fastened her napkin to her florid bosom with one of her numerous display of breastpins; poured some opaque wine into his glass, coming back to flood her own to the brim; smiled at him across the red head of the potted geranium, as if when the heart bleeds the heart grows light.

"Here's *to* you, Max!"

He raised his glass and drank in through his rather heavy mustache, then flecked it this way and that with his napkin "Ahh-h-h-h, that's the stuff!"

"S'more?"

"Yah-h-h-h-h-h!"

"Such a cotton mouth my bad boy brought home."

"Aha! Fee, fie, fum! Aha!"

"I broiled it under the single burner, Max, slow like you like. Here, you carve it, dearie. Just like always, eh?"

His fleshy, blue-shaved face took on the tenseness of concentrated effort, and he cut deep into the oozing beef, the red juice running out in quick streams.

"Ah-h-h-h-h!"

"No, no, you keep that, Max, it's your rare piece."

"Gravy?"

"Yes, dearie."

The small dog shook himself and rose from sleep and the depths of a pillow, nosing at her bare elbow.

"Was muvver's ittise Snookie Ookie such a hungry bow-wow?"

He yapped shortly, pawing her.

"Ask big bossie sitting over there carving his din-din if him got chocolate tandy in him pocket like always for Snookie Ookie. No, no, bad red meat no good for ittsee bittsie bow-wow. Go ask big bossie what him got this time in him pocket for Snookie. Aw, look at him, Max; he remembers how you used to bring him--"

"Get down! Get down, I said! For God's sake get that little red-eyed, mangy cur out of here while we're eating, can't you? Good gad! can't a man eat a meal in this joint without having that dirty cur whining around? Get him down off your dress there, Mae. Get out, you little cur! Ge-t out!"

"Max!"

"Chocolate candy in my pocket. Chocolate arsenic, you mean! My damn-fool days are over."

"What's got you, Max? Didn't you buy him for me yourself that day at the races five whole years ago? Wasn't the first things you asked for, when you woke in the hospital with your burns, me and--and Snookie? What's soured you, Max? What? What?"

"I'm soured on seeing a strapping, healthy woman sniveling over a little sick-eyed cur. Ain't that enough to sour any man? Why don't you get up and out and exercise yourself like the right kind of wimmin do? Play tennis or get something in you besides the rotten air of this flat, and mewling over that sick-eyed cur. Get out! Scc-c-c-c-c!"

The animal bellied to the door, tail down, and into the rear darkness of the hallway.

"Max, what's got you? What do I know about tennis or--things like that? You--you never used to want--things like that."

"Aw, what's the use of wasting breath?"

He flecked at his mustache, inserting the napkin between the two top buttons of his slight bay of waistcoat; carved a second helping of meat, masticating with care and strength so that his temples, where the hair thinned and grayed, contracted and expanded with the movements of his jaws.

"What's the use?"

"Max, I--"

"Thigh bother you?"

"A--a little."

"Didn't I tell you not to spare expense on trying new doctors if--"

"That ain't my real trouble, Max; it--"

"Been out to-day?"

"No, Max, I been sick as a dog, I tell you."

"No wonder you're sick, cooped up in this flat with nobody but a servant-girl for company. Gad! ain't you ashamed to get so low that your own servant-girl is your running-mate? Ain't you?"

"Max, she--"

"I know. I know."

"I been so blue, Max. Loo can tell you how I been waiting and wondering. I--Lord, I been so blue, Max. She's good to me, Max, and--and I been so blue."

"Never knew one of you wimmin that wasn't that way half her time. You're a gang of sob sisters, every one of you--whining like you got your foot caught in a machine and can't get it out."

"How you mean, Max?"

"Aw, you're all either in the blues or nagging. Why ain't you sports enough to take the slice of life you get handed you? None of you ain't healthy enough, anyways, I tell you, indoors, eating and sleeping and mewling over poodle-dogs all the time. I'm damn sick of it all. Damn sick, if you want to know it."

"But, Max, what's put this new stuff into your head all of a sudden? You never used to care if--"

"And you got to quit writing me them long-winded letters, Mae, about what's come over me. Sometimes a fellow just comes to his senses, that's all."

"Max!"

"And you got to quit butting in my business hours on the telephone. I don't want to get ugly, but you got to cut it out. Cut it out, Mae, is what I said!"

He quaffed his wine.

"Max dear, if you'll only tell me what's hurting you I'll find a way to make good. I--I can learn lawn-tennis, if that's what you want. I can take off ten pounds in--"

"Aw, I don't want nothing. Nothing, I tell you!"

"If I only knew, Max, what's itching you. This way there's days when I just feel like I can't go on living if you don't tell me what's got you. I just feel like I can't go on living this way, Max."

Tears hot and ever ready flowed over her words and she fumbled for her handkerchief, sobs rumbling up through her.

"I just can't, I--I just can't!"

He pushed back from his half-completed meal, rising, but stooping to rap his fist sharply against the table.

"Now, lemme tell you this much right now, Mae, either you got to cut this sob stuff and get down to brass tacks and tell me what you want, or, by gad! I'll get out of here so quick it'll make your head swim. I ain't going to be let in for no tragedy-queen stuff, and the sooner you know it the better. Business! I'm a business man."

She swallowed her tears, even smiling, and with her hand pat against her bosom as if to suppress its heaving.

"I'm all right now, Max. I'm so full up with worry it--it just slipped out. I'm all right now, Max. Sit down. Sit down and finish, dearie."

But he fell to pacing the red carpet in angry staccato strides. His napkin dropped from his waistcoat to the floor and he kicked it out of his path.

"By gad! I didn't want to come, anyhow. I knew the sniveling I'd be let in for. Gimme a healthy woman with some outdoors in her. Gimme--"

"I ain't going to let out any more, Max; I swear to God I ain't. Sit down, dear, and finish your supper. Looka, your coffee's all cold. Lemme go out and heat it up for you. I--"

"I'm done. I'm done before I begin. Now, Mae, if you can behave yourself and hold in long enough, just say what you got me up here for, and for God's sake let's have it over!"

He planted himself before her, feet well apart, and she rose, pushing back her chair, paling.

"I--I 'ain't got much of anything to say, Max, except I--I thought maybe you'd tell me what's eating you, dearie."

"I--"

"After all these years we been together, Max, so--so happy, all of a sudden, dear, these last two months dropping off from every other night to--to twice a week and then to--to once, and this last week--not at all. I--I--heavens above, Max, I 'ain't got nothing to say except what's got you. Tell me, dearie, is it anything I've done? Is it--"

"You talk like a loon, Mae, honest you do. You 'ain't done nothing. It's just that the--the time's come, that's all. You know it had to. It always has to. If you don't know it, a woman like--like you ought to. Gad! I used to think you was the

kind would break as clean as a whistle when the time came to break."

"Break, Max?"

"Yes, break. And don't gimme the baby-stare like that, neither. You know what I mean alrighty. You wasn't born yesterday, old girl!"

The blood ran from her face, blanching it. "You mean, Max--"

"Aw, you know what I mean alrighty, Mae, only you ain't sport enough to take things as they come. You knew all these years it had to come sooner or later. I 'ain't never quizzed into your old life, but if you didn't learn that, you--well you ought to. There never was a New Year came in, Mae, that I didn't tell you that, if you got the chance, for you to go out after better business. I never stood in your light or made no bones about nothing!"

"My God! Max, you--you're kidding!"

"All these years I been preaching to you, even before I joined Forest Park Club out there. 'Don't get soft, Mae. Keep down. Use the dumb-bells. Hustle around and do a little housework even if I do give you a servant. Walk in the park. Keep your looks, girl; you may need 'em,' I used to tell you."

"Oh you--You!--"

She clapped her hands over her mouth as if to stanch hysteria.

"Another let-out like that, Mae, and, by gad! I'll take my hat and--"

"No, no, Max, I--I didn't mean it. I'm all right. I--Only after all these years you wouldn't do it, Max. You wouldn't. You wouldn't throw me over and leave me cold, Max. What can I do after all these years? I--I 'ain't got a show in a chorus no more. You're kidding, Max. You're a white man, Max, and--you--you wouldn't do it, Max. You wouldn't. You--"

"Now, now, you can't say I 'ain't been as white as silk, girl, and I'm going to be just as white as I've been, too. Don't worry, girl. For six years there 'ain't been a better-stocked flat than this in town, has there?"

"No, Max."

"The best none too good, eh?"

"No, Max."

"Just the same stuff comes here that I send up to my mother's flat, eh? All the drinks and all the clothes you want and a servant in the house as good as my mother's own, eh? No kick coming, eh, girl?"

"You--you wouldn't, Max--you wouldn't ditch me. What could I do? Nothing--nothing. I--I can't hire out as a scrubwoman, I--"

"Come, come now, girl, you're pretty slick, but you--you don't quite slide. What about that thirty-five hundred you got down in your jeans--eh? Them thirty-five hundred in the Farmers' Savings Bank--eh? Eh?"

"Max!"

"Hah! Knocked you off your pins that time, didn't I? I found your bank-book one morning, kiddo--found it on the floor right next to the dresser--"

"Max, I--Out of my checks I--I saved--I--"

"Sure! Gad! I ain't kicking about it, girl. Glad for you! Glad you got it, girl, only don't try to tell me you can't take care of yourself in this world alrighty, girl. Any old time you can't! Gad! thirty-five hundred she snitches out of her allowance in six years, lives on the fat of the land, too, and then tries to bamboozle me that she's flat. Thirty-five hundred in six years. Gad! I got to hand it to you there, kiddo; I got to hand it to you!"

"You can have it back, Max. I--I was going to surprise you when I had five thousand. I--"

"Gad! I don't want your money, girl. It's yours. You're fixed for life on it. I'm even going to hand you over a couple of

thou extra to show you that I'm no cheap sport. I won't have a woman breathing can say I ain't white as silk with her."

"Max, you--you're killing me! Killing me! Killing me!"

"Now, now, Mae, if I was you I wouldn't show my hand so. I don't want to hurt you, girl. It ain't like I got any but the finest feelings for you. You're all right, you are. You are."

"Then, Max, for God's sake--"

"But what are you going to do about it? What the hell is anybody going to do about it? You ain't no baby. You know what life is. And you know that the seams has got to show on one of the two sides and it ain't your fault you got turned on the under side. But you should worry, girl! You're fixed. And I'm here to tell you I'm going to hand you on top of the two thou this here little flat just as it stands, Mae. Just as it stands, piano and all. I just guess you got a kick coming!"

Her hands flew to her bosom as if the steel of his words had slipped deep into the flesh. "You don't mean what you're saying, Max."

"Sure, I do! Piano and all, girl."

"No, no, you don't. You're just kidding me, Max, like you used to when you wanted to tease me and throw a scare in me that your mother was wise about the flat. Quit your kidding, Max, and take me in your arms and sing me 'Maizie you're a Daisie' like you used to after--after we had a little row. Lemme hear you call me 'Maizie,' dear, so I'll know you're only kidding. I'm a bum sport, dearie. I--I never could stand for guying. Cut the comedy, dear."

She leaned to him with her lips twisted and dried in their frenzy to belie his words, but with little else to indicate that her heart lay ticking against her breast like a clock that makes its hour in half-time.

"Quit guying, Max, for God's sake! You--you got me feeling sick clear down inside of me. Cut it, dear. Too much is enough."

Her dress rustled with the faint swish of scything as she moved toward him, and he withdrew, taking hold of the back of his chair.

"Now, now, Mae; come, come! You're a sensible woman. I ain't stuck on this business any more than you are. You ought to have let me stay away and just let it die out instead of raking up things like this. Come, buck up, old girl! Don't make it any harder than it's got to be. These things happen every day. This is business. There, there! Now! Now!"

The sudden bout of tenderness brought the tears stinging to her eyes and she was for ingratiating herself into his embrace, but he withdrew, edging toward the piano with an entire flattening of tone.

"Now, now, Mae, I tell you that you got to cut it. It would have been better if you had just let the old cat die, You oughtn't to tried that gag to get me here to-night. You'll get a lot more out of me if you do it dry, girl. A crying woman can drive me out of the house quicker 'n plague, and you ought to know it by now."

She sat down suddenly, feeling queasy.

"Now, now, old girl, buck up! Be a sport!"

"Gimme a drink, Max. I--Just a swallow. I--I'm all right." And she squeezed her eyes tight shut to blink out the tears.

He handed her a tumbler from the table, keeping his head averted, and after a bit she fell to sobbing and choking and trembling.

"It's her! It's your old woman. She's been chloroforming you with a lot of dope talk about hitting the altar rail with a bunch of white satin with a good fat wad sewed in the lining. It's your old--"

"Cut that!"

"It's your old woman. She--she don't know you like I do, Max. She--"

"Now, now, Mae! You knew this had to come sooner or later, I ain't never lied, have I? Right here in this room 'ain't you told me a dozen times you'd let me go quietly when the time came? 'Ain't you?"

"I never thought you meant it, Max. You don't mean it now. Don't let your old woman upset you, dear. What she don't know won't hurt her. Stick around her a little more if you think she's got a hunch about me and the flat. But she 'ain't, dearie; there ain't a chance in the world she's got a hunch about me. Don't let her make a mollycoddle out of you, Max. That old woman don't know enough about life and things to--"

"You cut that and cut it quick! I'm a decent fellow, I am. For six years I been tipping you off to leave my mother's name out--out of your mouth. There's a place for everything and, by gad! your mouth ain't the place for her name! By gad! I ain't no saint, but I won't stand for that! By gad! I--I won't!"

"Oh-h-h-h-h! Oh-h-h-h! Oh-h-h-h!"

She struck her breast twice with the flat of her hand, her voice so tight and high that it carried with it the quality of strangulation.

"Ain't fit to mention her name, ain't I? Ain't fit to mention her name?
My kind ain't fit to mention her name, eh?"

"No, if you got to know it. Not--like that! My old mother's name. Not like that!"

"Not fit, eh? What are we fit for, then, us that only get the husks of you men and nothing else?"

"I--"

"What am I fit for? Fit to run to when your decent friends won't stand for you? Fit to run to when you get mixed up in rotten customs deals? Fit to stand between you and hell when you got the law snapping at your heels for--for smuggling? Who was fit to run to then? Her whose name I ain't fit to mention? Her? Naw, you was afraid she'd turn on you. Naw, not her! Me! Me! I'm the one whose mouth is too dirty to mention your old lady's name--"

"By gad! you got to cut that or--"

"Just the same, who was it you hollered for when you woke up in the hospital with your back like raw meat? Who was it you hollered for then? Her whose name I ain't fit to mention? Naw, it wasn't! Me! Me! I was good enough then. I was good enough to smuggle you out of town overnight when you was dodging the law, and to sleep in my clothes for two weeks, ready to give the signal."

"That's right, dig up! Dig up! You might forget something."

"I been good enough to give you free all these years what you wasn't man enough to pay for. That's what we women are; we're the free lunch that you men get with a glass of beer, and what the hell do you care which garbage-pail what's left of us lands in after you're done with us!"

"Cut that barroom talk around here if--"

"Good enough for six years, wasn't I, to lay down like a door-mat for you to walk on, eh? Good enough. Good enough when it came to giving up chunks of my own flesh and blood when your burns was like hell's fire on your back and all your old woman could do to help was throw a swoon every time she looked at you. Good enough to--"

"Gad! I knew it! I knew it! Knew you'd show your yellow streak."

She fell to moaning in her hands. "No, no, Max, I--"

"Bah! you can't throw that up to me, though. I never wanted it! I could have bought it off any one of them poor devils that hang around hospitals, as many inches off any one of 'emas I wanted. I never wanted them to graft it on me off you. I told the doctor I didn't. I knew you'd be throwing it up to me some day. If I'd bought it off a stranger I--I wouldn't have that limp in front of me always to--to rub things in. I knew you'd throw it up to me. I--Gad! I knew it! I knew it!"

"No, no, Max, I didn't mean it. You--you just got me so crazy I don't know what I'm saying. Sure, I--I made you take it off me. I wanted 'em to cut it off me to graft on your burns because it--it was like finding a new way of saying how--how I love you, Max. Every drop of blood was like--like I could see for myself how--how I loved you, Max. I--"

"Oh, my God!" he said, folded his arms atop the piano, and let his head fall into them. "Oh, my God!"

"That's how I love you, Max. That's how you--you're all in the world I got, Max. That's why I--can't, just can't let you go, dear. Don't throw me over, Max. Cut the comedy and come down to earth. You 'ain't had a holy spell for two years now since the old woman sniffed me and wanted to marry you off to that cloak-and-suit buyer with ten thou in the bank and a rush of teeth to the front. You remember how we luffed, dearie, that night we seen her at the show? Don't let your old lady--"

"Cut that, I tell you!"

"You'd be a swell gink hitting the altar trail with a bunch of white satin, wouldn't you? At your time of life, forty and set in your ways, you'd have a swell time landing a young frisky one and trying to learn one of them mother's darlings how to rub in your hair-tonic and how to rub your salad-plate with garlic? Gosh-golly! I bust right out laffing when I even think about it! Come down to earth, Max! You'd be a swell hit welded for life with a gold band, now, wouldn't you?"

She was suddenly seized with immoderate laughter not untinged with hysteria, loud and full of emptiness, as if she were shouting for echoes in a cave.

"Like hell you would! *You* tied to a bunch of satin and tending the kids with the whooping-cough! Whoops la, la!" She fell to rocking herself backward and forward, her rollicking laughter staining her face dark red.

"Whoops la, la! Whoops la, la!"

Suddenly Max Zincas rose to his height, regarding her sprawling uncontrolled pose with writhing lips of distaste, straightened his waistcoat, cleared his throat twice, and, standing, drank the last of his wine. But a pallor crept up, riding down the flush.

"Funny, ain't it? Laff! Laff! But I'd wait till you hear something funnier I got to tell you. Funny, ain't it? Laff! Laff!"

She looked up with her lips still sagging from merriment, but the dark red in her face darker.

"Huh?"

His bravado suddenly oozed and the clock ticked roundly into the silence between them.

"Huh?" she repeated, cocking her head.

"You got to know it, Mae, and the sooner I get it out of me the better. But, remember, if you wanna drive me out before I'm finished, if you wanna get rid of me a damn sight quicker than any other way, throw me some sob stuff and watch. You--Well--I--The sooner I get it out of me the better, Mae."

"Huh?"

"She's a--a nice little thing, Mae. Her mother's a crony with my old lady. Lives in a brownstone out on Lenox Avenue. Met her first at--at a tennis-match she was winning at--at Forest Park Club."

"Huh?"

"Not a high-stepper or a looker like you in your day, Mae, none of--that chorus pep you used to have. Neat, though. Great little kid for outdoors. Nice little shape, too. Not in your class, but--but neat. Eyes like yours, Mae, only not--not in your class. A--a little cast in one of them, but all to the good, Mae. Nice clean little--girl, fifteen thou with her, and her old man half owner in the Weeko Woolen Mills. I--I need the money, Mae. The customs is digging up dirt again. It ain't like I 'ain't been on the level with you, girl. You knew it had to come sooner or later. Now, didn't you, Mae? Now there's the girl. Didn't you?"

Reassured, he crossed to where she sat silent, and placed a large, heavy hand on her shoulder.

"There's nothing needs to worry you, old girl. Thirty-five hundred in your jeans and a couple of thou and the flat from me on top. Gad! it's a cinch for you, old girl. I've seen 'em ready for the dump at your age, and you--you're on the boom yet. Gad! you're the only one I ever knew kept her looks and took on weight at the same time. You're all right, Mae, and--and, gad! if I don't wish sometimes the world was different! Gad! if--if I don't!"

And, rather reassured, he tilted her chin and pinched her cold cheek and touched the corner of his eyes with the back of his wrist."

"Gad, if--if I don't!"

It was as if the flood of her emotion had risen to a wave and at his words frozen on its crest. She opened her lips to speak, but could only regard him with eyes as hard as ice-fields.

"Now, now, Mae, don't look thataway. You're a sensible woman and know the world's just built thataway. I always told you it don't cost us men nothing but loose change to show ourselves a good time. You girls gotta pay up in different coin. If I hadn't come along some other fellow would, so what's the use a fellow not showing himself a good time? You girls know where you get off. Come, be a sport, old girl! With thirty-five hundred in your jeans and me wanting to do the square thing--the piano and all, lemme say to you that you 'ain't got a kick coming. Just lemme say that to you--piano and all, Mae!"

Sobs trembled up, thawing the edge of ice that incased her. A thin blur of tears rose to her eyes like a premonitory ripple before the coming of the wind.

"You can't! You can't! You--you can't ditch me like that, I tell you.
You--"

"By God! if you're going to begin to holler I'll get out of here so quick it'll make your head swim!"

"Oh no, you don't! Aw, no, you don't! You ain't going to quit so easy for a squint-eyed little hank that--that your old woman found for you. Max, you ain't! You wouldn't! Tell me you wouldn't, dear. Tell me! Tell me!"

"Get off your knees there and behave yourself, Mae! Looka your dress there, all torn. This ain't no barroom. Get up and behave yourself! Ain't you ashamed! Ain't you ashamed!"

She was trembling so that her knees sent little ripples down the tight white silk drop-skirt.

"You can't ditch me like this and get away with it. You and me can't--can't part peaceful. You can't throw me over after all these years for a little squint-eyed hank and get away with it! By Heaven! you can't!"

He drew tight fists to his sides, his lower jaw shot forward. "You start a row here and, by gad! if I don't--"

"I ain't! I ain't! But don't throw me over, Max, after all these years! Don't, Max! You need me. There ain't a woman on God's earth will do for you what I will. I--I 'ain't got nobody but you, Max, to do for. I tell you, Max, you--you need me. Think, dear, all them months when the customs was after you. Them hot days when you couldn't show your face, and I used to put you to bed and fan and fan you eight hours straight till you forgot to be scared and fell asleep like a baby."

"Now, now, Mae, I--"

"Them nights we used to mix a few drinks when we came home from a show or something and sit right here in this room and swill 'em off, laffing and laffing till we got a little lit up. That time when we sneaked down to Sheepshead and you lost your wad at the wheel and I won it back for you. All them times, Max! That--that Christmas Eve you sneaked away from your old woman! Remember? I tell you, Max, you can't throw me over after what we been through together, and get away with it. You can't, not by a damn sight! You can't!"

In spite of herself her voice would slip up, raucous sobs tore through her words, tears rained down her frankly distorted face, carrying their bitter taste of salt to her lips.

"You can't! You can't! I 'ain't got the strength! I 'ain't got a thing in life that ain't wrapped around you. I can't go back to hit or miss like--like I could ten years ago. I 'ain't got nothing saved out of it all but you. Don't try to ditch me, Max! Don't! I--I'll walk on my knees for you. I--"

"For God's sake, Mae, I--"

"If there's a way to raise two times fifteen thou for you, Max, I--I'll raise it. I'll find a way, Max. I tell you I will! I'm lucky at the wheel, Max. You watch and see. You just watch and see. I can work. Max, I--"

"Get up, Mae, get up. There's a good girl. Get up and--"

"I'll work my fingers down, Max, only don't try to ditch me, don't try to ditch me! I'll go out to the country where your old woman can't ever sniff me. I--I'll fix it, Max, so you--so you just can't lose. Don't ditch me, dear; take your Maizie

back. Take me in your arms and call me Maizie. Take me!"

"Girl, 'ain't you--'ain't you got no shame!"

"Just try me back for a month, Max. For a month, Max, and see if--if I don't fix things so they come out right. Gimme a month, Max! Gimme, Max! Gimme! Gimme!"

And with her last remnant of restraint gone, she lay downright at his feet, abandoned to virulent grief, and in her naked agony a shapeless mass of frill and flounce, a horrible and not dramatic spectacle of abandonment; decencies gone down before desire, the heart ruptured and broken through its walls. In such a moment of soul dishabille and her own dishabille of bosom bulging above the tight lacing of her corset-line as she lay prone, her mouth sagging and wet with tears, her lips blowing outward in bubbles, a picture, in fact, to gloss over, Mae Munroe dragged herself closer, flinging her arms about the knees of Mr. Zincas, sobbing through her raw throat.

"Just a month, Max! Don't ditch me! Don't! Don't! Don't!"

He looked away from the sorry spectacle of her bubbling lips and great, swollen eyelids.

"Leggo! Leggo my knees!"

"Just a month, Max, just--"

"Leggo! Leggo my knees! Leggo, girl! Ain't you ashamed!"

"Just a month, Max, I--"

"Gad! 'ain't you got no shame, girl! Get up! Leggo! I can't stand this, I tell you. Be a sport and leggo me quiet, Mae. I-- I'll send you everything, a--a check that'll surprise you, old girl! Lemme go quiet! Nothing can't change things. Quit your blubbering. It makes me sick, I tell you. Quit your blubbering, old girl, and leggo. Leggo! Leg-go! Leg-go, I say!"

Suddenly he stooped and with a backward turn of her wrist unloosed himself and, while the pain still staggered her, side-stepped the huddle of her body, grasped his hat from the divan and lunged to the door, tugging for a frantic moment with the lock.

On her knees beside the piano, in quite the attitude he had flung her, leaning forward on one palm and amid the lacy whirl of her train, Mae Munroe listened to his retreating steps; heard the slam of a lower door.

You who recede before the sight of raw emotions with every delicacy shamed, do not turn from the spectacle of Mae Munroe prone there on the floor, her bosom upheaved and her mouth too loose. When the heart is torn the heart bleeds, whether under cover of culture and a boiled shirt-front or without shame and the wound laid bare. And Mae Munroe, who lay there, simple soul, only knew or cared that her heart lay quivering like a hurt thing, and for the sobs that bubbled too frankly to her lips had no concern.

But after a while they ceased of exhaustion, and she rose to her feet, her train threatening to throw her; walked toward the cold, cloyed dinner, half-eaten and unappetizing on the table; and fell to scooping some of the cold gravy up from its dish, letting it drip from the spoon back again. The powder had long since washed off her cheeks and her face was cold as dough. The tears had dried around her mouth.

Presently she pinned up the lacy train about her, opened a cupboard door and slid into a dark, full-length coat, pinned on a hat with a feather that dropped over one side as if limp with wet, dabbed at her face with a pink powder-chamois and, wheezing ever so slightly, went out, tweaking off two of the three electric lights after her--down two flights of stairs through a quiet foyer and out into the fluid warmth of late October. Stars were out, myriads of them.

An hour she walked--down the cross-town street and a bit along the wide, bright, lighted driveway, its traffic long since died down to an occasional night-prowling cab, a skimming motor-car; then down a flight of curving stone steps with her slightly perceptible limp, and into the ledge of parkway where shadows took her into their velvet silence; down a second flight, across a railroad track, and to the water's edge, where a great coal-station ran a jut of pier out into the river. She could walk its length, feeling it sway to the heavy tug of current.

Out at the very edge the water washed up against the piles with a thick, inarticulate lisp, as if what it had to say might only be understood from the under side.

THE NAME AND THE GAME

At Christmas-tide men and women with soiled lives breathe alcoholic sighs and dare to glance back into the dim corridors of their long agos.

Cronies, snug in an age of steam heat, turn their warm backs upon to-day, swap white-Christmas stories, and hanker with forefinger laid alongside of nose for the base-burners and cold backs of the good old days.

Not least upon the busy magnate's table is his shopping-list.

Evenings, six-dollar-a-week salesgirls sit in their five-dollar-a-week hall-bedrooms, with their aching feet in a tub of hot water and their aching fingers busy with baby-ribboned coat-hangers and silk needle-book tokens of Yuletide affection.

Even as it flowered in a manger the Christmas spirit, a perennial lily upon the sooty face of the world, blooms out of the slack heap of men's rife and strife.

In the hearts of children it is a pod filled with their first happiness.

Down from a sky the color of cold dish-water a cloak of swift snow fell upon the city, muffling its voice like a hand held against its mouth. Children who had never before beheld a white Christmas leaped with the joy of it. A sudden army of men with blue faces and no overcoats sprang full-grown and armed with shovels, from out the storm. City parks lay etched in sudden finery. Men coming up out of the canon of Wall Street remembered that it was Christmas and felt for bauble money.

At early dusk and through the white dance of the white storm the city slid its four million packs off its four million backs and turned homeward. Pedestrians with the shopper's light in their eyes bent into the flurry and darted for surface cars and subways. Commuters, laden with bundles and with tickets between their teeth, rushed for early trains.

Women with bearing-down bundles and babies wedged through the crowd, fighting for trains and place. Boys in cadet uniforms and boarding-school girls, homeward bound, thrust forward their shining faces as if into the to-morrow. A tight tangle of business men passed single file through a trellised gateway and on down to a lower level. A messenger with a tipsy spray of holly stuck upright in his cap whacked with a folded newspaper at a fellow-messenger's swift legs and darted in and around the knees of the crowd. A prodigal hesitated, then bought a second-class ticket for home. Two nuns hurried softly on missions of Christmas.

The low thunder of a thousand feet: tired feet, eager feet; flat feet; shabby feet; young feet; callous feet; arched and archless feet. Voices that rose like wind to a gale. A child dragged by the arm and whimpering. A group of shawled strangers interchanging sharp jargon.

Within the marble mausoleum of a waiting-room, its benches lined with the kaleidoscopic faces of the traveling public, a train-announcer bellowed a paean of tracks and stations.

At the onyx-and-nickel-plated periodical stand men in passing snatched their evening paper from off the stack of the counter, flopping down their pennies as they ran. In the glow of a spray of red and white electric bulbs, in a bower of the instant's pretty-girl periodical covers, and herself the most vivid of them all, Miss Marjorie Clark caught a hastily flung copper coin on the fly, her laughter mounting with it.

"Whoops, la-la!"

"Good catch, kiddo."

"Oh, you Charley-boy, who was you pitching for last season?"

"The Reds, because that's your color."

"Say, if you're going to catch that four-eighteen you've got to break somebody's speed limit between here and track ten. Run along, Charley-boy, and Merry Christmas."

But Mr. Charles Scully swung to a halt, poured his armful of packages into a wire basket of six-city-postcard-views for ten cents, swung open his overcoat with a sprinkling of snow on its slick-napped velvet collar, lifted his small black mustache in a smile.

"Black-eyes, I'd miss three trains for you."

"There's not another until the four-forty."

"I should worry. Anyway, for all I know you've changed your mind and are coming out with me to-night, little one."

The quick blood ran up into her small face, dyeing it, and she withdrew from his nearing features.

"I have not! Gee! you're about as square as a doughnut, you are."

"Jumping Juniper, can't a fellow miss his train just to wish a little beauty like you a Merry Christmas? But on the level, I want to take you out home with me to-night; honest I do, little spitfire."

"Crank up there, Charley-boy; you got about thirty seconds to make that train in."

"Gets you sore every time I ask you out, don't it, black-eyes? Talk about your little tin saints!"

"Say, if you was any slicker you'd slide."

"You can't scare me with those black eyes."

"Can't I, my brave boy! Say, you'd want to quarantine the dictionary if you found smallpox in it, that's how hard you are to scare."

"Well, of all the lines of talk, if you 'ain't got the greatest. Cute is no name for you."

"And say, the place where you clerk must be a classy clothes-parlor, Charley-boy."

"Right-o, little one. If you ever pass by the Brown Haberdashery, on Twenty-third Street, drop in, and I'll buy you a lunch."

"Tra-la! Where did you get that checked suit? And I'll bet you flag the train out at Glendale, where you live, with that tie. Oh, you Checkers!"

"Some class to me, eh, kiddo?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that."

He leaned closer. His smile had an uplift like a crescent and a slight depression in his left cheek, too low for a dimple, twinkled when he smiled, like an adjacent star.

"Take it from me, Queenie, these glad rags are my stock in trade. In my line I got to sport them. At home I'm all to the overalls. If my boss was to see the old red wool smoking-jacket I wear around the house, he'd fire me for burlesquing the business."

"Well, of all the nerve! Let go my hand."

"Didn't know I had it, little one."

"And say, you give back that kodak picture you swiped off me yesterday. I don't give my photographs out promiscuous."

"That little snap-shot of you? Nix, I will! I took that home and hung it in a mother-of-pearl frame right over the parlor table."

"Sure! And above the family Bible, huh? I had a fellow once tell me he was a bookmaker, and I was green enough then to beg him to take me out and let me see him make 'em. But I've learnt a thing or two about you and your kind since then, Charley-boy."

"You come out to-night and I'll show it to you myself."

"Haven't you got my number, yet, Cholly--haven't you?"

"What is it, little one, number scared-cat?"

She flung him a glance over the hump of one shoulder. Nineteen summers had breezed lightly over her, and her lips were cherry-like, but tilted slightly as if their fruit had been plucked from the tree of sophistication.

"You bet your life I'm scared."

"Why, out there in Glendale, little one, you won't meet your own shadow, if that's what's hurting you."

"You bet your life I won't."

"My old woman will fix you up all right."

"Oh no, she won't!"

"Aw, come on, kiddo. We're going to have a tree for the little brother, and the old woman will be rigged up like a mast in her spotted silk. Come on. Who'll be any the wiser?"

Laughter and mockery rose to the surface of her eyes, bubbled to her lips.

"Huh! What's that only-son stuff you gave me yesterday? All about how you had to land a job in the city and make good after your old man died, eh? How about your yesterday's line of talk?"

"I--"

"All about how mother's wandering boy found himself all plastered over with the mortgage and worked nights to get out from under. All about--Aw, say, what's the use? But I always say to you fellows, 'Boys, cultivate good memories; you need 'em.' Little brother! Ha, joke!"

"I--aw--I--Little brother's what we call my sister Till's little red-headed kid. Aw, what--what you want to put me in bad for, sister? I'm not so easy to trip up as you think I am."

"Little brother! And say, that's a bottle of malted milk there in your pocket that you're taking out to him, ain't it? Sure it is."

"This? Aw, this--Say, you haven't got those snappy black eyes of yours for nothing, have you? This bottle here in my pocket, aw, this--this is a--bottle of brandy for my old woman. First snow flurry and her left foot begins to drag like a rag with rheumatism."

Her laughter rose, and his confusion with it.

"Sure," she cried.

"Aw--aw, come on, Marjie."

"Well, of all the nerve! My name's private property, it is."

"It slipped. It said itself. But, gee! I like it. Marjie! Some little name."

"Well, of all the nerve!"

"Come on, black-eyes. You're off at five and we'll catch the five-eighteen. Who's going to be any the wiser? I got something out there I want to tell you."

"My hearing's all right in the city."

"It's something I want to whisper right where I can get next to that little ear of yours."

"You got a swell chance at that little ear of mine, nix."

"Stingy!"

"You bet your life I'm stingy."

"It's a white Christmas for sure out where I live. Come on out and let me show you a good time, little one."

"I wish you was half as white as this Christmas is. Honest, sometimes I says to myself, I says, ain't there just none of you white? Has a girl like me got to keep dodging all her life?"

"Come, sister, let's catch the five-eighteen."

"You better run along before you get me all rubbed the wrong way. At five-eighteen I'll be buying my own meal ticket, let me tell you that."

"Then buy your own meal ticket, if that's what's hurting you, little touchy, and come out on the eight-eighteen. It's only a thirty-minute run; and if you say the word I'll be at the station with bells on to meet you. Come on. I'll show you the Christmas Eve of your life. Be a sport, Marjie."

"Yes, I always say, inviting a girl to be a sport is a slick way of inviting her to Hades. I've seen where being a sport lands a girl, I have. I ain't game, maybe, but, thank God, I ain't. Thank God, I ain't, is what I always say to them."

"Well, of all the funny little propositions."

"Well, there's nothing funny about your proposition."

"You're one funny little girl, but, gee! I like you."

There was that in his glance and the white flash of his teeth and the pomaded air of geniality about him that sent a quick network of thrills darting through her; all her perceptions rose, and her color.

"Come on, little girl."

"Oh," she cried, clenching her small tan hand, and a tempest of fury flashing across her face, "you--you fresh fellows up-town here think just because you wear good clothes and can hold down a decent job, that you--you can put up any kind of a proposition to a girl like me. Oh--oh, just every one of you!"

"Well, of all the little spitfires."

"What do you think I am? What does every one of you, up and down town, think I am? Do I look like I was born yesterday? Well, I wasn't, or the day before or the day before that. Honest to God, if I was a nice-appearing fellow like you I'd be ashamed, I would. I'd go out in the garden and eat worms, I would."

He retreated before her scorn, but smiling. "I'll get you yet, you little vix," he said; "you pretty little black-eyed vix, you; I'll get you yet."

"Like hell you will."

"If you change your mind, come out on the eight-eighteen, girly. Two blocks to the left of the station; the corner house with a little weather-cock over the porch. Can't miss it. I'll be drapin' the tree in tin fringe and wishing you were there."

"Oh," she cried, her voice cracked spang across with a sob, "I--I just hate you!"

"No, you don't," he said, smiling and gathering his parcels.

"Do."

"Don't."

"Do."

"What's that on your wrist?"

"Where?"

"There. I thought you said you threw it away."

Her right hand flew to her left wrist as if a welt lay there. "This,

I--huh--I--I forgot I had it on. This--this little old bracelet you said you found in the Subway. It--it's nothing but red celluloid, anyway. I--I nearly did throw it away."

"You look just like a little gipsy, you do, with that red comb in that black hair of yours and that red bracelet on your little brown arm. I'll swear if I didn't miss my train by ten minutes the first time I seen you standing here at this counter with those big black eyes of yours shining out."

"You'll miss it again if you don't run away, Charley-boy."

"Dare you to come along! I'll wait for the five-eighteen."

"Don't hold your breath till I do."

"Dare you to come out on the eight-eighteen! Say the word, and I'll be at the station."

"I'll see myself crazy with the blues first."

"You might as well come, kiddo, because I'll get you yet."

"Try the soft-pedal stuff about the kid and the Christmas tree on the girl at the Glendale station. Maybe she hasn't cut her eye-teeth."

A flush swept his face like quick wind. "You're a bum sport, all righty."

"And you! Gee! if I was to tell you what I think you are! If I was!" She sank her teeth into her lower lip to keep it from trembling, but smiled. "But I wouldn't take the trouble, Charley-boy--honest, I wouldn't take the trouble."

"I'll get you yet, you little vix," he insisted, his white smile flashing, and retreating into the crowd.

"You--oh--oh, you!"

She stood looking after him, head backward and hip arched forward in the pose of Carmen's immortal defiance. But behind her flashing attitude her heart rose to her throat and a warm gush of blood to her face, betraying it.

When the illuminated hands of the illuminated tower clock swung to the wide angle of five o'clock, Miss Marjorie Clark and Miss Minnie Bundt, from the fancy-fruit stand opposite, cast off the brown cocoon of their workaday for the trim street finery which the American shopgirl, to the stupefaction of economists and theorists, can somehow evolve out of eight dollars a week.

In the locker-room they met, the placid sky-colored eyes of Miss Bundt meeting Miss Clark's in the wavy square of mirror.

"Snowing, ain't it?"

"Yep."

"Gee! that's a nifty little hat, Min! Where'd you get the pompon?"

"Five-and-Ten."

"If it 'ain't got the Avenue written all over it."

Silence.

"Want some my powder, Min? Pink."

"Nope."

"Want to--want to go to a movie to-night or--or bum around the stores? It's Christmas Eve."

"Can't."

"Date?"

"Yep."

Silence.

A flush rose to Miss Clark's face, darkening it. She adjusted her dyed-fur tippet and a small imitation-fur cap at just the angle which doubled its face value. Something seemed to leap out from her eyes and then retreat behind a smile and a squint.

"Say, Min, if my voice hurt me like yours does, I'd rub salve on it," and went out, slamming the door behind her. But a tear lay on the edge of her down-curved lashes, threatening to ricochet down her smoothly powdered cheek. She winked it in again. The station swarm was close to her, jostling, kicking her ankles in passing, buffeting.

From out the swift tide a figure without an overcoat, and a cap vizor pulled well down over his eyes, locked her arm from the rear, so that she sprang about, releasing herself.

"For God's sake, Blink, cut the pussy-foot tread, will you? I've jabbed with a hat-pin for less than that."

"Merry Christmas, Marj."

"Yes, I'm merry as a crutch. What brought you around, Blink?"

"Can't a fellow drop around to pick you up?"

"Land that job?"

"Not a chance. What they want down there is a rough-neck, not a gentleman rubber-down. Say, take it from me; after a fellow has worked in the high-class Turkish baths, Third Avenue joints ain't up to his tone no more. I got to have class, kiddo. That's why I got such a lean toward you."

"Cut that."

"Come down to-night, Marj?"

"Where?"

"Harry's."

"Well, I guess not."

"Buy you a dinner."

"But you're flat as your hand."

He set up a jingling in his left pocket. "I am, am I?"

"Well, I'm not going."

"When you going to cut this comedy, Marj?"

"I'm not. I'm just beginning."

"Breaking into high society, eh? Fine chance."

"Yes, with the gang of you down there hanging on like the plague, I got a swell chance, nix."

"It's because we know you too well, Marj. Knew you when you had two black pigtailed and used to carry a bucket into the family entrance of Harry's place, crying with madness every time your old man sent you. Gad! I can see you yet, sweetness, with your big black eyes blacker than ever, and steering home your old man from off a jamboree."

"God! sometimes I wake up in the night just like him and ma was still alive and me and her was sitting there listening to him creak up the stairs on his bad nights. I wake up, I can tell you, in a sweat--right in a sweat."

"I knew you in them days, kiddo, just like you knew me. That's why you can't pull nothing over on a fellow, kiddo, that's had as many pulls on your all-day suckers as I have. You're a little quitter, you are, and sometimes I think you're out for bigger game."

"It don't mean because a girl was born in the mud she's got to stick there, does it?"

"No, but she can't pretend she don't know one of the old mud-turtles when she sees one."

"Mud-turtle is the right name."

"The crowd has got your number, all right, kiddo; they know you're out after bigger game. You're a little turncoat, that's what they say about you."

"Turncoat! Who wouldn't turn a coat they was ashamed of? I guess you all don't remember how I used to say, even back in those years when I was taking tickets down at Lute's old Fourteenth Street Amusement Parlors, how when my little minute came I was going to breeze away from the gang down there?"

"I remember, all righty."

"How I was going to get me a job up-town here, where I could get in with a decent crowd of girls, and not be known for the kind down there that you and all of 'em knew I--I wasn't."

"Sure we knew."

"Yes, but what good does that do me? Can a dirty little yellow-haired snip over in the Fancy Fruits give me the once-over and a turn-down? She can. And why? Because I ain't certified. I come from a counterfeit crowd, and who's going to take the trouble to find my number and see if it's real?"

"Aw, now--"

"Didn't a broken-down old granny over in the Thirty-fourth Street house where I roomed give me notice last week, because Addie Lynch found me out one night and came to see me, lit up like a Christmas tree?"

"That's why I say, Marj, stick to the old ones who know you."

"Like May Pope used to say, a girl might as well have the game as the name."

"If I was a free man, Marj, I'd--"

"Where has the strait and narrow got me to, I'd like to know? Sometimes I think it's nothing but a blind alley pushing me back."

"If I was a free man, Marj--"

"Let me meet a slick little up-stage fellow that doesn't have to look two ways before he walks the wrong beat in daylight; let me meet a fellow like that, and where does it get me?"

"I'm no saint, Marj, but there ain't a beat in town I'd have to look two ways on. Ask any cop--"

"Does the slick little up-stage fellow get my number? He does not. I'd like to see one of them ask that dirty little yellow-head over in the Fancy Fruits to go home with him. A little Nobody-Home like her, just because she was raised in an amen corner of the Bronx and has a six-foot master-mechanic brother to call for her every time she works fifteen minutes later, she can wear her hands crossed on her chest and a lily stuck in 'em and get away with it, too."

"You're right, kiddo; you got more sand than ten of such put together."

"I'm as good as her and better. I'm not so sure by a long shot that any of those baby faces would say no if they was ever invited to say yes. Watch out there, that cab, Blink. Gee! your nerves are as steady as gelatin."

They were veering through the crowds and out into the soft flurry of the storm. Flakes like pulled-out bits of cotton floated to their shoulders, resting there. Seventh Avenue, for the instant before the eye left the great Greek facade of the Pennsylvania Terminal, was like a dream of Athens seen through the dapple of white shadows. Immediately the eye veered, however, the great cosmopolis formed by street meeting avenue tore down the illusion. Another block and

second-hand clothing shops nudged one another, their flapping wares for sale outside them like clothes-wash on a line, empty arms and legs gallivanting in the wind. A storm-car combed through the driven snow, scuttling it and clearing the tracks. Down another block the hot, spicy smell of a Mexican dish floated out between the swinging doors of an all-night bar. A man lurched out, laughing and crying.

Marjorie Clark's companion steered her past and turned toward her, his twitching features suddenly, and even through their looseness, softened.

"Poor kiddo!" he said. "Just send them to me for reference. I can do some tall vouching for you."

"The way I feel lately sometimes, honest, I think if I get to getting the indigoes much deeper, there's no telling where they'll land me. The game as well as the name ain't all poetry, let me tell you that."

Through the fall of mild snow he could see her face shining out darkly, and his bare, eager fingers moved toward her arm, and except when the spasmodic twitch locked his features, his face, too, was thrust forward, keen and close to hers.

"I've been telling you that for five years, girl."

"Now don't go getting me wrong, Blink."

"If I was what the law calls a free man, Marj, you know what kind of a proposition I would have put up to you five years ago when I had my health and my looks and--"

"If you want to make me sore, just tune up on that old song. You ain't man enough to even get your own little kid out of the clutches of a mother that's pulling her down to Hades with her. Take it from me, if there wasn't something in me that's just sorry for you, I wouldn't walk these here blocks with you. Sometimes when I look at you right hard, Blink, honest, it looks to me like the coke's got you, Blink."

"Now, Marjie--"

"You wouldn't tell me if it had. But you got the twitches, all righty."

"It's me nerves, Marj; me nerves and you."

"Bah! you got about as much backbone as a jellyfish. Blaming things on a girl."

"You took the backbone out of me, I tell you."

"Oh no, I didn't; it's been missing since your first birthday."

"Eating out my heart and vitals for you and your confounded highfalutin amen notions."

"Before you ever clapped eyes on me you was more famous for your arm muscle than your backbone. I guess I don't remember how your own mother told me the very day before she died how she tried on her old knees to keep you out of a marriage with that woman. All that happened way back in the days when you had your muscles and was head rubber-down at Herschey's. You knew her kind when you did it, and now why ain't you man enough to blame yourself for what you are instead of blaming the girl? Gee!"

"I didn't mean it, Marj. It slipped. S'help me, I didn't. Sometimes I just don't know what I'm saying, Marj; that's how my mind kinda gets sometimes. All fuzzed over like."

"What's the odds what you say, Blink? You're just not man-size, I guess."

She was a bleak little figure bowing into the wind, her tippet flapping back over one shoulder.

"I ain't, ain't I? I ain't gone through a living hell sitting on the water-wagon for you, have I?"

"Try to keep from twitching that way, Blink. You give me the horrors."

"I ain't cut out playing stakes, have I? Gad! I can live from Sunday to Sunday on a pick-up from a little gamble here and a little gamble there. But when you hollered, I didn't cut it and begin to work up muscle to

get back on the job again, did I? I didn't, did I?"

"You can't pump that into me, Blink."

His voice narrowed to a nasal quality. "I didn't send her and the kid a whole Christmas box like you wanted me to, did I? I didn't stick a brand-new fiver in the black-silk-dress pattern, knowing all the while she'd have it drunk up before she opened the creases out. I didn't, did I?"

They were approaching the intersection of a wide and white-lighted cross-town street. The snowfall had lightened. Marjorie Clark let her gaze rest for the moment upon her companion, and her voice seemed suddenly to nestle deep in her throat.

"Gee! Blink, if I thought any of the--the uplift stuff I've tried to pump into you had seeped in. Gee! if I could think that, Blink!"

Tears lay close to the surface of her words, and his lean face was thrust farther forward in affirmation.

"It has, Marj. All I got to do is to think of you and those big black eyes of yours shining, and I could lead a water-wagon parade."

"It's the habits, Blink, you got to watch most. For a minute to-night you looked like coke and--and it scared me. Don't let the coke get you, Blink. For God's sake, don't!"

"I sent her a fiver, Marj, and a black silk, and a doll with real hair for the kid. Y'oughtta seen, Marj, real hair on it."

"That was fine, Blink. Fine!"

"Where you going? Aw, come, Marj. For the love of Mike, you're not going."

"Yes, yes. I got to go. This is Twenty-second Street, my corner. That's where I room; that fourth house to the right. That dark one. I got to go."

"Where?"

"Where do you s'pose? Home."

"What's doin' there?"

"N-nothing."

"Whatta you going to do Christmas Eve? Sit in your two-by-four and twiddle your thumbs?"

Immediate sobs rose in her throat. "Lord!" she said, "I dun'no! I dun'no!"

He set up the jangling again. "It's Christmas Eve, Marj."

"That's right, rub it in," and looked away from him.

"Come, Marj, don't leave me high and dry like this. Come, I'll blow you to a little supper, kiddo. I got a couple of meal tickets coming to me down at Harry's on some ivories I threw last night."

"Dice! And after the line of talk you just tried to make me swallow. Did I believe it? I did not!"

"No stakes, Marj. Just for a couple of meal tickets we tossed. Come, girl, you 'ain't been down to Harry's for months; you won't get your halo mussed from one time. It's Christmas Eve, Marj."

"I heard you the first time."

"If I got to go it alone to-night, Marj, it'll be the wettest Christmas I ever spent, it will. I'll pickle this Christmas Eve like it was never pickled before, I will."

"Aren't you no man at all, threatening like that? Just no man at all?"

"I tell you if I got to go it alone to-night, I won't be. I'm crazy enough to tear things wide open."

"A line of talk like that will send me home quicker than anything, if you want to know it." She turned her face away and toward the dark aisle of the side street.

"I didn't mean it, Marj."

"I hate whining."

"Don't go, girl. Don't. Don't give me the horrors and leave me alone to-night, Marj."

She moved slowly into the gloom of the cross-town street. Solemn rows of blank-faced houses flanked it. Wind slewed as through a canon, whistling in high pitch.

"Gee!"

"Fine little joy lane for your Christmas Eve, eh? Don't go, Marj. Have a heart and be a sport. Let me blow you to a supper down at Harry's for old times' sake. Didn't you promise my old woman to keep an eye on me? Didn't you? For old times' sake, Marj. It's Christmas."

She stood shivering and gazing down into the black throat of the street.

"It'll be a merry evening in that two-by-four of yours, won't it? Look at it down there. Cheerful, ain't it?"

Tears formed in a glaze over her eyes.

"Be a sport, Marj."

"All right--Blink!"

* * * * *

At the family entrance to Harry's place, and just around the corner from the main entrance of knee-high swinging doors and a broadside of frosted plate-glass front, a bead of gas burned sullenly through a red globe, winking, so to speak, at all who would enter there under cover of its murk.

Women with faces the fatty white of jade, and lips that might have kissed blood, slipped from the dark tide of the side street into the entrance. Furtive couples rose out of the night: the men, lean as laths, collars turned up and caps drawn down; girls, some with red lights and some with no lights in their eyes, and most of them with too red lips of too few curves, and all of them with chalk-colored powder laid on over the golden pollen of youth.

Within Harry's place, Christmas found little enough berth except that above the great soaped-over mirror at the far end of the room a holly wreath dangled from the tarnished gilt frame and against the clouded-over glass a forefinger had etched a careless Merry Christmas.

At tables set so close that waiters side-stepped between them, the habitués of Harry's place dined--wined, too, but mostly out of uncovered steins or two-inch stemless glasses. And here and there at smaller tables a solitary figure with a seer's light in his eyes sipped his greenish milk!

An electric piano, its shallow tones undigested by the crowded room, played in response to whomsoever slipped a coin into its maw. Kicked-up sawdust lay in the air like flakes.

From her table near the door Miss Marjorie Clark pushed from her a litter of half-tasted dishes and sent her dark glance out over the room. A few pairs of too sinuous dancers circled a small clearing around the electric piano. Waiters with fans of foam-drifting steins clutched between fingers jostled them in passing. At a small table adjoining, a girl slept in her arms. Two more entered, elbow in elbow, and directly a youth in a wide-striped wool sweater muffled high to his teeth, and features that in spite of himself would twitch and twitch again.

"Hi, Blink," he said in passing.

"Hi."

Reader, your heart lifted up and glowing with Yuletide and good-will toward men, turn not in warranted nausea from the

reek of Harry's place. Mere plants can love the light and turn to it, but have not the beautiful mercy to share their loveliness with foul places. The human heart is a finer work. It can, if it will, turn its white light upon darkness, so that out of it even a single seed may take heart and grow. A fastidious olfactory nerve has no right to dominion over the quality of mercy. The heart should keep its thousand doors all open, each heart-string a latch-string, and each latch-string out.

Marjorie Clark met her companion's eyes above the rim of his stein. "Looks more like hell on a busy day down here than like Christmas Eve, don't it?"

He was warmed, and the tight skin had softened as dried fruit expands in water. "Ah-h-h, but I feel better, kiddo."

"That's three steins you've had, Blink. And there's no telling what you filled up on those three times you went out."

"It's Christmas Eve, kiddo. What kind of a good time do you want for your money? A Christmas tree trimmed in tin angels?"

"Do I? You just bet your life I do."

"Then let me get it for you, sugar-plum. You just stick to me to-night and you can have any little thing your heart desires. Here, waiter." And he jingled again in the depths of his pocket.

"If you want to lose my company double quick, just you order another stein. Just look at you seeing double already."

"I'm all right, baby; never felt better in my life."

"You caught me when I was down and blue, didn't you, and pumped me full of a lot of Sunday-school talk, that's what you did. And I was fool enough to get soft and come down here with you, I was! But I felt it in my bones you was lying. I knew I was right about the coke. I seen you throw a high sign to that twitching guy in the striped sweater. I knew I was right. God, I--I just knew."

He leaned for her hand. "Little bittsie, black-eyed baby, you got me wrong."

"Ugh-h! Quit! Let go!"

He straightened, regarding her solemnly and controlling the slight swaying of his figure. "I'm a gentleman."

Her laugh was more of a cough. "There ain't no such animal."

"There ain't? I seen you trying to rope one to-day, all righty. I seen you."

"You what?"

"Sure I did. The slick guy in checks."

"You--"

"Sure I seen you. I was loafing around the station a whole hour before you seen me to-day, baby doll. I seen the whole show. Grabbed the slick little Checkers right out of the line, didn't you? Bowled him over with those black eyes of yours. Went for him right like he was a stick of candy and you was licking it, eh? Pretty slick to take in a big eyeful like that, wasn't I? Some little Checkers, he was."

Red leaped to her face. "Cut that!"

"Gad! what you mad about, kiddo? Gentleman friend, eh?"

"You just cut that talk, and double quick, too."

"After bigger game, eh, kiddo?"

"Fine chance."

"Not good enough down here, eh?"

"No, if you want to know it. No."

"He liked you, kiddo."

"Yes, he liked me. He liked me, all righty, like they all do. God! if I'd ever run across a fellow that was on the level with me, I'd get the hysterics right in his face, I would. Right in his face!"

"I'm on the level, Marj, only--"

"You try to begin that, now."

"I am, and you know it."

"You're about as straight as a horseshoe."

"I may backslide now and then, sweetness, but--"

"There's no backsliding for you any more, Blink. After that Gregory raid business you slid back as far in my mind as a fellow can slide."

He drained his glass, and this time caught his sway a bit too late.

"Forget that, kiddo."

"I can't. It was that showed me plainer than all that went before how I was wasting my time working over you."

"Ain't I got something on you, too, peaches? But you don't hear me throwing it up to you, do you? 'Ain't I got Checkers on you?"

"You--"

"But I ain't blaming you. Come, Marj, let's swap our real names."

"What?"

"Sure, I ain't blaming you. Only be on the level, girl--be on the level. If it's big fry you're after, and we don't measure up down here, say so."

"You--I think you're crazy, Blink."

"I know life, kiddo. I've used up thirty years of my lease on it getting wise to it. Come now, is it Checkers, queenie? What's your game?"

She leaned forward, looking him evenly between the eyes, but her lips seared as if from his hot insult. "You take that back."

"What you green around the gills for, kiddo? Didn't you say yourself that the name and the game come together in the same package? I ain't arguing it with you."

"You take it back, I said."

He laughed and flecked his fingers for a waiter, flinging out his legs at full length alongside the table. "You're a clever little girl, Marj, and I've got to hand it to you. Another stein there, waiter, and one for the girl; she needs it."

"I'll spill it right out if it comes."

"Lord! what you so sheety-looking for? White with temper and green at the gills, eh? Gad! I like you that way. I like you for your temper, and if you want to know it, I like you for every blamed thing about you."

"You--quit! Let go! Let go, I say! Ug-gh!" Her lips, with the greenish auro about them, would only move stiffly, and she pushed back from the table only half articulate. "Let me pass--please."

"Where you going, peaches?" He reached for her hand. "You mad, Marj? I didn't mean to get you sore."

"N-no, Blink."

"You beauty, you."

"Sh-h-h!"

"Gad! but I like you. Sit down, Marj, I got a new proposition to put to you. I can talk big money, girl."

"Don't--Blink."

"Sit down, girl. Harry don't stand for no stage stuff in here no more."

"I--"

"I got a new proposition, girl. One that'll make Checkers look like thirty cents. A white proposition, too, Marj. A baby could listen to it."

"Yes, yes, Blink, but not now. When you get lit up you--you oughtn't begin to dream about those millionaire propositions, Blink. Try and keep your wits."

"A baby could listen to this here proposition, Marj. And big money, too, Marj. It's diamonds for you."

Somehow with her lips she smiled down at him, and did not tug for the release of her hand. Dallied for the instant instead.

"You're lit up, Blink."

"Some big guns in Wall Street, Marj, are after me, Marj, with a million-dollar proposition. I--"

"Yes, yes, but wait a minute, Blink. I'll be back." She even lay a pat on his shoulder and slid past him lightly. "In a minute, Blink."

"Hurry," he said, his smile broken by a swift twitch of feature, and raising his fresh stein.

Once out of his vision, she veered sharply and in a bath of fear darted toward the small hallway, with its red bead of gaslight burning on and flickering against the two panels of colored glass in the dingy brown door.

Outside, the flakes had ceased and the sinister-looking side street lay in a white hush, a single line of scraggly footsteps crunched into the snow of the sidewalk. A clock from a sky-scraping tower rang out eight, its echoes singing like anvils in the sharp, thin air. On the cross-town street the shops were full of light and activity, crowds wedging in and out. Marjorie Clark pulled at her strength and ran.

At the Twenty-second Street corner she paused for the merest moment for breath and for a quick glance into the dark lane of the diverging street. The double row of stone houses, blank-faced and shouldering one another like paper dolls cut from a folded newspaper, stood back indistinctly against the night, most of the high stoops cushioned in untrod snow, the fourth of them from the right, lean-looking and undistinguished, except that the ash-can at its curb was a glorified urn of snow.

As she stood there the ache in Marjorie Clark's throat threatened to become articulate. She took up her swift pace again, but onward.

Ten minutes later, within the great heated mausoleum of the Pennsylvania Terminal, she bought a ticket for Glendale. On track ten the eight-eighteen had already made its first jerk outward as she made her dash for it.

In the spick swaddling clothes of new-laid snow, its roadways and garden beds, macadamized streets and runty lanes all of one identity, Glendale lay in a miniature valley beneath the railroad elevation; meandered down a slight hillside and out toward the open country.

Immediately removed from the steep flight of stairs leading down from the gabled station, small houses with roofs that wore the snow like coolies' hoods appeared in uncertain ranks forming uncertain streets. Lights gleamed in frequent windows, throwing squares of gold-colored light in the snow.

Here and there where shades were drawn the grotesque shadow of a fir-tree stood against the window; silhouettes moved past. Picket fences marched crookedly along. At each intersection of streets a white arc-light dangled, hissing

and spreading its radiance to the very stoops of adjoining houses.

Two blocks from the left of the station Marjorie Clark paused in the white shower of one of these arc-lights. The wind had hauled around to the north and its raw breath galloped across the open country, stinging her.

Across the street, diagonal, a low house of too many angles, the snow banked in a high drift across its north flank, stood well back in shadow, except that on the peak of its small veranda, and clearly defined by the arc-light, a weather-vane spun to the gale.

Marjorie Clark ducked her head to the onslaught of wind and crossed the street, kicking up a fine flurry of snow before her. A convoy of trees stood in military precision down the quiet avenue, their bare branches embracing her in immediate shadows. The gate creaked when she drew it backward, scraping outward and upon the sidewalk a hill of loose snow. Before that small house a garden lay tucked beneath its blanket, a scrawny line of hedge fluted with snow inclosing it and a few stalks that would presently flower. The hood of the dark veranda, surmounted with its high ruche of snow, seemed to incline, invitational.

Yet when Marjorie Clark pulled out the old-fashioned bell-handle her face sickened as she stood and she was down the steps again, the tightness squeezing her throat, her gloved hands fumbling the gate latch, and her knee flung against it, pressing it outward.

In the moment of her most frenzied attitude a golden patch of light from an opened door streamed out and over her. In its radiance a woman's wide-bosomed, wide-hipped silhouette, hand bent in a vizor over her eyes, leaned forward, and, rushing past her and down the plushy steps, the bareheaded figure of Mr. Charley Scully, a red and antiquated red wool indoor jacket flying to the wind, and a forelock of his shiny hair lifted.

"Marjie!"

She backed against the gate.

"Marj! Marjie?"

"I--No, no--I--I--"

"Why, little one! Marjie! Marjie!"

"I--No--no--"

But her inertia was of no moment, and very presently, Charles Scully's strong right arm propelling her, she was in the warm, bright-lighted hallway, its door closing her in and the wide-bosomed, wide-hipped figure in spotted silk fumbling the throat fastenings of her jacket, and the stooped form of Charley Scully dragging off her thin rubber shoes.

"Whew! they're soaking wet, ma. Get her a pair of Till's slippers or something."

"Don't jerk the child like that, son. Pull 'em off easy."

Through glazed eyes Marjorie Clark, balancing herself first on one foot, then the other, the spotted silk arm half sustaining her, could glimpse the scene of an adjoining room: a fir-tree standing against a drawn window-blind half hung in tinsel fringe, and abandoned in the very act of being draped; a woman and a child stooping at its base. Above a carved black-walnut table and from a mother-of-pearl frame, a small amateur photograph of Marjorie Clark smiled out at herself.

The figure in spotted silk dragged off the wet jacket and hurried with it toward the rear of the hallway, her left foot dragging slightly.

"Just a second, dearie-child, until I find dry things for you. Son, stop fussing around the lamb until she gets rested."

But on the first instant of the two of them standing alone there in the little hallway, Charley Scully turned swiftly to Marjorie Clark, catching up her small hand. His eyes carried the iridescence of bronze.

"Marjie," he said, "to--why, to think you'd come! Why--why, little Marjie!"

"I--oh, Charley-boy, I--"

"What, little one? What?"

"I--I dun'no'."

"What is it, hon? Ain't you as glad as I am?"

"I dun'no', only I--I--I'm scared, Charley--scared, I guess."

"Why, you just never was so safe, Marjie, as now--you just never was!"

She could not meet the eloquence of his eyes, but his smile was so near that the tightness at her throat seemed suddenly to thaw.

"Charley-boy," she said.

But at the sound of returning footsteps she sprang backward, clasping her hands behind her. A copper-haired woman with a copper-haired child in the curve of her arm moved through the lighted front room and toward them. Her smile was upturned, with a dimple low in one cheek, like a star in the cradle of a crescent moon. Charley Scully turned his vivid face toward her.

"Till," he cried, "she come, anyway. Looka, she's come!"

"Yes, I--I've come," said Marjorie Clark. There was a layer of hysteria in her voice.

THE END