

FICTION

Eleanor Hallowell Abbott

Old-Dad

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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OLD-DAD

BY

ELEANOR HALLOWELL ABBOTT

NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

681 FIFTH AVENUE

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First Printing, Feb., 1919

Second Printing, Feb., 1919

Third Printing, Feb., 1919

Fourth Printing, Feb., 1919

Fifth Printing, Mar., 1919

Sixth Printing, Mar., 1919

Seventh Printing, April, 1919

Eighth Printing, April, 1919

Printed in the United States of America

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PART I
OLD-DAD
I

UNTIL Daphne Bretton's peremptory departure from college she had neither known nor liked her father well enough to distinguish him with a nick name. But on that momentous day in question, when blurting into the problematical presence of an unfamiliar parent in an unfamiliar room in an unfamiliar city she flung her unhappy news across his book-cluttered desk, the appellation slipped from her stark lips as though it were the only fluid phrase in a wooden-throated world.

"Old-Dad!" she said, "I have been expelled from college!"

From under the incongruous thatch of his snow-white hair her young father lifted his extraordinarily young face with a snarl like the snarl of a startled animal.

"Why?--Why Daphne!" he gasped. "*What?*"

With her small gloved hand fumbling desperately at the great muffy collar of her coat the young girl repeated her statement.

"I--I have been expelled from college!" she said.

"Yes, but Daphne!--What for?" demanded her father. His own face was suddenly as white as hers, his lips as stark. "What for?" he persisted.

Twice the young girl's lips opened and shut in an utter agony of inarticulation. Then quite sharply the blonde head lifted, the shoulders squared, and the whole slender, quivering little body braced itself to meet the traditional blow of the traditional Avenger.

"For--for having a boy in my room--at night," said the girl.

Before the dumb, abject misery in the young blue eyes that lifted so heavily to his, a grin like the painted grin on a sick clown's face shot suddenly across the father's mobile mouth.

"Oh I hope he was a nice boy!" he said quite abruptly. "Blonde or brunette?"

"Why--Why--Father!" stammered the girl. "I--I thought you would-- would kill me!"

"Kill you?" mumbled her father. More essentially at the moment he seemed concerned with an overturned bottle of ink that was splashing its sinister pool across his morning's work. "Kill you?" he repeated vaguely. Across the high, intervening barrier of books and catalogues he craned his neck suddenly with a certain sharp intentness.

"And is your shoulder broken, too?" he asked very gently.

"My shoulder?" quivered the girl.

"It sags so," murmured her father.

"It's my suit-case," said the girl. "My heavy suit-case."

"Why not put it down?" asked the man.

Across the young girl's fluctuant face a dozen new miseries flared hotly.

"I didn't--just know--whether you'd want me to put it down," she said.

"You've come home, haven't you?" questioned the man. "Home is supposed to be where your father is, isn't it?"

"It never has been," said the girl quite simply.

Like a clash of swords the man's eyes smote across the girl's and the girl's across the man's. The ironic grin was still twisting wryly at one corner of the man's mouth but under the mocking fend of his narrowing eye lids a glint of tears showed suddenly.

"Oh--Father," rallied the girl. "They called me an evil name! They----" With a gesture of ultimate bewilderment and despair she took a single step towards him. "Oh, Father," she gasped. "*What* is it about boys that makes it so wicked to have them around?" And pitched over headlong in a dead faint at his feet.

When blackness turned into whiteness again she found herself lying limply in the big Oxford chair before the fire with a slate-colored hound sniffing rather interrogatively at her finger-tips and the strange man whom she had called "father"

leaning casually with one elbow on the mantel-piece while he stood staring down at her through a great, sweet, foggy blur of cigarette smoke.

"Wh--what is the blue dog's name?" she asked a bit vaguely.

"Creep-Mouse," said the man.

"I'm--I'm glad there's a dog," she whispered.

"So it's all right now, is it?" smiled the man. The smile was all in his eyes now and frankly mechanical still--a faint flare of mirth through a quizzical fretwork of pain.

"Yes, it's all right--now," said the girl, "unless of course----" Edging weakly forward to the front of the chair she clutched out gropingly for its cool, creaking straw arms and straightened up suddenly very stiff and tense. "Aren't you even going to ask me," she faltered, "what the boy was doing in my room--at night?"

"Oh, of course, I'm only human," admitted her father. Very leisurely as he spoke he stopped to light a fresh cigarette and stood for a moment blowing innumerable rings of smoke into space. "Only somehow--that's a matter," he smiled, "that I'd rather hear directly from the boy himself!"

"From the boy himself?" stammered the girl. With her slender, silken-shod limbs, the short skirt of the day, the simple blouse, the tousled hair, she looked for all the world like a little child just jumping up to play. "Why--why he's here now!" she said.

"Here *now*?" cried her father. "Where?"

"Downstairs," said the girl. "We came on together."

"Came on together?" demanded her father. "From college, you mean? Two days and a night?"

"Yes," said the girl.

With a sharp intake of his breath that might have meant anything the man stepped suddenly forward.

Towering to her own little height the girl stood staunchly to meet him.

"Why you don't think for one single moment that--that it was fun, do you?" she questioned whitely. "You don't think for one single solitary little moment that I wanted him to come, do you? Or that there was anything very specially amusing for him in the coming?" Whiter and whiter the little face lifted. "It was only that he said I couldn't come alone to--to face whatever had to be faced. And if he came first he said it would seem like telling tales on me instead of on himself. So----"

"Go and get him!" said her father quite sharply.

With unquestioning obedience the girl started for the door. Half way across the rug she stopped and swung round squarely.

"He will say it was all his fault," she said. "But it wasn't! I-- I sort of dared him to do it!"

"Just a minute!" called her father. "When you come back with him----"

"Am I to come back with him?" protested the girl.

"When you come back with him----" repeated her father, "if I ask him to be seated you may leave the room at once--at once, you understand? But if I shouldn't ask him to sit down----"

"Then I am to stay and--see it through?" shivered the girl.

"Then you are to stay and see it through," said her father.

With a little soft thud the door shut between them.

When it opened again the man was still standing by the fireplace blowing gray smoke into space. With a casualness that savored almost of affectation he stopped to light another cigarette before glancing up half askance to greet the hesitant footstep on the threshold.

"Why, come in!" he ordered.

Without further parleying the two young people appeared before him.

In the five minutes of her absence the young girl seemed to have grown younger, smaller, infinitely more broken even than her father had remembered her. But almost any girl would have looked unduly frail perhaps before the superbly handsome and altogether stalwart young athlete who loomed up so definitely beside her.

As though his daughter suddenly had ceased to exist the father's glance narrowed sharply towards the boy's clean

young figure-- the eager, worried eyes--the sensitive nostril--the grimly resolute young mouth, and in that glance a gasp that might have meant anything slipped through his own lips.

"You're--you're a keen looking lad!" he said. "But I think I could lick you at tennis!"

"Sir?" faltered the boy.

Quizzically but not unkindly the man resumed his stare. "I don't think I happen to have heard your name," he affirmed with some abruptness.

"Wiltoner," said the boy. "Richard Wiltoner."

"Sit down, Richard," said the man.

Like some tortured creature at bay the boy turned sharply to the window and back towards the door again.

"No, I thank you, Sir!" he protested. "I simply couldn't sit down!" Restively he crossed to the bookcase and swung around with a jerk to rake his impatient eyes across the girl's lingering presence. "Maybe I'll never sit down again!" he said.

"Nor eat?" drawled the older man. "Nor--sleep?"

"Nor eat, nor sleep!" said the boy.

"Yes, that's just it," whispered the girl. "That's just the way he was on the train--miles and miles it must have been--from the engine to the last car--all the time I mean--night and day-- stalking up and down--up and down!"

"Little Stupid!" said her father.

"Who?--I?" gasped the girl. For a second bewilderment she stared from the man's face to the boy's. "O--h!" she cried out in sudden enlightenment. "You *asked* him to sit down, didn't you?" And fled from the room.

With a shiver of relief the boy turned squarely then to meet the man. The quizzically furrowed lines around the man's mouth still held their faint ironic humor but the boy's face in the full light showed strangely stark.

"Well--Lad," said the man very softly. "What have you got to tell me about it?"

"Why that's just it!" cried the boy. "What is there to tell except that I've been a thoughtless cad,--a----"

"How--thoughtless?" said the man.

"And that your daughter isn't one bit to blame!" persisted the boy. "Not one bit! And for the rest of it----" he cried out desperately. "What am I expected to say? What ought I to say? For God's sake what do you want me to say? Oh, of course, I've read yarns," he flushed. "French novels and all that sort of thing, but when it comes down to one's self and a--and a girl you know----Why--what's the matter with everybody?" he demanded furiously. "A fellow isn't rotten just because he's a fellow! And it isn't even as though I had wanted to be rotten but wasn't! I never *thought* of being rotten!" Hotter and hotter the red shame flared in his face. "It's a nasty, dirty, evil-minded world!" he stormed. "Why you'd think to hear Miss Merriwayne talk that----"

"Miss who?" said the older man.

"Miss Merriwayne," said the boy. "Claudia Merriwayne--the president of the college, you know."

"No, I didn't know," said the man.

"She's a fiend!" said the boy. "An utterly merciless----" In a hectic effort to regain his self-control he bit the sentence in two and began to repace the room. "There--there was a dance at the college that night," he resumed at last with reasonable calmness.

"I don't go in much for that sort of thing. I don't live in town, you see, but miles and miles outside. I'm just a 'farmer,' you know," he confided with his first faint ghost of a smile. "My brother and I have a bit of a ranch outside. We're trying very hard to be 'scientific farmers.' It's the deuce of a job! And whenever there comes a night that I've got 'pep' enough to stay awake I'd rather ride somehow than fuss around with people. Sometimes I ride all night! I've got a horse named Brainstorm! And he's some devil!" In the instant's transfiguring glow he was all young god again, superb, defiant. Then as though with a spasm of pain his young mouth tightened to a single determinate line. With the air of one suddenly very tired he stopped his restless pacing and backed into the supporting angle of the bookcase.

"But on this particular night--that I was telling you about," he resumed unhappily, "I had a sort of a feeling somehow that I'd like to go to the dance. It isn't always easy, you know," he confided with unexpected ingenuousness. "After the long day's work, I mean, with your back broken and your arms sprained, to come in and round up your own hot tub and your own shaving things and your own supper and the evening clothes you haven't even seen for six months. And I forgot the supper," he smiled faintly. "We haven't any woman at the house just now. But after you get to the dance you

don't mind!" he brightened transiently. "It's so bright and sweet-smelling! So many lights and colors! And so many funny dresses! And the music certainly is bully! And then all of a sudden at some silly hour like eleven o'clock everything shuts down and you have to go home! Why you'd only just come! Just got into your step, I mean! Just met the girls you wanted to meet! Just begun to laugh! Just begun to fool! That's the trouble with college parties," he frowned. "They're so darn institutional! No hanging round afterwards to forage in the kitchen and help put the house to bed, no nice jolly dawdling about on the front steps to look at the moon, no funny, bumpy walk home through a plowed field with a girl in high-heeled shoes and a lace tidy over her head! Just *zip!* Like that! 'Eleven o'clock! Everybody *get out!*' All that fun and prettiness and everything snuffed out like a sour candle just because some old dame wants to go to bed! It's too--it's too abrupt!" said the boy.

"So you felt?" prodded the man.

"*Felt?*" cried the boy. "Why at five minutes of eleven I felt so *fit* I could have run nine miles to help put out a fire. But at eleven I was so mad I'd have run twenty just to start one!"

"So what *did* you do?" said the man.

"I swore I wouldn't go home," flushed the boy, "until at least I'd had something to eat! You know what college feeds are, a cent's worth of salad and the juice of one cracker? Your daughter laughed. She thought it was funny. 'Oh, what a pity,' she said, 'that you can't have the cold roast chicken that's up in my room!' 'Where is your room?' I asked. I was laughing too. 'Oh, just round the corner in the next building,' she said. 'Trot along over with me and if nobody's round I'll scoot upstairs and toss it down to you!' It was further than I thought," said the boy. "And very nice. Just a two-minute cut across the campus, but stars, you know, and a crunch of snow, and the funny fat shapes of the orchestra instruments running for their train. And Lord but I was hungry! But when we got to the dormitory there were too many people round, it seemed, too many lights, too much passing, not a single shadow in the whole world apparently that was big enough to toss a roast chicken into--let alone hide my great hulking shape. 'I just darsn't!' said your daughter. 'Somebody surely would see me, a matron or a proctor or the night watchman or some body!' And all of a sudden," flushed the boy, "it seemed to me so absolutely idiotic that a girl who'd never done any harm in her life should be shut up in a place where she couldn't even proffer food to a starving friend or finish out a dance or do any other decent normal thing just because some cranky old dame had other ideas. 'Well, there's no old dame who owns me!' I said. So if you're afraid to go get the chicken I'll come and get it myself! 'Yes--I can-- see you!' laughed your daughter. She was standing on the step as she spoke and she had on something very red and sort of cunning with a hood all black fur around her face and as she tilted up her chin to the light it looked as though even her hair was laughing at you. 'Well, I'm coming!' I laughed back. '*You darsn't!*' she said. In an hour I was there! Oh, of course, I know I oughtn't to have done it!" conceded the boy. "But upon my soul I swear I didn't think anything about it except that it was putting something over on some of those old dames! All this fuss about it's being a girl's room never entered my head for a moment I tell you! I've always had such an awful lot of girl cousins tumbling around. And it was all so darned easy after the moon went down! Such a nifty fire-escape and the toughest sort of an old wisteria vine and----"

"Was--she expecting you?" asked the man.

"No,--that was the trouble," flushed the boy. "Maybe at first she had wondered a bit if I'd really have the nerve--I don't know. But by the time I'd got there she'd started for bed. Was in her wrapper, I mean, with her hair down. Bare feet, you know, and all that sort of thing. And when I opened the window and slipped in across the edge she started to scream. Knew who I was all at once and all that--but the scream got started first. And I knew, of course, that wouldn't do, so I jumped and caught her in my arms to try and smother it out. And the door opened--and in walked President Merriwayne herself. I don't know what she was doing there in that dormitory at that time of night. It may have been just accident or somebody may have overheard us fooling out on the front steps the hour before--I don't know. It just happened--that's all," said the boy. "And there was an awful scene, of course. Things said, I mean, that I shouldn't have supposed a woman would say to a young girl. And two or three teachers or proctors came running in. And there was a faculty meeting later of course. And somebody blabbed to a chambermaid and the chambermaid blabbed to somebody else. And a reporter got hold of it and----"

"And a reporter got hold of it?" said the man.

"Yes," shivered the boy.

"Pictures?" asked the man.

"Yes," said the boy.

"Pretty horrid?" said the man.

"Very horrid," said the boy.

For an instant there seemed to be no sound at all in the room except the sound of flame sucking at the birch juices on

the hearth.

Then the man looked up sharply from the birch log to the boy's quivering face.

"Well--was the roast chicken good?" he asked.

"S--ir?" stammered the boy.

"And so----?" prompted the man.

From the boy's lips a long shuddering sigh escaped. "And so," said the boy, "I have ruined your daughter's life."

"And what do you propose to do about it?" asked the man.

With a quick squaring of his shoulders the boy drew his fine young body to its full height.

"I propose to do whatever you want me to do," he said.

"Such as what?" asked the man.

"Such as anything!" said the boy. Almost imperceptibly his breath quickened. "Why, when I came here just now," he cried, "I came, of course, expecting to be stormed at, to be cursed, to be insulted, to be told I was a liar, to have everything I said or did rammed down my throat again! But you?----All you've done is just to listen to me! And believe me! And laugh! It's as though I'd hurt you so much you were sorriest of all for me--and were trying every darned way you knew to keep me from going mad! It's as though----" From the sudden slight sag of his shoulders he rallied again with a gesture of folded arms and finality. "I tell you I want to do whatever you want me to do," he repeated quite simply.

"Have you talked with anyone--about this?" asked the man.

"Just with my brother," said the boy.

"And what did he say?" asked the man.

"It's the brother who runs the farm with me," explained the boy. "He's a cripple and rather a bit nervous now and then, but he reads an awful lot of books. Not just farm books I mean--not just scientific books, but all sorts of----"

"By which you are intending to imply," interrupted the man, "that your brother's opinion, even though nervous, may be considered fairly sophisticated?"

"Oh, yes," said the boy. "And we went into it all very thoroughly. All the scandal and notoriety of the expulsion, I mean, and the fright and the mortification, and the silly sap-headed mothers who won't let their daughters chum with your daughter any more, and the old cats who all their lives long will be pussy footing after her with whispers and insinuations. It's the bill, of course, that I can't ever pay. That's the beastliness of it! But what I've got, of course, I must give towards it! This isn't just my opinion, you understand?" he questioned a bit sharply. "But it's my brother's, too! And it isn't just my brother's either! It's *mine*!"

"And that opinion is----?" prompted the man.

"I should like to ask your daughter to marry me!" said the boy.

"I admit that that opinion is--classical," drawled the man. "Shall--shall we consult the lady?"

"Yes," said the boy.

"Suppose you go to the door and call her," suggested the father.

An instant later the boy was on the threshold. With the hesitation of perplexity only he peered first to the right and then to the left.

"Miss Bretton!" he called.

"Not even 'Daphne?'" interpolated the man.

With a vague gesture of surprise the boy swung back into the room.

"Why--why I never even *saw* your daughter," he said, "until the night of the dance!"

"*What?*" cried the man.

Before the interrogative exclamation could even be acknowledged Daphne herself appeared upon the scene.

"Yes,--Mr. Wiltoner?" she faltered.

"Mr. Wiltoner," said her father quite abruptly, "has just made you an offer of marriage."

"A--what?" gasped the girl.

"Mr. Wiltoner--I would say," drawled her father, "has--just done himself the honor of asking your hand in marriage."

"What?" repeated the girl, her voice like a smothered scream.

"And he's quite poor, I judge," said her father, "with all his own way to make in the world--and a crippled brother besides. And whoever marries him now will have the devil of a time pitching in neck and neck to help him run his farm. Have to carry wood, I mean, and water, and help plow and help scrub and help kill pigs--and help wrangle with the crippled brother and----"

"*What?*" gasped the girl.

"Oh, of course, I admit it's very old-fashioned," murmured her father, "very quixotic--very absurd--and altogether what any decent lad would do under the circumstances. And you, of course, will refuse him to the full satisfaction of your own thoroughly modern sense of chivalry and self-respect Nevertheless----" From the half-mocking raillery of the older man's eyes a sudden glance wistful as a caress shot down across the boy's sensitive face and superb young figure. "Nevertheless," he readdressed his daughter almost harshly, "I would to God that *you* were old-fashioned enough to faint on his neck and accept him!"

"Why--why Father!" stammered the girl. "I'm engaged to the--to the English professor at college!"

Above the faint flare of a fresh cigarette the man's ironic smile broke suddenly again through shrewdly narrowed eyes.

"Are? Or were?" he asked. "'Yet', you mean? 'Still?'"

"Oh, of course, I know I can't marry anyone now," quivered the girl. "Everything's over--everything's smashed. It's only that-- that----"

With the hand that had just tossed away a half-burnt match her father reached out a bit abruptly to clasp the boy's fingers.

"You hear, Richard?" he asked. "Your offer, it seems, is rejected! So the incident is closed, my boy--with honor to all and 'malice towards none!' Completely closed!" he adjured with a certain finality. "And the little lady----" he bowed to his daughter, "suffers no more--fear--nor ever will, I trust, while her life remains in my keeping." From his pocket he snatched a card suddenly, scribbled a line on it, and handed it to the boy. "I'm going South to-morrow," he smiled. "Daphne and I. To be gone rather indefinitely I imagine. About January send me a line! About your own luck, you know, that farm of yours and everything! It's very interesting!" With faintly forked eyebrows he turned to watch the precipitated parting between the boy and girl--a slender, quivering hand stealing limply into a clasp that wrung it like a torture, blue eyes still baffled with perplexity lifting heavily to black eyes as quick as a bared nerve. "Good-bye!" said the man quite trenchantly.

"Good-bye," choked the girl.

"Good-bye!" snapped the boy.

Then the man and his daughter stood alone again.

"There's a bath-room down the hall!" said the man. "And my own room is just beyond. Take a tub! Take a nap. Take--something! I've got a letter to write and don't want any one around!"

It was quite evident also that he didn't want any things around, either. The instant his daughter had left him he turned with a single impetuous gesture and swept all the books and papers from his desk. It might have been the tantramous impulse of a child, or the unconscious urge of the spirit towards unhampered elbow room.

Certainly there was neither childishness nor spirituality in the plain businesslike paper and strong, blunt handwriting that went to the composition of the letter. An almost breathless immediacy seemed also a distinctly actuating factor in the task. As fast ever as hand could reach pen and pen could reach ink and ink could reach paper again the writer drove to his mark.

To Miss Claudia Merriwayne,

President, ----- College (said the letter).

So it is you, dear Clytie Merriwayne, who have so peremptorily thus become the arbitrator of my family fame and fortunes?

God Almighty! How Time flies! You, old enough to have a college. And I, old enough to have a daughter expelled from the same! Why did you do it, Clytie? Not have a college, I mean, but expel my daughter? Truly she seems to me like rather a nice little kid. And now I suppose in the cackle and comment of all concerned she stands forth "ruined" before the world. Yet when all's said and done, Clytie Merriwayne, who did the "ruining?" Not the little girl certainly. Most emphatically not that splendid boy! Who else then except yourself? Personally it would seem to me somehow at the moment as though you had bungled your college just about as badly as I have bungled my daughter. My only

conceivable excuse is that I've been a damned Ignoramus! What's yours?

Here I had a fine, frank, clean, prankish little girl who didn't know a man from a woman, and you have changed her into a cowering, tortured, and altogether bewildered young recreant who never again, as long as time lasts, perhaps, will ever be able to tell a saint from a devil, or a lark from a lust, or a college president from any other traducer of youth and innocence. Yet you are considered to be something of a Specialist in girls, I should suppose. As well as once having been a girl yourself.

How ever did you happen to do it, I say? How ever in the world did you happen to do it?

"For discipline," of course you will most instantly affirm. "A necessary if drastic example to all the young lives in your charge. Youth being," as you will undoubtedly emphasize, "the formative period of character." It certainly is, Clytie! The simplest garden catalogue will tell you the same. 'Young things grow on the morning sun!' That's the phrase--everywhere. But don't ever forget, Clytie, that they blight just as easily on that selfsame sun! And if you have blighted my little girl instead of 'grown' her I shall not easily forgive you.

"What?" I can hear you demand in hectic righteousness. "Do I claim for one minute that my little daughter has committed a Propriety instead of an Impropropriety?" (Oh, Clytie, haven't you learned even yet that Youth is almost never proper but, oh, so seldom vicious?) Admitting perfectly frankly to all the world that my daughter has committed a very grave Impropropriety I must still contend that she has by no means committed a Viciousness! And even God Almighty, that shrewdest of Accountants, exacts such little toll for Improproprieties. It's these sharkish overhead charges of middlemen like you that strain Youth's reputational resources so.

Far be it from me, alas, to deny that there undoubtedly *is* a hideous amount of evil in the world. But more and more I stand astonished before the extraordinarily small amount of it that smoulders in young people's bodies compared with the undue proportion of it that flames so frankly in older people's minds! In this case in point for instance, it's your whole moral premises that are wrong! It isn't just that the boy wouldn't have hurt her if he could. But that he couldn't have hurt her if he would! Both equally "pure in heart!" Both romping equally impishly through a moment's impulsive adventure! My God! I'd hate to be the first evil thought that had ever butted into a youngster's mind!

But enough! What you need in your college, perhaps, is a little less French and a little more Biology! Quite a bit more mercy certainly! This setting steel traps for Vice and catching Innocence instead is getting to be an altogether too common human experience. And some of us who have watched the writhings of an accidentally incarcerated household pet have decided long since that even a varmint doesn't quite deserve a steel trap!

But all this, Clytie, being neither here nor there, I come now to the real point of my letter which is to ask a favor.

My little daughter is pretty sick, Clytie--sick mentally, I mean--sex-scared, socially and emotionally disorganized. On the particular trip I am planning for the winter into the more or less primitive and lawless wild-lands of the far South I am hoping that she will find plentiful opportunity to reconstruct her courage from the inherent principles alone of Right and Wrong. But failing this hope by the time the Northern summer is due----?

Have you no memories, Clytie, of another college room? And another indiscretion? Which beginning soberly with a most worthy desire to exchange Philosophy note books ended----if my memory serves right----with a certain amount of kissing. Yet will you contend for one single instant, Clytie, that your thoughts that night were one whit less clean than my daughter's? That there were four "improper" youngsters in that episode, instead of two as now, does not greatly in my mind refute the similarity. Nor the fortuitous chance by which one boy had just vanished over the window-sill and you into another room when *that* blow fell! Do you remember the things that were said then, Clytie Merriwayne? To your room-mate, I mean? Poor little frightened baby! Seventeen, wasn't she? And cut her throat at dawn rather than meet what had to be met? Pretty little white throat it was too as I remember it. With a rather specially tender and lilting little contralto voice that would have been singing lullabys in another four or five years. And the boy? The boy who was caught, I mean? Not a bad sort at all! Was rather intending to make something fairly decent of himself--up to then! But after the blood-red things the girl's father and mother said to him? He went a bit "batty" after that, some people said! A bit wild anyway! Eighteen or nineteen he must have been? Oh, ye gods, what a waste! Babies *all*! And to make them suffer so! Just by the thickness of a door you escaped it, Clytie! Just by the wish of a skirt! Except for that----?

Well this is the favor, Clytie. If by Summer my little girl is still staggering under the nervous and moral burden of feeling herself the only "improper" person in the world, I shall ask your permission to tell her the incident here noted, assuring you of course in all fairness and decency--if I am any judge of young character--that she will never tell on you as you have told on her!

As for the rest if I have written over-garrulously I crave your pardon. This turning the hands of the clock backwards is slower work than turning them ahead.

For old time's sake believe me at least

Sincerely yours,

JAFFREYBRETTON.

With a sigh of relief then he rose from his desk, lit another cigarette, and started down the hall, with Creep-Mouse, the blue hound, skulking close behind him.

As he crossed the threshold of his own room and glanced incidentally towards his bed a gasp of purely optical astonishment escaped him. All hunched up in a pale blue puffy-quilt his lovely little daughter lay ensconced among his snow-white pillows. Across her knees innumerable sheets of paper fluttered. Close at her elbow a discarded box of pencils lay tossed like a handful of jack-straws. And the great blue eyes that peered out at him from the cloud of bright gold hair were all brimmed up again with terror and tears.

"I'm--I'm writing to John," she said.

"John?" queried her father.

"Why--yes,--the English professor--at college,--don't you remember?" faltered the girl. "Don't--don't you want to know about John?"

"No, I don't!" said the man. "There's nothing important about 'John' that 'John' won't have a chance to show for himself--in this immediate situation."

"Isn't it--isn't it--Hell?" quivered the girl.

"N--o--o," said her father. "I shouldn't consider it just Hell. But I admit it's something of a poser for a man in John's position. He's one of the faculty of course?"

"Yes," said the girl.

"And was at the faculty meeting--presumably when----"

"Yes," said the girl.

"Was your engagement--announced?" asked her father quite abruptly. "Generally known, I mean, among the girls?"

"No--not--exactly," said the girl.

"U--m--m," said her father. From his wordless stare at the wall he glanced down a bit sharply at the wan little face before him. "Heard from him yet?" he demanded.

"No, not yet," said the girl. "Why he doesn't know where I am! Nobody knows where I am, I tell you! I just ran away, I tell you! I didn't even wait to pack! I-I---But, of course, I *will* hear!" she asserted passionately. "I will! I *will*! It isn't that I expect to--to marry him now," she explained piteously. "Nobody of course--would want to marry me now. It's only that----"

Before the sudden rush of color to her face her father gave a little startled gasp.

"Hanged if you're not pretty!" he said. "Shockingly pretty!" With an almost amused interest his eyes swept down across the exquisite little face and figure all muffled up to the tips of its ears in the great blue puffy-quilt against the snow-white pillows. "Truly when I came in here just now," he laughed, "I thought a magazine-cover had come to life on my bed!" With the laughter still on his lips all the mischief went suddenly out of his eyes. "You heard what I said just now about going South to-morrow?" he asked a bit trenchantly. "I'm sorry if it seems peremptory. But my plans have been made for some time. I had intended to take only--Creep-Mouse with me."

"Creep-Mouse?" questioned the girl.

"Oh, of course, there are a dozen other dogs up country that I could choose from," reflected her father with a somewhat frowning introspection. "But when it comes to traveling about and putting up with things, Creep-Mouse alone combines the essential characteristics of an undauntable disposition--with folding legs."

"Oh, of course, I can't speak too positively about my undauntable disposition," rallied the girl with the faintest possible smile, "but I certainly will try to take the hint about the folding legs----"

"Hint?" snapped her father. "Oh, it wasn't so much the adaptability business I was thinking about as it was about the dog!" With a gesture almost embarrassed he reached down suddenly and drew the hound's plushy ear through his fingers. "Oh, hang it all, Daphne!" he resumed quite abruptly, "you and I might easily not like the same opera or the same hors-d'oeuvre--but I'd hate anyone round who didn't like the same dog."

"I--adore--Creep-Mouse!" said Daphne.

"Truly?" quizzed her father.

"Truly!" twinkled Daphne.

"Oh, all right then," said her father, "I guess we understand each other!"

"Perfectly," nodded Daphne.

"For all time," said her father.

"All time," acquiesced Daphne.

With his watch in his hand and his dark eyes narrowed to some unspoken thought he thrust out his last admonishment to her.

"Then take all the brace there is!" he said, "and hustle out and get some new clothes! It's quite lucky on the whole, I imagine, that you didn't have time to pack up any of your college things for you certainly won't need anything--academic in the place we're heading for! It's not any South that you've ever heard of that we're going to, you understand?" he explained with the faintest possible tint of edginess in his tone. "No Palm Beaches! No pink sash-ribbons! No tennis! No velvet golf courses! No airy--fairy--anythings! But a South below the South! A South all heat and glare and sweat and jet-greens jungles! Tropics and slime! Rough! Tough! Pretty nasty some of the time. Violently beautiful--almost always! And we're going down to *hunt!*" he added with certain decisiveness. "And to *fish!* And to study citrus fruits when there's nothing else to do! And you might just as well know it now as later," he resumed with all his old insouciance. "I--am--also going to find me a wife if such a thing is humanly possible."

"A--wife?" gasped the girl. "Oh, this--this eternal marrying business!" she shivered. "If it's all so dreadful, about men, I mean, why do women keep marrying? What's the righteousness of it? What's the decency? What's it all about?"

"Don't forget that I'm one of these 'dreadful men,'" smiled her father.

"Yes--I--know," quivered the girl.

"But----" Like a butterfly slipping out of its cocoon one shoulder slipped lacy-white from the blue puffy-quilt. "What about my own mother?" she demanded.

"Your mother has been dead for fifteen years," said the man.

"Yes--but Father," persisted the girl.

With folded arms the man stood watching her bright young color wax--and wane again.

"If there's anything you want to ask," he suggested, "maybe you'd better ask it now--and get it over with."

"Oh, I didn't want to be inquisitive," stammered the girl. "It's only that--that servants and relatives talk so--and I know so little. You--you and mother didn't live together, did you?" she questioned quite abruptly.

"No," said the man.

"You--you mean there was trouble?" flushed the girl.

"There was--some trouble," said the man.

"You mean that you--didn't like her?" probed the merciless little voice.

"No--I--didn't--like her," said the man without a flicker of expression.

Clutching the blue quilt about her the girl jumped to the floor and ran swiftly to him.

"Oh, Father!" she cried. "Whatever in the world will I do if you don't like *me?*"

"But I do like you!" smiled her father. Shy as a boy he reached out and touched her sunny hair. "Only one condition!" he rallied with sudden and unaffected sternness. "When you broke into my study just now you called me 'Old-Dad!' Up to that moment I had considered myself--some--young--buck. Never again--as long as you live--I warn you--ever call me anything *except* Old-Dad! Darned if it isn't sobering!"

II

THE scene that Daphne had left behind her two thousand miles or more, though more academic of course, was none the less poignant to the one most concerned.

Deflected by a more or less erudite lecture-obligation to a town at least gossip-distance away, no faintest rumor of any college chaos whatsoever had reached John Burnarde's ears till the evening after the dance, when just recrossing the well-worn threshold of his beautiful, austere study, the shrill harsh clang of his telephone bell rang down the curtain on what had been the most exquisitely perfect episode of even his fastidious life.

Yet even then no whisper prepared him for what the alarm was all about. Poor John Burnarde!

Whatever else an academic training may teach an undergraduate it has certainly never taught a member of the faculty

what to do when summoned post-haste to the President's office to consult with various other members of the faculty on what has been pronounced "a most flagrant breach of moral as well as of academic standards" he finds the case to be the exceedingly delicate one of a girl-student caught entertaining a man in her room late at night,--and the girl herself--his fiancée!

That the betrothal at that moment was known only to himself and the girl gave John Burnarde the last long breath, he felt, that he should ever draw again.

Still a bit flushed, a bit breezy, with his brisk sprint across the chill November campus, he was just slipping out of his overcoat in the doorway of the President's office when the name "Daphne Bretton" first struck across his startled senses. Half hampered by a balky overshoe, half pinioned by a ripped sleeve- lining he thrust his head alone into the conference.

"What?" he demanded.

"This will hit Burnarde rather roughly, I'm afraid," whispered the History Man to the Biology Woman. "She's quite his star English pupil, I imagine. Has done one little bit of lyric verse already, they say, that is really rather remarkable. Very young of course, very ingenuous, but quite remarkably knowing."

"Maybe now we can guess where she gets her 'knowingness,'" murmured the new Bible Instructor behind her pure white ringers.

"*What?*" demanded John Burnarde all over again. The winter wind seemed to have faded oddly from one cheek but was still spotting hecticly in the other. "*What?*" he persisted bewilderedly, still struggling with his overshoes.

"Why it's the Bretton girl!" prompted a sharp voice from some dark seat in the corner.

"That pretty little Bretton girl," regretted a gentler tone.

"Yes--I--I--know who you mean," stammered Burnarde. "But--but----"

"Always made me think of apple-blossoms--somehow," confided the old Mathematics professor a bit surreptitiously.

"Apple-blossoms?" mumbled poor Burnarde.

"So sort of pink and white and fresh and--and fragrant. 'Pon my soul when she comes into my class and takes a front seat it makes me feel a little queer. It's like being a boy again! Young grass, May morning, and a wind through the apple orchard! Fragrance? Yes, that's it!"

"Yes, it's just exactly the fragrance of it that makes the scandal so complete!" interposed the President's keenly incisive feminine voice.

Instantly every eye except Burnarde's reverted to the unquestionable dominance of the President's ash-blond personality.

Burnarde alone, looming lean, keen, tense, on the edge of the group, with five generations of poise and reticence masking the precipitant horror in his mind, stood staring blankly from one face to another of his cruder-born associates.

"I--protest!" he said.

"Protest?" questioned the President's coolly inflected voice. "Protest what?" With a graceful if somewhat studied gesture of patience Miss Claudia Merriwayne laid down her jotting pencil and narrowed her cold gray eyes to the eyes of her youngest professor. "You were a little late getting here I think, Mr. Burnarde," she admonished him perfectly courteously, "but the general circumstances of the case you have gleaned quite sufficiently, I think, even in this last brief moment or so? Surely in a case so--so distressing," she flushed, "it will not be necessary for us to--to revive the details in all their entirety? In the half hour that we have been discussing the matter. It *is* a half hour, isn't it?" she turned sharply and asked of her nearest neighbor.

"Fully a half hour!" gloated the nearest neighbor.

"Miss Bretton, of course, will have to leave college," resumed the President succinctly. "Definitely--positive expulsion is, of course, the only path open to us!"

"I protest!" said John Burnarde.

From some half-shadowed corner directly in front of him a distinctly Continental smile flared up on a French instructor's face. Close at his elbow the phrase "little sly, pink-faced minx" hissed plainly from one gossip to another. The blood was surging in his ears! His heart was pounding like an engine! Shock, bewilderment, nausea itself, racked chaotically through all his senses! Yet neither love nor loyalty, a girl's honor or a man's dignity, seemed to him at that moment to be essentially served by capping sensationalism with sensationalism. Sophisticated as he was in all the finer knowledges

that book or life could offer, afraid of nothing on earth except the vulgarity of publicity, shy of nothing on earth except his great, grown-man desire for this little, young, exquisite girl, no power in the world could have forced him then and there to take the sweetest news he had ever known, or ever was to know, it would seem, and slop it down like so much kerosene to feed a flame already quite noxious enough. Still fighting desperately for time, still parrying for enlightenment, he kept his mask-like face turned blankly towards his companions.

"I protest!" he repeated tenaciously. "There is some mistake-- some misunderstanding! Even in the two short months Miss Bretton has been with us she has certainly--Certainly----" In a voice as low as a nun's but particularly and peculiarly enunciated he focused suddenly on the President. "The charge is absurd," he said. "It's outrageous! Someone has lied of course! And lied very badly."

With an ill-concealed gesture of exasperation the President straightened up in her chair and glared at her youngest professor.

"I--am the only person--who could have 'lied,'" she affirmed with some hauteur. Slowly into her cold strong-featured face a hot flush ebbed and waned again through lips that crisped a bit round the edges of her words. "If you *insist* on knowing every detail, Mr. Burnarde," she said, "it was I myself who discovered Miss Bretton! And she was barefooted at the time--and in her nightdress--and clasped most emphatically in the young man's arms."

"What?" cried Burnarde. His very heart seemed to wrench itself loose at the word, but his tight lips bit back the agony into a mere raspishness of astonishment. "What?" Then quite as unexpectedly to himself as to any of the others an amazing little laugh slipped through where even agony could not pass. Oh ye god of Rhetoric! Ye subtlety of Satire! Ye psychology of Climax! Was this the moment when a Master of Arts should fling his tenderest morsel to the dogs? "Betrothal?" Red as blood, white as a lily, the word flashed through his stricken senses! "Betrothal?" Oh ye gods of everything! A betrothal so new, so shy, so sacred, so reverential, that he had not yet even so much as affrighted the cool, unawakened, little-girl finger tips with the thrill of his grown-man lips! A betrothal so new, so shy, so precious, he had not yet even so much as shared the secret with his adorable, patrician mother! Announce it now? Proclaim it now? Merciful God! Was there anything left to proclaim? Yes, that was just exactly the question! *Was* there anything left to proclaim? Even for loyalty, even in defense of the Beloved who had chosen so garishly--elsewhere, would it greatly enhance a substance as tender as a young girl's honor to scream out now? "*I also claimed her--once?*" Starkly his fine, clear-cut lips opened and shut again. "I--I protest!" he mumbled. Vaguely in a chaotic blur he sensed a restless exchange of glances, the soft, clothly shifting and stir of busy people impatient to be off. Cleanly and concisely through the blur cut the President's persistent purpose.

"Expulsion, of course," said the President, "must always seem a drastic measure. But in the safety and protection of the greater number rests now as always the greater mercy. This Bretton girl, I understand, has grown up with practically no home surroundings, being shifted about from one boarding school to another ever since her earliest childhood, and knowing apparently very little more about her people than even I have been able to glean. The circumstances are very sad, of course, very unfortunate, but our duty at the moment, of course, concerns itself with results, not causes. Looking back now to her first appearance among us two months ago I realize that there has always been something about her that was vaguely disquieting, vaguely suggestive of lawlessness. Her eyes, perhaps, her hair, some odd little trick of manner. Certainly," quickened the President, "I would not be doing my duty by the hundreds of innocent young girls committed to my care if---"

As though all life reverted then to the mere pursuit of hats and coats and rubbers, the Faculty Meeting dissolved into individual interests again and dispersed as such along the gloomy corridor and down the creaking stairs.

It was winter-cold on the stairs.

Shuffling a little in his overshoes, jerking his coat-collar just a bit tighter around his throat, John Burnarde felt suddenly very old. "Old? Merciful Heavens!" he winced. He was only thirty-five! Did Age come like that to a man in just the time it took him to go up and down the same gray, creaky, familiar stairs? "Apple Blossoms was it that the old Mathematics Professor had said she looked like? But God knew it wasn't just her little face that was Apple Blossomy, but her little mind also, and the little glad gay heart of her! So fresh, so new, so virgin-sweet! By what foul chance, by what incalculable circumstance, had she blundered into *this?*"

Stripped of passion, stripped even of protest, stripped indeed of every human emotion except his dignity and his pain he pushed his way blindly out through interminable heavy doors and breasted the winter night.

Then quite suddenly, stripped of every emotion *except* pain, he swung around in his tracks, remounted the stairs, re-entered the President's office, and slamming the door behind him, flung down even his dignity on the altar of his love.

"Miss Merriwayne!" he said. "This thing that you propose doing-- cannot be done! I am engaged to Miss Bretton!"

For a single instant only, every knowledge, manner, poise, that John Burnarde had been born with, defied every knowledge, manner, poise, that Claudia Merriwayne had worked forty years to acquire.

Then reverting suddenly to the identical accent with which Claudia Merriwayne's mother was still lashing Claudia Merriwayne's father, doubtless, in the little far away North Kansas home, the College President opened her thin lips to speak.

"The thing--is already done,--Mr. Burnarde," she said. "Miss Bretton left town an hour ago--and with her paramour, I am told!"

"With her--what?" cried John Burnarde.

"With her 'paramour,'" repeated the President coolly.

"The word is unfortunate," frowned Burnarde.

"So--is the episode," said the President.

With a little sharp catch of his breath John Burnarde stepped forward to the edge of the desk.

"You understand that I am going to marry Miss Bretton?" he affirmed with some incisiveness.

"Not in my college!" said the President. "Nor in any other college if I even so much as remotely gauge either the professional or the social exigencies of the situation." Emphatically, but by no means extravagantly, she drove her meaning home. "Do you dream for one single moment, Mr. Burnarde," she quizzed, "that any reputable college in the land would accept, or maintain on its faculty," she added significantly, "a man whose wife for reasons of moral obliquity had not been considered a safe associate for----"

"You mean----" interrupted John Burnarde.

"Everything that I say," acquiesced the President, "and everything that I imply."

"That is your ultimatum?" questioned John Burnarde.

"That is my ultimatum!" said the President.

With the slightest perceptible tightening of his lips John Burnarde began to put on his gloves.

"Very fortunately," he said, "there are other professions in the world besides the teaching of English."

"Very fortunately," conceded the President. One side of her mouth lifted very faintly with the concession. "Yet somehow, Mr. Burnarde," she added hastily, "I do not seem to picture you as a--as an automobile salesman, for instance. Nor yet visualize that frail, lovely mother of yours relinquishing very easily her life-long ambitions for your deanship--which up to now, of course, has by no means seemed the improbable fruition of your distinguished services with us. Your mother," mused the President, "has doubtless made some sacrifices for you--in her time?"

"Most mothers have!" snapped John Burnarde.

Roused snap for snap to his tone the President leaned forward suddenly.

"You're not the only man," she cried, "who has been both flouted and betrayed by Frivolity! Next time you choose----" Her cheeks flushed scarlet. "Next time you choose, perhaps you will choose more wisely, more consistently with your age and attainments! This mad infatuation is surely but the mood of a moment, the----" Recovering her self-control as quickly almost as she had lost it she sank back with typical statuesqueness into her throne- like Jacobean chair. "Surely, Mr. Burnarde," she asked in all sincerity, "you must admit that the--that the warning I have given you is at least--reasonable?"

"Absolutely reasonable!" said John Burnarde. "And absolutely damnable!" And turning on his heel he stalked from the room.

But even the winter night could not cool his cheeks now, nor the great pile of unread themes and forensics that he found awaiting him in his room, divert his tortured mind for one single second from the problems of a lover to the problems of a professor. Somewhere indeed, he reasoned, among that white flare of papers a fresh stab of pain undoubtedly awaited him, a familiar handwriting strangely poignant, some little brand new bud of an idea forging valiantly upward through the clotted sod of academic tradition into the sunshine of acknowledged success, a purely prosy rhetorical question, perhaps, thrilled to its very interrogation mark by the sweet new secret hidden behind its formality!

With an irresistible impulse he began suddenly to rummage through the themes. Yes, here was *the* handwriting! With fingers that trembled he unfolded the page. Dated the very night before this dreadful thing had happened, surely somehow--somewhere on this very page the dreadful thing must be disproved!

"Dear Mr. Burnarde," ran the little note pinned to the page. "Dear Mr. Burnarde" (Oh, the delicious camouflage of the formality). Please, I beg of you do not be angry with me because I am submitting no prose theme this week! I just can't, somehow! I'm all verse these days! What do you think about this one? There are oodles and oodles more lines to it of

course, but this is to be the recurrent refrain:

He who made Hunger, Love, and the Sea,
Made three tides which have got to be!

"Oh, of course, I know you'll say that the word 'got' isn't particularly poetical and all that. But it's simply got to be 'got,' don't you see? Why----"

Right in the middle of the unfinished sentence he crumpled the page in his hand. Merciful Heavens, if she was innocent why hadn't she written him? Or even if she were sorry--only? Or even if----If people had any explanations to give they usually gave them to you, didn't they? "Gave" them to you? *Forced* them on you, rather, didn't they? Fairly *hurled* them at you? This staking all for love? Yes, surely! Social position! Professional reputation! Even his mother's heart! *For love*? Yes, that was it! But suppose--the object of such love--fairly flaunted herself as being neither loving--nor lovable? Maddened anew by the futility of it all he plunged down at his desk and began to write a letter--and tore that letter up! And began another and tore that up! And began another! Merciful Heavens! he suffered. Was his hand palsied? His brain blighted? Were there no live words left in all the world--except just those which crowded every other sane thought out of his mind?

He who made Hunger, Love, and the sea,
Made three tides which have got to be!

III

TAKEN all in all, *mileage* undoubtedly is just about the paltriest form of separation that can occur between two people. If only Fate would break its impish habit of always and forever introducing such perfectly unexpected things into mileage! Even Fate though at just this time hadn't quite made up its mind perhaps just what it intended to do with little Daphne Bretton!

Given good food, a brave heart, and any reasonable amount of diversion, most young people outgrow their sins and even their mistakes almost as soon as they outgrow their clothes. But to outgrow a punishment is quite a different matter! People who deal out punishments ought to think about that!

Daphne Bretton and her father had to think a good deal about it. Daphne especially! Totally uninjured by her mistake but pretty badly crippled by her punishment the world looked very dark to Daphne.

Being only eighteen and having thus far evolved no special philosophy of her own concerning the best way to meet Life's inevitable disasters it was rather fortunate perhaps in the present emergency that she had at least her father's philosophy to fall back upon. Her father's philosophy was so amazingly simple.

"No matter what happens," said her father, "never wear a worried looking hat!"

"Which being interpreted," puzzled Daphne, "means----"

Like a Fancier perfectly willing to share the cut-flowers of his mind but quite distinctly opposed to parting with the roots of any of his ideas her father parried the question.

"Which being interpreted," he repeated a bit stiffly, "means '*Never wear a worried looking hat!*'"

Certainly there developed nothing worried looking about Daphne Bretton's Florida-going hat! Nor about her suit, either! Nor her shoes! Nor her silken stockings! Her hat was crisp, with a flare of pink in it, her suit was blue, her shoes and silkies distinctly trim. From top to toe, bright hair, bright cheeks, lithe little body and all, there was nothing worried looking about Daphne Bretton except her eyes. Sweet eyes they were too, wide set, wistful, and inherently frank, though vaguely furtive now with the tragic, incongruous furtiveness of youth that having once perhaps feared overmuch that it would not be noticed is panic-stricken now lest it may be. Little girl eyes distinctly, and the eyes of a very worried little girl at that!

In the joggling crowd at the railroad station two women noticed her only too quickly. The little blue hound himself sniffing close at her heels quickened to the trail no more avidly than they.

"Bet you a dollar," gasped the first, "that that's the Bretton girl!"

"Bretton girl?" gloated the other in an only too audible whisper.

"Why, yes, of course, you know," nudged the first "That one, you know, that was expelled from college for having a boy in her room at night! Oh, an awful scandal it was! Why the Sunday papers were full of it last week!"

"Oh, yes, of course, I saw it," confided the second. "A whole page of pictures, wasn't it? Perfectly disgusting, I call it! So bold--so----"

"Pretty, though, isn't she?" deprecated the first.

"If you like that fast type," sneered the second.

"Oh, and look at her now!" snickered the first. "Got an older man in tow this time! And, oh goodness, but isn't he a stunner with all that white hair and elegant figure and swell traveling bags! If there's one thing I think refined it's swell traveling bags! But, oh, isn't it awful the way rich people cut up? Wouldn't you think her folks would stop her? Wouldn't you?"

From under the sheltering, shadowy brim of her hat Daphne shot an agonized glance at her father's half-averted face. But to her infinite astonishment her father's deep-set eyes were utterly serene, and even his shrewd mouth was relaxed at the moment into the faint ghost of a perfectly amiable smile.

"Old-Dad--are you deaf?" she gasped with a little quick clutch at his arm.

"When geese are cackling," said her father.

"And blind?" flared Daphne.

"When the view is offensive," admitted her father. With unwavering nonchalance he swung around suddenly to the nearest news stand and began then and there to pile Daphne's blue broadcloth arms with every funny paper in sight.

From lips quivering so that they could barely function their speech Daphne protested the action. "Why--why, Old-Dad," she pleaded. "Do you think for one single moment that I shall ever smile again? Or--or ever--even want to smile again?" In a fresh shiver of tears and shame the hot tears started to her eyes. "Why I'm nothing but--but just an outlaw!" she gasped. "A--a-- sort of a----"

"Personally," conceded her father, "I'd infinitely rather travel with an outlaw than an inlaw! They're so inherently more considerate--somehow, so----" Quite imperturbably as he spoke he kept right on piling up the magazines in Daphne's protesting arms. "Steady there, Kiddie!" he admonished her smilingly. "Steady! Steady! Never let any sorrow you'll ever meet leak into your chance to laugh! Water-tight your compartments--that's the idea! Love, Hope, Fear, Pride, Ambition--everything walled off and separate from another! And then if you run into a bit of bad weather now and then, Little Girl, you won't--" Aghast at the increasing tremor of the little figure he broke off abruptly in the midst of his message. "Why the only trouble with you, Daphne," he laughed, "is that you are so pretty! It's an awful responsibility I tell you to travel with a daughter who's so extravagantly pretty. So many complicating things are bound to happen all the time. Beaux, for instance, and----"

"Beaux?" winced Daphne.

"Such as the incipient one yonder," nodded her father.

Following the general direction of the nod the girl's eyes raked somewhat covertly but none the less thoroughly the shadow just back of the flower booth.

"O--h," she shivered. "That?" Back of her lovely blondeness, her youth, her vitality, the delicate fine-boned structure of her face loomed suddenly into the faint, poignant outline of the ultimate skull. "Do--do you think he's a reporter?" she stammered.

"Reporter *nothing!*" snapped her father. Snatching up the traveling bags he headed quite precipitously for the train. White as a little ghost Daphne pattered after him. Close at her heels followed the blue hound.

"What a stunning looking man!" said someone. "And what an awfully pretty girl!" murmured another. "And what a funny looking dog!" agreed everybody.

"For goodness sake, don't you know who it is?" called the girl at the flower booth to the girl at the news-stand.

"Naw," admitted the girl at the news-stand.

"Oh, pshaw," preened the girl at the flower booth. "Don't you know anything? Why it's Jaffrey Bretton the--the--well, I don't know what he is except that he's richer than--oh, richer than Croesus! And wild? Oh, Gee! Why I knew a chauffeur once that knew a cook that said----"

So Jaffrey Bretton and Daphne and the little blue hound passed from the rabble of the station to the rumble of the train.

The rumble of the train is at least a pleasant sound. And when one's nerves are just a bit over-frazzled with the cantankerous parlance of men it is not a half bad idea for the price of a railroad ticket to yield one's ears for such time as one may to the simpler things that Steel, Wood, and Plush have to say to each other. "Strength!" pulses Steel. "Form!" urges Wood. "Rest!" purrs Plush. "Strength-- Form--Rest! Strength--Form--Rest!" On and on and on, just like that, day and night, mile and mile, swirl and sway, with no more effort to one's brittle-nerved, ice-chilled body than lolling in a bath-tub would be, while the great Sunny South like so much hot water comes pouring in, a little deeper, a little hotter, every minute, to lave and soothe Past, Present, and Future alike. God bless Railroad Journeys!

Surely it was at least twenty-four restful hours before the "parlance of men" caught up with Daphne and her father again. This catching up, however, proved itself quite sufficiently unpleasant.

It had been rather an eerie day, an eerie twilight anyway, as railroad twilights are apt to be with a great, smooth-running, brilliantly lighted, ultra-perfected train of ultra-perfected cars slipping deeper and deeper and deeper into the black morass of a wild, swampy, tropical night.

Eeriness for eeriness Daphne Bretton's eyes matched the night. Sparkle for sparkle Jaffrey Bretton's eyes matched the train. To escape the sparkle Daphne pleaded a desire to dally alone in her quiet dark drawing-room. To escape the eeriness Jaffrey Bretton vaunted the intention of finding some stray man who could smoke more cigars than he. With an unwonted touch of formality, a sudden strange shyness of scene and sentiment they bowed their good-nights to each other.

"See you in the morning!" nodded her father.

"In the morning," acquiesced Daphne.

Nothing on earth could have brightened her eyes at the moment. Nothing on earth could have dulled her father's. Yet within an hour when they met again it was Daphne's face that was fairly blazing with excitement and her father's that was stricken with brooding.

Maybe too much "looking back" even from the last car of a train isn't specially good for any man. Certainly just sitting up till nine o'clock never made any man look so tired.

Joggling back to his warm, plushy Pullman car from the cindery murk and chill of the observation platform it was then that Jaffrey Bretton sensed through the tail of his eye, as it were, the kaleidoscopic blur of a scuffle in the smoking-room. Tweed- brown, newspaper-white, broadcloth-blue, the fleeting impress struck across his jaded optic nerve, till roused by a sudden lurch of his heart to the familiar blueness of that blue he whirled around in the narrow aisle and yanked aside the curtain just in time to behold a perfectly strange young man forcing a kiss on Daphne's infuriated lips.

"But I *am* Daphne Bretton! I *am*! I *am*!" fought the girl.

"Why, of course, you're 'Daphne Bretton!'" kissed the man. "So why be so particular?"

"And I--happen to be Daphne Bretton's--father!" hailed Jaffrey Bretton quite incisively from the doorway.

"Eh? *What*?" jumped the Kissing Man.

"Oh--O--h!" gasped Daphne.

With a somewhat hectic attempt at nonchalance the Kissing Man stooped down and picked up the crumpled newspaper at his feet.

"Well, it's my newspaper, anyway!" he grinned.

"It's mine if I want it!" began Daphne all over again.

With a quick jerk of his wrist the stranger twisted the newspaper from the girl's snatching fingers and began rather awkwardly to smooth out the crumple and piece together the fragments. It was the pictorial supplement of a week-old Sunday paper and from its front page loomed an almost life-sized portrait of Daphne extravagantly bordered and garnished with what some cheap cartoonist considered a facetious portrayal of Daphne's recent tragedy.

"Do--you want your head--kicked off?" asked Jaffrey Bretton.

"No, I don't," admitted the stranger. "But even if I did," he confided with undismayed diablerie, "how ever in the world should we locate it? I seem to have lost it so badly!" By no means unattractive even in his impudence he turned his flushed, indecorous face to Daphne and in the sudden tilt of his deeply-cleft chin the electric light struck down rather mercilessly across a faint white scar that slashed zig-zag from his turbid, reckless eyes to a most ingenuous dimple in his left cheek.

"You are--drunk!" said Jaffrey Bretton quite frankly.

"Yes, a little," admitted the stranger. "But even so," he persisted with an elaborate bow. "But even so, the young lady here will hardly contend, I think, that I acted entirely without provocation!"

"Provocation?" questioned Jaffrey Bretton. With the faintest perceptible frown blackening between his brows he turned to his daughter. "Daphne," he said, "don't you know that you haven't any business to enter a man's smoking-room?"

"But he wasn't smoking!" flared Daphne. "He was sleeping!"

"Well--a man's sleeping-room, then?" conceded her father.

"But I simply *had* to have that newspaper!" insisted Daphne. "I tell you I won't have it flaunted all over the train! Brought into the dining-car every meal! Flapped and rustled in my face-- everywhere I look! Oh, you think you're *funny*, do you?" she cried out furiously as with one swift dart she snatched the offending page from the stranger's unguarded grasp and tore it into shreds before his eyes. "Oh, you think you're fu--fu-- funny, do you?" she began to babble hysterically.

"Yes--but Daphne," said her father with scarcely a lift to his voice, "surely you don't imagine for a moment that you're destroying the whole edition? It can't be done, you know. No one yet has ever found a way to do it. Ten years hence from a wayside hovel some well-meaning crone will hand you the page to wrap your muddy rubbers in! Five thousand miles from here, on the other side of the world, you'll open your top bureau drawer to find it lined with your own immortal features! You just simply have to get used to it, that's all. Laugh at it! Keep a laugh always handy for just that thing!"

"*Laugh?*", flared Daphne. With a fresh burst of fury she tore the tattered page through and through again. "Well, I've destroyed *this* copy!" she triumphed. "No darkey porters or smirking tourists will ever see *this* copy! And maybe when I get to Florida," she cried, "snakes will bite me! Or typhoons shipwreck me! Or--or something happen so that I won't have to come home again! But you, Old-Dad----" Tottering ever so slightly where she stood all the hot anger in her eyes faded suddenly into the vague, sinister bewilderment of a young mind crowded dangerously near to the edge of its endurance. "You--you see nobody knew I was bad until the College President said so," she explained painstakingly to no one in particular. "I didn't even know it myself, I mean. *But my father*----" she rekindled instantly. Like the rippling start of a young tiger just getting ready to spring she swung around sharply on the stranger again. "Surely you didn't think for a moment that it was just myself I was thinking about in that wicked old paper?" she demanded furiously of him. "For Heaven's sake, what earthly difference do you think any such thing can make to *me* now? My life's over and done with! But my father? The dreadful--malicious--flippant things they said about my father!"

"O--h! So it was my honor, was it, that you were defending?" asked her father a bit dryly.

As though she had not even heard the question, Daphne lifted her flaming, defiant little face to the stranger's. "Why, my Father's an *angel!*" she attested. "And he always was an *angel!* And he always will be an *angel!*"

"In which case," interposed her father quite abruptly, "we had better leave I think while the angeling is still good!" With a touch that looked like the graze of a butterfly's wing and felt like a lash of steel wires he curved his arm across her shoulder and swept her from the smoking-room. Once outside the curtain his directions were equally concise. "Trot along to your drawing-room, Kiddie!" he ordered. "I'll join you presently."

As he swung back into the smoking-room he almost tripped across the stranger's sprawling feet. Huddled in the corner with his face buried in his hands the stranger sat sobbing like a woman.

"You are drunker than I thought!" said Jaffrey Bretton.

"I am fully--that," admitted the stranger.

"And a rotter!" said Jaffrey Bretton.

"Oh, no end of a rotter!" conceded the stranger.

"And if I am not very much mistaken," mused Jaffrey Bretton, "you are also the same man whom I noted--yesterday afternoon at the flower booth in the railroad station--staring so unconscionably-- not to say offensively hard at my daughter?"

"I deny nothing!" hiccoughed the stranger. With an emotion that would have done credit to a sober sorrow he lifted his stricken face to his accuser. "And I don't mind at all that I'm drunk," he confided. "Nor--nor yet being the man who stared so--so hard at your daughter. But--but *why* am I such a rotter? Frankly now as man to man how could I be such a rotter? That nice--nice little girl! That----" With uncontrollable remorse he buried his face in his hands again.

"There are never but two reasons why a man pursues a woman," observed Bretton, "One because he respects her, and the other because he doesn't. My daughter has, of course, been a little unfortunate lately in achieving a certain amount of cheap newspaper notoriety." In a perfectly even line of interrogation his fine eyebrows lifted ever so slightly. "There was a woman back there at the railroad station," he confided, as though in sheer impulsiveness, "who rated my daughter indeed as being 'fast looking'. Now just about how 'fast looking' would you consider her?"

From behind the cage of his fingers the young man's lips emitted a most unhappy little groan.

"Why--why I should consider her," he mumbled, "just--just about as 'fast looking' as a new-born babe!" But his rowdy eyes, raking the older man's face, gathered no answering smile to their humor. "N--n--o?" he rallied desperately. "N--o? On--on further consideration I should say that that she wasn't *half* as fast looking as a newborn babe! What? *Eh?*" he questioned worriedly. "Well not a hundredth part, then? Not a thousandth? Not a--not a billionth? Oh, upon my soul," he sweated, "I can't think what comes higher than billions!"

"A 'billion' is plenty high enough," said Jaffrey Bretton. "But such being the case--*why did you do it?*"

"Why did I do it?" mumbled the stranger.

"Why? Why----" Once again the rakish, confused young face lifted, but this time at least a single illuminating conviction transfigured its confusion. "Why--because she was so pretty!"

With a cigarette at his lips, a match poised halfway in mid-air, Jaffrey Bretton's heels clicked together. Sharp as the crackle of a trainer's whip his smile snapped into the situation.

"So you admit that she is pretty?" he asked quite tersely.

As though the question were a hook that fairly yanked him to his feet the stranger struggled upward and crossed his limp arms on his breast.

"She is--adorable!" he testified.

"And young?" urged Jaffrey Bretton.

"Very young," acknowledged the stranger.

"And--spirited?" prodded Jaffrey Bretton. "Even tom-boyish perhaps? And distinctly innocent?"

"Oh, perfectly spirited!" grinned the stranger a bit wanly. "Ditto tom-boyish! And most essentially innocent!"

"So innocent," persisted Jaffrey Bretton. "So tom-boyish--so spirited--so young--so pretty--that taken all in all the only wonder is that--she wasn't expelled from college before."

"It is an absolute miracle!" brightened the stranger quite precipitously.

With a shrug of his shoulders Jaffrey Bretton resumed the lighting of his cigarette.

"The days--of miracles--are reputedly over," he confided very casually between puffs. "But the natural phenomenon of a formal apology is still occasionally observed, I believe, in the case where either a very crude or a very cruel injustice has been done."

With a click of his own heels the stranger added at least an inch to his otherwise slouching height.

"I apologize in all languages!" he hastened to affirm.

"'Jeg beklager at jeg har vaeret uhoflig.' That's it in Norwegian, I believe! Now in Spanish----"

"What is just 'Plain Sorry?'" interrupted Jaffrey Bretton.

"*I am!*" cried the stranger. Like a sign post pointing "This way to the Smile!" the faint white scar that slashed across his face seemed to twitch suddenly towards the astonishing dimple in his left cheek. Robbed for that single instant of its frowning, furtive-eyed emphasis, his whole haggard young face assumed an expression of extraordinary ingenuousness. "Certainly, you've been awfully decent to me!" he smiled. "Thank you for being so-- so decent! But--but--whatever in the world *made* you so decent?" he began to waver ever so slightly. "Most fa--fathers you know, would have knocked me down!"

"I--don't--knock--sick men down," said Jaffrey Bretton quite simply.

"*Sick men?*" flared the stranger, all eyes again.

"But--some fathers--haven't such scruples," confided Jaffrey Bretton. With absolutely merciless scrutiny his eyes swept over the swaying young figure before him--hollow temples, narrow chest, twittering wrists, and all. "And if--I hadn't any longer to live--than you evidently have," he added, without a flex of accent, "I don't think I would squander any very large amount of it in forcing tipsy kisses on young girls."

"*What would you do?*" asked the stranger quite surprisingly.

"God knows!" said Jaffrey Bretton. "But not that!"

"Yes--but *what?*" pleaded the stranger.

"Search--me!" shrugged Jaffrey Bretton. "That's the whole trouble with 'whooping it up,'" he confided quite frankly. "There's so blamed little to whoop! And it's so soon over! If one only could believe now what the preachers have to say----"

"Preachers?" sniffed the stranger.

"It is, I admit, a sniffy idea," said Jaffrey Bretton, "but undeniably--quaint! Being somewhat to the effect that the pursuit of 'good works,' on the contrary, is an absolutely inexhaustible amusement! Brand-new every morning, I mean! Just as original at night! A perfectly thrilling novelty--even at noon! Heartache in it now and then perhaps but never

any headache! Atrophy of the pocket-book perhaps--but never atrophy of the liver!"

"Never--any--headache?" contemplated the stranger. "Not even in the morning, you mean?" Across his face a faint incredulous smile twisted wryly like a twinge of pain. "Oh, now you're joshing!" he said. "In all the world there never was any idea as quaint as that!"

"Oh, nonsense!" snapped Jaffrey Bretton. "I've got an idea of my own that's twice as quaint as that!"

"Such as what?" bridled the stranger.

Across the sweet-scented blur of a fresh cigarette the older man's eyes narrowed suddenly to two mere glints of steel.

"I--I hated the way you kissed my little girl!" he said.

"Y--yes?" stammered the stranger.

"That youngster of mine is such a--little youngster," mused Jaffrey Bretton perfectly evenly. "So totally inexperienced! So desperately affrighted and bewildered already with the untoward happenings of the past week! Personally," he persisted, "I want neither Prude nor Wanton in my family, but either one of them-- unfortunately--is made only too easily out of the same sex- shock. In view of which case and under all existing circumstances-- you have made it considerably harder, I think, for my little girl to reconstruct normal sex standards while that particular kiss of yours remains the last one in her memory. So I will thank you," said Jaffrey Bretton, "to accompany me now to her drawing-room and show her as best you may how even a man like you can kiss a woman 'Good-night' instead of 'Bad-night!'"

"*What?*" jumped the stranger.

Starkly for an instant he probed Jaffrey Bretton's unflinching eyes. Then rubbing one hand for a single instant across his clammy forehead he followed Jaffrey Bretton out through the plushy green curtain into the aisle.

In the general joggle of the train it was comfortable for each perhaps that the other's footsteps swayed no more, no less, than his own. Even outside Daphne's door the footing was none too certain.

"Let us in!" cried Daphne's father quite peremptorily.

In a vague mist of ruffled gold hair and soft white negligee Daphne opened the door and ushered the two men into her trig little room.

Without a moment's delay Jaffrey Bretton sprung the question that was already on his lips. "Daphne--have you ever been kissed very much?"

Above the cruel shadows that underlined the lovely young eyes, the eyes themselves widened still with blank astonishment of a little girl. But the white teeth that gleamed so brightly in the half-light were caught for the first time in their lives across the crimson line of an over-conscious under lip.

"I said, 'Were you ever kissed very much?'" repeated her father a bit tersely.

It was the big, blue, bewildered child's eyes that proved the truth of the red lips answer.

"Why--why once," stammered Daphne perplexedly. "Why once on a boat--when I was a little girl--and--and lost my doll overboard-- an--an old lady jumped up and kissed me. Oughtn't she to have?" Heavy with bewilderment only the blue eyes lifted to the stranger's face, winced darkly away again behind their shadowy lashes, and opened wide once more to her father's strangely inscrutable smile.

"Yes--but man-kisses?" probed her father quite mercilessly. "You--you are engaged to be married?"

"I--I was engaged to be married," corrected Daphne. It was the red lips that did all the answering now. "If you mean----" curled the red lips, "if you mean----" Startlingly just above her delicate cheek-bones two spots of red flared suddenly. "It-- it just never happened--somehow," she whispered. "Maybe--people don't kiss much before they're married." Into the blue eyes suddenly welled a great blur of tears. "It just--never happened-- that's all," quivered the red lips. Quick as a bolt the white teeth shot across the quiver. "Thank God it never happened!" cried the red lips. "I loathe men! I despise them! I----"

"This--this gentleman," said Jaffrey Bretton, quite abruptly, "has come to kiss you 'Good-night!'----"

"*What?*" screamed Daphne. Reeling back against the dark wainscoting she stood there before them with a single slender hand creeping out of its white sleeve towards her throat.

"Oh, I admit," said her father, "that it will not be just the kiss that the old lady gave you when your doll was drowned. Nor yet the kiss that your English Professor was doubtless planning to give you some time. But as kisses go--you will find no fault with it--I am quite sure."

"Why--why, Old-Dad!" gasped Daphne.

Flaming with protest, paling with revulsion, she lifted her stricken eyes to the stranger only to find that his own face was quite as stricken as hers.

Ashy-gray where his flush had been, faintly green around his insolent young nostrils, his eyes seemed fairly begging for mercy. Then quite suddenly he gave a queer, strained little smile, sank down on one knee like a hero in a Play, and picking up the hem of her gown pressed his lips solemnly to it.

"You little--funny--furious--Baby," he began, twitched his queer smile again, and crumpled up at her feet! "Call my man--quick!" he mumbled thickly. "Next car--somewhere. Good-night! *Good-night!*"

But it was not a good night even so! Even what was left of the night was not good! Even after the brief commotion was over and the young stranger had been carried off more or less stumblingly to his own quarters in the hands of a most efficient and formidable valet, Daphne found her car only too frankly a sleepless car. Curling up just as she was in her easiest window-corner with all her pillows crushed behind her back, her knees hunched to her chin in the clasp of her slim white arms, she sat wide-eyed and feverish watching the cindery-smelling Southland go rushing darkly by to meet the North. Long forgotten incidents of her littlest childhood flared hectically back to her! Optical impressions so recent that they had scarcely yet reported to her consciousness seared like flame across her senses! The funny, furry scallop of her first kitten's ear, the jingling tune of a Christmas Cantata, the quite irrelevant weave of the gray silk tie her English professor had worn at his last lecture, the queer white scar that slashed the tipsy stranger's face, some turquoise-colored dishes she had seen once in a shop-window, the crackling rhyme-words "faster"--"disaster" of a new poem she had just planned to write, the horrid crushed feeling of her nose when that Wiltoner boy had caught her so roughly to his breast, white narcissus and scarlet tulips bunched together somewhere in a jet-black basket, and--and always that queer white scar that slashed the tipsy stranger's face! Clackety-clack-clack-clack of wheels and brakes, rhythm and rumble, rapture of speed, stark-eyed sleeplessness, a Railroad Night! Murky blackness spangled with hamlet lights! Interminable miles of wraith-like fog! A night-heron winging his homeward way suddenly across a bizarre sky striped like a Japanese fan! The faint, sweet, unbelievable scent of orange blossoms! And then the Florida Dawn!

It was the dawn that crept so inquisitively to the hem of Daphne's gown.

With her lovely tousled head cocked ever so slightly to one side Daphne's glance followed the dawn's. Between her perfect eyebrows a curious little frown puckered suddenly. With a quick, raspy catch of her breath she jumped from her couch and bolted for her father's compartment. Digging her fingers quite unceremoniously into his gay-colored flannel shoulders she roused him from his dreams.

"Old-Dad!" she cried, "I can't sleep!"

"Very few people can," growled her father. "So why fuss about it?"

"Yes--but Old-Dad!" persisted the girl. Her teeth were chattering and from hand to feet a dreadful convulsive chill seemed to be racking her suddenly.

"For Heaven's sake, what's the matter?" cried her father.

"It's that--kiss!" quivered Daphne.

"Oh, shucks!" relaxed her father. "Forget it! It was a bit rough, I know! But remember--you had no right--at all--to go foraging into a tipsy man's smoking-room!"

"Smoking-room?" gasped Daphne. "Why--why I'd forgotten all about *that!* The--the kiss, I mean----" her eyes were wide with horror, "the kiss, I mean----" White as a ghost suddenly she lifted to her father's eyes the filmy hem of her gown where in two faint crimson splashes across one corner a man had stenciled the bow of his lips with his own life-blood.

"The *deuce!*" cried her father, and jumping into his wrapper rang precipitously for the porter.

"The young man who was--who was sick last night the one that had the hemorrhage--what about him?" he demanded of the first white-coated Darky who came running.

"Is--is he dead?" whispered Daphne.

"The young man what had the hemorrhage," confided the Darky, "he done gone leap from the train."

"What?" cried Jaffrey Bretton.

Enraptured by the excitement the Darky ripped his somber face in a white grin from ear to ear.

"He sure did, Sah!" he attested genially. "Back thar jes' as we was leavin' the water tank it was! More'n an hour back I reckon!" With a sudden elongation of his grin that threatened to separate the whole upper part of his face from the lower he rallied himself for his real news. "Was you by any chance, sah," he grinned, "the gentleman what owned the cat-hound in the baggage car?"

"Cat-hound?" flared Jaffrey Bretton. "I've got a thousand-dollar slate-colored hound in the baggage car if that's what you mean?"

"You ain't done got him now," regretted the Darky. "It was him that jumps off first at the water tank. The cat was yellor. One of them sort of swamp cats that----"

With a cry of real dismay Jaffrey Bretton pushed the Darky aside and started for the door.

"Twon't do you no good now, sah," protested the Darky. "It was more'n an hour ago I reckon and the Captain of this 'ere train he don't stop nothing for no dog."

"No, of course not!" cried Jaffrey Bretton, "But we've got to do something! The swamp country----"

"Yes, sah, that's the trouble with these 'ere hound-dogs," reflected the Darky. "They runs till they busts. And when they busts they bogs down. And jes' as soon as they bogs down Mr. Alligator or Mr. Little Ole Mocassin snake he----It was when the young gentleman sees the swamp that he jumps. Tell the folks not to worry, he hollers. Tell 'em this little ole good works 'speriment am only just begun! Was *you* his folks?" brightened the Darky.

"No!" flared Daphne.

"Yes!" said Jaffrey Bretton. "Go get me a telegraph blank quick!" he ordered. "Find out what the last station back was! And the next one ahead!"

Expeditiously the Darky plunged through the door, then swung back for one more sentence.

"There was some gentlemens down here las' year what lost their hound-dog. Jes' two hours it was and when they foun' him he was all buzzard-et."

"Hush your mouth!" said Jaffrey Bretton.

"But, Old-Dad," shivered Daphne, "what about the--the man?"

"Men can look after themselves!" frowned her father, "and if they can't, maybe they'll get another chance, who knows? But a dog, poor little lover. All that dumb quivering miracle of love, trust, shrewdness, sinew, silk. If *he* doesn't get the chance to live out the measure of even his stingy little day----"

"Yes, but Old-Dad," reasoned Daphne, "it was Creep-Mouse's own idea wasn't it--this jumping off to chase the cat?"

"Hush *your* mouth!" said Jaffrey Bretton. To cover the very real emotion that hid behind the irritability he began at once with the stub of a pencil and the back of an envelope to compose a telegram for the stranger.

"Thanks," he wrote. "Please communicate any news to J. Bretton, Hotel-----"

Then quite abruptly he jumped up and started after the porter. "Why, what an idiot I am!" he called back from the door way. "We don't even know the chap's name!"

From under lashes that seemed extraordinarily heavy to lift Daphne glanced up a bit askance at her father.

"His name is Sheridan Kaire," she said.

Swinging sharply round in his tracks her father stood eyeing her with frank astonishment.

"Well, I'd like to know," he demanded, "how *you* happen to know what his name is?"

"He--he sent me his card," said Daphne. This time her eyelashes were quite unmistakably too heavy to lift. "At the hotel, I mean," she faltered, "three or four nights ago. He sent me orchids. He sent me candy. He sent me----"

"Do you mean," said her father, "that this man has been following you for days?"

"Yes," said Daphne.

"And--and what did you do with these--these offerings?" asked her father.

"Why, I didn't know just what to do with them," stammered Daphne. "I was so frightened--I--I gave them to the bell boy."

"Do you mind telling me," quickened her father, "just why if you were frightened or troubled you wouldn't call upon your most natural protector?"

Like the fluffy edges of two feather fans Daphne's lashes fringed on her cheeks.

"This father and daughter game is such a new one to me," she said. "I've lived so much with boarding school girls--I--I didn't know fathers were people you told things to, I thought they were people that you kept things from!" Very faintly around the tremulous young mouth, very briefly behind the dark lashes a little smile signaled.

"Take off that gown!" ordered her father quite abruptly, "and wrap yourself up in that big coat of mine! And wait here

till I come back!"

"What time is it?" shivered Daphne.

"Four o'clock," said her father and was gone.

When he reappeared ten minutes later with a yellow envelope flapping in his hand Daphne was still standing just where he had left her though obediently bundled up now in the big tweed coat.

"We are all idiots!" affirmed her father. "Everybody on the train is an idiot! Here's this message been stuck up in the dining car since nine o'clock last night and no one had wit enough to find us!"

"Is it from--Creep-Mouse?" brightened Daphne.

"Silly!" cried her father. "Creep-Mouse didn't jump off till after midnight! This is for you!"

"For--me?" questioned Daphne. With incredulous fingers she took the yellow envelope and slit it end from end.

"Why, it's from John," she whispered. "John Burnarde--Mr. John Burnarde." Swaying a little where she stood she bent her bright head to the message. Then white once more to the lips she handed the page to her father.

"Read it to me yourself," said her father. "You know the man's accents and emphases better than I do and it won't make any sense to me unless I can hear the man's voice in it."

Once again the bright head bent to the page.

"To Miss Daphne Bretton," began the young voice as one quotes some precious-remembered phrase. "While your blessed letter completely relieves mind it cannot unfortunately relieve certain distressing complications of----" As though breaking its way through lips turned suddenly to ice the sweet enunciation began quite palpably to crisp around the edges of its words. "Certain distressing complications of this most unhappy situation. Forwarding to you all love and confidence am yet tied hand and foot against immediate action. Letter follows.

"T. D."

"Which being interpreted?" questioned her father.

"Which being interpreted," rallied Daphne, "is academic for nothing doing.----"

"U--m--m," mused her father, "and what does 'T. D.' stand for?"

"Teacher-Dear," flushed Daphne. "It was just a sort of a joke between us. I never somehow quite got round to calling him 'John.'"

As though lost in the most abstract reflection Jaffrey Bretton cocked his head on one side.

"It's a good telegram," he said.

"Oh, a perfectly good telegram," acquiesced Daphne. With a curiously old gesture of finality she turned aside.

"So in this fashion ends passion," she murmured.

"What do you know about passion?" quizzed her father.

"It rhymes with 'fashion,'" said Daphne.

For an instant only from blue eyes to black eyes and black eyes to blue again the baffling, sphynxlike mystery of youth defied the baffling, sphynxlike mystery of experience. Then quite abruptly her father reached out and cupped the little white quivering chin in the hollow of his hand.

"What did you *think* your lover would do, Daphne?" he smiled. "Tear down the college chapel? Set fire to the gymnasium? Cast all the faculty into dungeons--and come riding forth to claim you on a coal black charger decked with crimson trappings?"

"No, of course not," said Daphne. "Only----"

"Yes, that's just it," hurried her father. "'Only' boys do things like that! Only first-love, the young, wild free-lance peddler ready and able any moment, God bless him, to dump down his whole tip-cartful of trinkets at the feet of the first lady-fair who meets his fancy! But a *grown man*, Daphne, is a corporation! No end of other people's investments tied up with him! No end of rules and obligations encompassing him about! Truly, little girl, there are mighty few grown men who could proffer honorable succor even to their belovedest on such short notice. Truly, little girl, taken all in all, I think your John is doing pretty well. Maybe for all you know your John owes money!"

"He does," nodded Daphne. "There were some queer old editions of something he persuaded the college to buy last year. They turned out not to be genuine or something and John feels he ought to refund on it."

"And maybe there's an old father somewhere?"

"It's an old mother," quivered Daphne.

"And maybe the college president herself didn't make things any too easy for him!"

"Miss Merriwayne's crazy about him," quickened Daphne. "All the girls say so! Everybody----"

"U--m--m," mused her father. "Well, I think you'll hear from him again!"

"Yes, I think I'll hear from him again," monotoned Daphne. Quite suddenly her teeth began to chatter and the eyes that lifted to his were like the eyes of a frightened fawn.

"I feel so little," she whispered. "Even in this big coat I feel so little--and so cold! I never sat in anybody's lap," she stammered desperately, "and--and as long as you didn't like my-- my mother I don't suppose you've ever held anybody in yours. But perhaps--maybe----" With a little smothered cry her hands crept up to her father's shoulders. "Oh, if you just could hold me till breakfast time!" she begged, "or just till the coffee's ready."

Flushing like an embarrassed school-boy her father caught her up in his arms and sank back into the narrow angular corner of plush and wood with the little unfamiliar form snuggled close on his breast.

"Why--why, you don't weigh anything!" he faltered.

"No, I'm not as fat as I was last week," conceded Daphne. Like a puppy dog settling down for a nap she stirred once or twice in her nest. "Do you think of any little song you could sing?" she asked.

"Nothing except:

'Fifteen men on a dead man's chest--
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!----'"

began her father in a cheerful tenor.

"No, I wouldn't care for that," sighed Daphne.

"Why, it's from Stevenson himself!" argued her father.

"Never mind," snuggled Daphne. "Maybe I can think of one myself."

Peering down a moment later through the bright tickly blur of her hair her father noticed suddenly that her lips were moving.

"Oh, you're not praying, are you?" he squirmed. "Oh, I do hope you're not one of those people who makes his spiritual toilet in public! Dear me! Dear me! To brush your soul night and morning is no more, of course, than any neat person would do. But in public----"

"I wasn't praying," said Daphne. "I was making a little poem."

"You seem to be rather prone to make little poems," murmured her father.

"Would you like to hear this one?" offered Daphne.

"Oh, I don't mind," said her father.

"All right," quivered Daphne. "It's about Love."

"So I supposed," mused her father.

"And death," confided Daphne.

"I wouldn't wonder at all," admitted her father.

"And its name?" puzzled Daphne. "Oh, I guess it hasn't any name! It just begins! This is it:

'Oh, the little rose that died,
How it tried, oh, how it tried
Just to grow a little stronger,
Just to live a little longer,
Snatching sunshine, sipping rain
Till the June should come again!
Didn't want to be a tree,
Didn't envy you or me,
Asked no favor ere life's close
But the chance to be a rose,

Oh, that little rose that died,
How it tried! Oh, how it tried!----"

"U--m--m," mused her father. "But I thought you said it was about 'Love.' This is all about 'roses.'"

"But it *is* about 'Love!'" flared Daphne. "The rose part is just-- just figurative! You have to do that in poetry! Make most everything figurative, or else it wouldn't be--be delicate." Quite palpably her upper lip began to tremble. "Why, didn't you like it?" she whispered. "Didn't you like it at all, I mean?"

"Oh, yes," hurried her father, "I liked it very much, oh very! Though personally on these crape-y poems I must confess I like some jolly refrain added like 'Yo-ho and a bottle of rum!----'"

"Why--Old-Dad!" gasped Daphne. Sitting bolt upright, her cheeks blazing, she stared aghast at him.

"Oh, of course, you've never been in love!" she cried. "But I tell you when you're sitting all alone with your love-secret in a whole recitation roomful of girls and--and *he* comes in--so lithe--so beautiful--and smiles through everybody--right at you-- and--and then begins to read--it's Shakespeare, you know

'How like a winter hath my absence been
From Thee----'

Oh, Old-Dad, if you could only hear him read!"

Before the sudden twinkle in her father's eyes she reverted equally suddenly into sheer childishness again and began to pound him quite familiarly with her small fists.

"Oh, you're just teasing me!" she laughed. "You naughty, naughty--Old-Dad! Oh, very well then, here's another poem for you! You'll love this one! I made it up last night It's all about you!"

"Shoot!" said her father.

Re-dramatized in that single instant to the role of a poet she straightened up very formally. Back to her breast crept the quivering little hands. Her eyes were blurred with tears. "The name of this poem," she said, "is 'The Word that God Forgot to Make.' But if that's too long I could, of course, call it just 'The Miracle.' See what you think.

'Out of panic and pain, out of unspeakable disaster,
(Oh rhyme, oh rune, oh rhythm itself, come faster,
come faster!)

Out of all this I say

Fate has found me my father!

But where? Where? In earth or air?

From sky to sea? From you to me?

Where shall I find a rhyme for "father"?

I whose only speech is rhyme, I who have so little
time.

How can I in other ways sound my Daddy's glorious
praise?

Beauty, Splendor, Brains, Perfection----"

"Oh, I say!" wriggled her father. "Is that all?"

Wilting down on his breast again he heard her swallow pretty hard several times before her muffled answer came.

"It's--it's all," she said, "except, of course, the refrain 'Yo-ho,' etc."

Chuckling softly to himself for a moment her father sat staring off across the crown of her head at the shifting car-window landscape of orange groves, palm trees, and pine.

"Couldn't you pat me a little?" came the sweet, muffled voice again.

"I darsn't," said her father. "If I should unclasp a single hand you'd go bumpety-bump on the floor."

"O--h," sighed Daphne, "but couldn't you even--pat me with your voice?"

"Pat you with my voice?" puzzled her father. With a quiver of muscles his strong arms tightened round her. "Why, you poor baby," he cried, "you poor lonesome little kiddie! You----"

"Why does everybody think I'm so little?" protested Daphne. With considerable effort she struggled up again, "You and John---- Burnarde--and the--and the Kissing Man! Every one of you called me 'a baby.' But that Wiltoner boy--at

the dance that night," she faltered, "he treated me as though I was quite grown up and real. Right in the midst of a dance it was he asked me about bread machines. Asked my advice about bread machines, I mean! And I loved it!"

"Did you ever see a bread machine?" quizzed her father.

"N--o," admitted Daphne, "but it sounds so real! But what I want to know," she hurried on quite irrelevantly, "is about this place--this wild, desert-islandy sort of place that we're going to. Will that seem *real*?"

"Very real," promised her father.

"Tents?" questioned Daphne.

"Yes," said her father.

"What will there be to eat?" brightened Daphne.

"Oh, canned goods," shrugged her father, "and warm oranges and grape-fruit, and heaps of salt pork, of course, and all the fresh fish we have strength to land--Spanish mackerel, sea trout, sharks."

"Not sharks?" thrilled Daphne.

"Ah, of course, we don't have to eat them," confessed her father.

"And people?" wilted Daphne again. "Will there have to be people?"

"Oh, only four or five probably," laughed her father, "and even those usually are scattered twenty-five or fifty miles apart. Oh, of course, now and then," he admitted in all honesty, "some gay Northern houseboat comes floating by. But mostly--somehow, all that part of the land, or rather of the water, seems inhabited by people who have made mistakes--made real mistakes, I mean--argued not wisely but too well with their mothers-in-law, or overdrawn their bank accounts with the butt of a pistol rather than with the point of a pen, or had a bit of 'rough play' somewhere upstate with an over-sensitive sheriff. We're going to have, for instance, a 'Lost Man' for a cook. Nice distinguished looking old city-spoken derelict who can't remember who he is, so most happily for him he can't remember what *his* mistake was. And on the next key just below us, twenty miles or so, there's an outlaw who killed two revenue officers 'up North in Alabama' somewhere. And inland just behind us there's a rather good-looking woman who's gone batty on the subject of red. Can't bear red, it seems, and has come down there to wallow her nerves in the all-green jungle."

Big and dark and blue, Daphne widened her eyes to her father's.

"You're not fooling *any*, Old-Dad?" she asked.

"Not fooling any," said her father.

Blackly for an instant the heavy lashes shadowed down across the delicately tinted cheeks. Then quite abruptly a real smile flashed from eyes to lips.

"Oh, Old-Dad!" cried Daphne. "*Would* you mind if I touched your--beautiful hair?"

"Oh, shucks!" dodged her father.

But Daphne's little hands had already reached their goal.

"Oh, Old-Dad--how soft!" she gloated. "How white! How *thick*! But, oh goodness--isn't it *hot*?"

"On the contrary," smiled her father with a slightly twisted eyebrow. "On the contrary--it is an Ice Cap prescribed by Fate for what has doubtless been an over-feverish youth."

Solemnly for an instant Daphne considered the answer.

"Which being interpreted?" she questioned.

With a little sharp catch of his breath her father caught her suddenly back to his breast.

"Which being interpreted," he laughed, "means:

Didn't want to be a freak,
Had no hunch to sing or speak,
Couldn't be clever if he tried,
So have it dyed! *Oh*, have it dyed!----"

PART II

I

"EVERY man, once in his lifetime," gloated Jaffrey Bretton, "has craved the adventurous experience of being marooned on a coral island with a beautiful lady!"

From eyes that brooded only too soberly on the bright tropic scene all around her, Daphne shot back a faintly amused and frankly deprecatory smile.

"Oh, of course I meant an unrelated 'beautiful lady,'" murmured her father.

As swiftly as it had come the faint smile vanished again.

Shrugging the hot salt and sand from his blue-jersied shoulders her father gathered his bare brown knees into the curve of his bare brown arms and surveyed her suddenly with a most ferocious frown.

"Daphne," he ordered, "never inhale your smile! Nicotine itself is no more injurious to one's 'in'ards than is an inhaled smile." With a sweep of the hand he seemed in that single moment to include the whole shining universe in the measure of his reproach. "Even with all--this," he demanded, "can't you be happy--*any*?"

Certainly no one could have denied that it was a shining universe!

Like a cake of white soap splashing in a pan of bluing, the little island gleamed in the Gulf! Whiteness beyond your wildest dreams of whiteness! Blueness beyond your wildest dreams of blueness! Pearl, azure, indigo, turquoise, ultramarine--all sizzling together in the merciless sun!

Green there was too, of course--the vivid, clattering green of majestic cocoanut palms, the virescent flare of beech-grass, the crisp fan of scrub palmetto, and always the great, glossy mangrove trees rearing like giant laurel bushes in the dark, dustless splendor. But green in the Gulf, somehow, always seems like man's idea, or woman's--a sheer after-thought, as it were, of shade or trimmings. All the blue gulf wants is glare--and the eternal chance to grind pale rain bow-tinted shells into white sand!

Cuddled to the white sand but hiding from the glare, Jaffrey Bretton lolled in the pale shadow of an old wreck, staring out into the radiance. Half a rod away from him in a slim blue swimming suit that exactly matched his own, Daphne lay basking in her own sand nest.

Nothing else on land or sea dozed or dallied because of the heat.

"Slam--Bang--*Bang*" for a glistening mile the big billows boomed and roared on the beach. Fantastic as a shadow with a shine to it, the gray sharks slashed and reslashed through the churning tide! High overhead in inestimable thousands white gulls furred and feathered in ecstatic maneuver! Far on the outer reef bright Spanish mackerel leaped in the sun! And startlingly outlined across the horizon, as though in deliberate mockery of all man's futile efforts to walk on the water, a gigantic kite-shaped whipperee went reeling tipsily from wave to wave!

With a gasp of almost pagan joy Jaffrey Bretton repeated his question.

"Even with all this," he insisted, "can't you be happy--*any*?"

"Oh, Old-Dad," shivered Daphne, "you know just as well as I do that I would be perfectly happy if only I could forget!"

"Forget what?" said her father.

"Forget the hideous thing the President called me!" quivered Daphne. "Forget that---that awful letter my room-mate's mother wrote me! . . . Forget the newspapers! . . . Forget--forget--*everything*!"

With a shrug of his shoulders, Jaffrey Bretton gestured back to the camp fire at the edge of the cactus thicket where, crouched before the fragrant coffee pot in a scarecrow suit of gay-colored gingham, a weirdly majestic looking old man with long scraggly hair and sharply aquiline features added the one tragic note to the scene.

"Lost Man has--'forgotten everything,'" he confided, a bit dryly.

"Forgotten everything?" repeated Daphne.

"Everything except how to make coffee," said her father, "or fry a bit of fish now and then! Forgotten who he is, I mean! Forgotten who he was! Forgotten even who he intends to be! That's rather the trouble, it seems, with this forgetting business! When you once start out to 'forget' there doesn't seem to be any special discrimination about it! Your father's name, the location of your banker, the price of turnips, the esthetic value of brushing your hair all wiped out of existence by a single slop of the same sponge!"

"Yes, but Old-Dad----" parried Daphne.

With a smile that was almost caressing her father narrowed his gaze once more to the tragic old figure.

"Hanged if I don't think the old chap would die for me!" he attested. "But nothing on earth, it seems, could make him remember me! Seventy years old and seventy miles from a fish hook and seventy times battier than batty! That's the way I found him five or six years ago!"

"Yes, but where did you find him?" wakened Daphne. "How ever did you happen to find him?"

"Well, if the truth must be told," said her father, "I was hunting rather zealously at the moment for a pink curlew. It is against the law, I believe, to be hunting overzealously for a pink curlew. Way up one of those tortuous green waterways it was! An absolute maze of mangrove islands! No conceivable footing, you understand, except that great bare fretwork of mangrove roots clawing down into the water! And every separate way you stared was just another dank green tunnel! Glossy leaves slapping along the sides of your canoe, dove-gray curlews blocking out the sky, alligators guzzling in every slimy bog hole! Had a little chunk of dry land, the old chap did, just about the size and substantiality of a crumpled-up newspaper, and a wigwam thatched like a cannibal hut with palm leaf fans! And there he lay in the damp and the heat and the buzz, too weak any longer to raise his head, but swearing like a trooper because in some inexplicable way he had missed the trading boat that chugged along his coast line every three months or so. For days and days, I suppose, he had rowed laboriously down to the mouth of the pass and leaned on his oars from dawn to dusk raking that blue horizon line for rice and 'white bacon' and coffee and matches and--life. It wasn't just that he was fastidious, you know! Raw curlew or raw jewfish would have tasted like pudding to him by then! But something seemed to have happened to his shotgun and his last fish hook--rot, I suppose. Anyway, from grass floor to peak of that rattling palm-leaf hut there wasn't a single thing left but damp and heat and buzz! Yet somewhere up in the North, I suppose, or the East or the West, there's a baffled little family group still arguing round the evening lamp or over the morning porridge: 'Whatever in the world became of Father?' Wrecked by a typhoon or a bank defalcation, swerved from some perfectly sober path by the phantasia of a headache powder, driven to frenzy by the pattern of his dining-room wall paper 'Whatever in the world became of Father?'"

"Well, whatever did?" quickened Daphne.

"Oh, we chucked him into our canoe," said Jaffrey Bretton, "and took him back to the yacht, and from the yacht in due time to this same little coral island. And every quarter now, when the trading boat skirts the coast, it rather plans, I think, to throw a box of fodder ashore at the entrance to Lost Man's pass-- whether Lost Man himself is in sight or not. And usually in the winter when I come down I send a Seminole Indian back into that mad green maze to find him. No one but an Indian could find him, I imagine. And always, without the slightest question or demur, Lost Man comes and cooks for me. Yet never once, I think, has he shown a flicker of recognition beyond staring up bewilderedly through every first brew of camp coffee to inquire, 'Say, boss,-- have--I--ever--cooked for you before?'"

"Oh, but Old-Dad!" cried Daphne. "Don't you think we ought to try and take him home?"

"Home to what?" frowned her father. With a sudden glance of a lover his eyes reswept the turquoise-colored tide. "Wouldn't any man," he questioned, "rather die on the Spanish Main--than live in an asylum? Also, incidentally," he murmured, "when a man has once formed the Seminole Indian sort of habit of living in a gay gingham jumper with or without trousers he doesn't slip over- easily, you understand, into linen collars again."

"Yes, but what about his family?" protested Daphne, "and the awful tragedy of being lost?"

"God knows!" said her father. "But the awful tragedy of being lost is considerably less sometimes, I fancy, than the awful tragedy of being found! Every human catastrophe makes a lot of new problems of course--but it cancels, I imagine, just as many old ones. By land or sea there never was any smash-up yet, I suppose, that didn't release some poor soul with the cry, 'Now, I'll never have to tell! Now, they'll never need to know! Now, we'll never have to pay!' People who wondered how they could meet the coming day just didn't have to, that's all! And lads like our old friend here, Kiddie, are pretty apt to represent somebody's canceled problem. And anyway" (for comedy instead of tragedy he restaged his whole face suddenly by the shift of a single eyebrow), "and anyway, Kiddie," he laughed, "it must simplify life pretty considerably to forget everything in it except how to cook the one thing you like best! In your own case, for instance, what will you choose? Guava jelly? Or fudge?"

"Guava jelly and fudge *nothing!*" flared Daphne. In another instant she was on her feet and speeding toward Lost Man.

"Whatever you do--don't start him swearing!" shouted her father. "Truly, I couldn't advise it!"

But heedless of everything except the intolerable mystery, Daphne was already at the camp fire poised like a slim wand of blue larkspur over the old man's crouching hulk.

"Must at least have been a Northerner once!" called her father, "or he'd never stand the shock of that bathing suit!"

Shrugging the raillery aside Daphne clutched out with desperate intensity at the old man's multicolored shoulder.

"Lost Man!" she flamed, "it's perfectly absurd for you to remember a silly little thing like how to make coffee and forget a great big important one like who you are! It doesn't make sense, I tell you? You must remember who you are! You must! You *must*! Lost Man, what is your name?"

"Lost Man," answered the old chap, as though it had been Smith.

"Yes, but where do you live?" cried Daphne.

"Here," said Lost Man.

"Yes, but after you leave here where do you go?" persisted Daphne.

"There," said Lost Man.

With a little wail of despair Daphne pointed back toward her father.

"What is that man's name?" she demanded.

"It doesn't matter," said Lost Man. "He has such a good face."

"Yes, but what's my name?" giggled Daphne.

As though just a little bit wearied by the catechism Lost Man resumed his coffee drinking.

"Everything is all the same," he said.

"But I tell you I won't be an 'All the Same!'" cried Daphne. "My name is Daphne! D-a-p-h-n-e! *Daphne*! Remember it now!" she admonished him. "You've simply got to remember something! . . . Daphne! Daphne! Daphne!"

With a curious little chuckle and a sudden cock of his head as though trying to locate the source of so unfamiliar a sound, Lost Man reached out for the great long-handled camp spider and began quite unexpectedly to thrum it like a banjo, as, shaking his shaggy mane out of his eyes, he burst into song:

"Diaphenia, like a daffadown dilly,
White as the sun, fair as the lily,
Heigho--Heigho----"

With a tiny scream Daphne swung back to ward her father.

"Why, Old-Dad!" she cried. "He's calling me 'Diaphenia'! It's an old, old song! Oh, an awfully old, old English song! It's in the Golden Treasury! You learn it in college! You never in the world would know it if you hadn't been to college!"

"Well, switch him back to the swearing if you'd like it better!" called her father. But already, with a leap and a run, he was on his way to prove the phenomenon with his own ears and eyes.

Quaveringly, but with determinate gallantry, Lost Man's guttural old voice carried the tuneful memory.

"Diaphenia like to all things blessed,
When all thy praises are expressed,
Heigh-o--Heigh-o."

The scream that Daphne gave now scared even Lost Man out of his next line.

"Oh, I've thought of something perfectly wonderful!" she cried, and speeding into her tent returned with a large shining mirror clasped close in her arms. "Oh, you thought I was silly to bring it!" she admonished her father, "but maybe I wasn't so silly, after all! Maybe I'm going to work a miracle with it! Maybe this is the psychological moment!" Still with the mirrored surface gleaming from her like a bright breastplate she advanced slowly toward Lost Man till every inch of the quicksilver had taken its merciless toll of the scarecrow figure before it. "Now, Lost Man!" she triumphed, "look close! Look close! . . . *Who are you?*"

As indifferently as an animal Lost Man gazed into the mirror for an instant. Then, quite suddenly, with his neck yanked oddly forward, he stared direct into the reflection and staggered to his feet. Dumb with some inexplicable emotion he stood staring for a breathless moment from Jaffrey Bretton's utterly expressionless face to Daphne's excited eyes. Then, very deliberately the tip of his tongue crept out to moisten his sun-parched lips.

"Do I look like *that*?" he pointed.

"Yes, I'm afraid you do," admitted Daphne in all honesty.

With a gasp like the gasp of a person strangling, Lost Man raised his arms to heaven. "My God! My God!" he cried, "I thought I was *young*!" And swinging sharply around he ran madly down the white beach into the white surf and out

through the white surf into the blue churn and chop beyond, as though the horizon line itself was his ultimate goal. Outward through the indigo depths in long, slow, fiercely powerful strokes, floundering half erect through azure-colored shoals, merging for interminable seconds with the wild eddy and roar of far outlying breakers, silhouetted for one brief fantastic moment standing ankle-deep on the crest of a hidden sand bar with white gulls circling in a living halo around his head he passed, half whipperee, half miracle-man--into the unfathomable glare.

"Oh, Old-Dad!" gasped Daphne, "won't he be drowned?"

More shaken than he liked to show, Jaffrey Bretton stooped for an instant to brush a tickle of imaginary sand from his instep.

"Not in a thousand years," he said, "but at least he will be-- washed."

At some unfamiliar timbre of the voice Daphne crept timidly to him.

"Oh, Old-Dad," she faltered, "you don't really suppose, do you, that he's been lost ever since he was--young?"

"God knows," said Jaffrey Bretton. "Only, next time you have a wonderful idea, Kiddie,--keep it muzzled for a day or two until you make sure it won't bite."

"Oh, but Old-Dad!" quivered Daphne, "I--I didn't mean to hurt him! Truly, I didn't! I---"

"You didn't hurt him," said her father. "Like all merciful executions, he never knew what hit him!" With a gesture frankly romping he reached out and grabbed Daphne by her wrist. "Come on, Kiddie!" he challenged, "let's have a race up the beach!"

By the time the race was over there wasn't enough breath left in either of them to talk about anything. Merged in the sand again, scorched by the sun, fanned by a great clattery clump of scrub palmetto, they curled up in half a shadow and fell asleep.

It was Jaffrey Bretton who woke first.

"Poor--devil," was the first phrase on his lips.

"Who?" yawned Daphne.

"I!" said her father quite quickly. "I was worrying about my dog."

"O--h," yawned Daphne.

"Oh--yourself!" yawned her father.

It was Daphne who woke first the next time, and she woke with her fingers clutching hard into her father's startled shoulder.

"Oh, Old-Dad!" she cried. "There's a lady walking on my beach!"

Heavy with sleep, Jaffrey Bretton struggled laboriously upward and shook his white hair from his eyes just in time to face the intruder as she rounded the nearest cactus thicket.

"Why--why--good afternoon, Lady-Walking-on-our-Beach!" he said.

The scream that the lady gave, though distinctly shrill was yet quite unmistakably a khaki scream, the scream, as it were, of a sportswoman, a mere matter of atavism only.

"*Oh!* How you startled me!" she cried.

It was at least very becoming to the lady to be startled, though all around the edges of the frank confession her lips showed still their stark, atavic pallor, and the clever gray eyes that searched the two blue-jersied figures before her were rather extravagantly dilated.

"Is--is this Martha's Island?" she questioned just a little bit abruptly.

"It is not!" said Jaffrey Bretton with some coldness. "Martha is a crazy lady. Do we look to you like crazy ladies?"

"Oh, no--of course not," flushed the intruder. "Only--only it is so awfully hard sometimes to place people without their clothes."

"Without their clothes?" flared Daphne. "Why these are our clothes! Our very own clothes!" As though in indisputable proof of the assertion she edged even closer to her father's side and began to stroke such shoulder and such sleeve as her father's swimming suit boasted.

But, gentle as the gesture was, it only served somehow to increase the Intruding Lady's nervousness.

"Why--of course--I--I didn't mean that," she stammered. "It's only that that running on you so suddenly the way I did,

I----" With a gesture of sheer helplessness she threw out her hands. "Well, there *are* so many queer people down here!" she cried. "Fanatics and fruit growers and runaway people--and--and fanatics!" In an access of bewilderment her glance swept out across Daphne's slim, nymph-like loveliness to the wild island scene all around them, and back again to Jaffrey Bretton's distinctly sophisticated eyes. "For all I know," she affirmed with a palpable effort at lightness, "*you* may be fugitives from justice!"

"Call us rather--fugitives from injustice," bowed Jaffrey Bretton, with the faintest possible smile.

Tugging at the brim of her brown khaki hat, fumbling at the collar of her brown khaki shirt, patting at the flare of her brown khaki skirt, the Intruding Lady began very suddenly to tinker with her personal appearance.

"Now, isn't that funny?" jerked Daphne. "Whenever my father smiles, smiles like that, I mean--so faint, so twinkly--every woman in sight except myself begins to straighten her hat and----"

"Hush such nonsense!" ordered her father.

But the Intruding Lady, without showing an atom of resentment, wilted right down in the hot sands and began to laugh. It was a clever laugh, too, though still just a little bit wobbly round its edges.

"Please excuse me for being so hysterical," she begged. "But it's been such a queer day! And I've just had such a dreadful fright I hardly know who's crazy and who isn't!"

"A fright?" deprecated Jaffrey Bretton with increasing formality.

"Yes! Coming ashore just now," cried the Intruding Lady, "I thought I saw a man walking on the water! Way out in the Gulf it was! Almost a mile I should think! But when I looked again it was a fish!" very faintly, but none the less palpably her teeth began to chatter. "But when I looked *again* it was a man! It *was*!"

"Nothing at all to be alarmed about," interposed Jaffrey Bretton quickly; "it was just our butler doing his calisthenics."

"Your--butler?" stammered the Intruding Lady.

"Yes--you have probably noticed that the water is exceedingly thin in spots" then with a precipitate return of his manners Jaffrey Bretton waved her toward the green-shadowed sand nest which he had just vacated.

"Have a shade, madam!" he begged her. "You seem quite out of breath! And as though you had been running!"

"Running?" rallied the lady. "I have been galloping!" Rather cautiously, but none the less gratefully, she edged her way into the wavy green shadow. "And even after I got ashore," she confided, "I met such queer things on the beach! Oh, pelicans, I mean," she added hastily, "and fiddler crabs! Crowds and crowds of----"

"We shall have to have a traffic cop," mused Jaffrey Bretton. But even as he mused he stood with one hand shading his eyes while he raked the vacant horizon line for some thing that seemed to perplex him.

"When you spoke of coming ashore just now," he turned and asked the lady quite abruptly, "just what, may I ask, were you on?"

"I was on a--on a honeymoon," said the lady.

"A honeymoon?" jumped Daphne.

"And being inexpressibly bored," said the lady, "I----"

"You are frank, to say the least," murmured Jaffrey Bretton.

"Frank?" said the lady. "I was desperate! So when the others took all the launches to go off and hunt for some kind of a fish, a sail fish I think it was, I pretended that I had a headache and stayed behind in my cabin, and the first moment even the engineer was out of sight I just slipped into the canoe and paddled ashore. Having heard, you see," explained the lady, "about all the queer people hidden away on some of these islands--it just occurred to me, you see, that----"

"All of which is very interesting, of course," said Jaffrey Bretton, "but honor compels me to advance a few little observations of my own. Yonder, through that maze of gulls," he pointed, "I note the only smoke on the horizon which leads me to infer that, having camouflaged your absence not only wisely but too well, the yacht and bridegroom in question are already steaming southward at a very reasonable mileage. For the Caribbean, doubtless? Always have I understood that the Caribbean was a really rather remarkable place for honeymoons!"

But already, with a little choking gasp, the Intruding Lady was on her feet staring frantically in every direction. Her face was horridly white.

"Quick!" she cried. "We must get the canoe and try to catch them!"

"Your knowledge of nautical matters is charming," bowed Jaffrey Bretton. "But though one may often put to sea in a canoe he does not readily put to Gulf. The unfortunate typhoonish treachery of these waters, the peculiarly hoydenish

habits of sharks, the----"

"We--must--get--the--canoe!" insisted the lady.

"Why, how silly!" roused Daphne. "Why, it would take weeks and weeks!"

"And in this impetuous climate," deprecated her father; "how dispiriting to arrive at last only to find that the recreant bride groom had already taken unto himself another bride."

"Your levity is quite uncalled for," frowned the lady. "When I think of the anxiety I have caused my party the commotion there will be on board the yacht as soon as my absence is discovered, the----"

"Oh, of course we could advertise," suggested Jaffrey Bretton cheerfully, "stating the latitude and longitude, and the more explicit directions that it's the island that almost always has eleven pelicans sitting on the sand bar. And we could train our butler, I suppose, to swim out from time to time to the passing yachts and houseboats with a placard in his mouth saying, Found: 'A Brown Khaki Lady'. But unless we have a little more definite identification--" he turned and addressed the lady with some incisiveness.

In spite of herself and quite inexplicably the lady began to smile. Simultaneously with the smile she unwound the brown veil from her brown hat, and snatching off the hat itself bared her bright head to the breeze.

"Just mention that I have red hair," she said. "Names are altogether too easily assumed to be practical for identification purposes."

"Yet more ladies, I suppose," murmured Jaffrey Bretton, "travel under assumed hair than under assumed names."

"Why, Old-Dad!" protested Daphne. In a sudden flare of interest her whole attention focused on the lady. "My! but your hair *is* red!" she cried. "And such heaps of it! Why, goodness!" she stammered, "you're almost as young as I am!"

"It's delightful of you to think so," smiled the lady. "But even you, I'm afraid, will never rate me as young as this--this--your father, was it, you said?"

"I don't quite understand what you mean?" sobered Daphne.

"People almost never understand what ladies mean," said her father. "But the inference is, of course, that this one refers at the moment to my somewhat callow conversation. However," he continued, perfectly blithely, "I see no reason why we shouldn't all be very happy together--until such time at least as my own launch returns with its remodeled engine. But meanwhile when did you eat last?" he turned abruptly to ask the lady with sincere concern.

"Last night," conceded the lady. "Truly I did have a bit of a headache."

"Our grapefruit are not iced," mused Jaffrey Bretton, "and we pour our butter from a pitcher--which is not the custom, of course, on Gulf-going yachts but as camp food goes----" With a little swift smile he reached out his hand to Daphne and drew her to her feet. "Dinner is served, ladies!" he said, and started up the beach.

Still holding tightly to one hand Daphne followed half a step behind him.

"The sun's so hot and--the sand's so thick--and the shells are so sharp," she called back cordially to the Intruding Lady, "you'd find it heaps easier, too, if you'd take Old-Dad's other hand!"

"No, I thank you!" said the Intruding Lady, but plowed along valiantly after them.

The sun was hot! The sand was thick! The shells were very sharp! No shade for almost a mile except the occasional lattice-like flicker of a sea gull's flight! But close at their side the Blue Gulf pounded and splashed in ecstatic spray. And towering high above the sallow glare of beach-grass and cactus thicket the bright green cocoanut palms clattered and fanned with at least the sound of coolness!

"I--I suppose I'll have to keep the lady in *my* tent," whispered Daphne.

"Your supposition is perfectly correct," said her father.

"She's got rather nice eyes, I think," whispered Daphne. "And the cutest hair!"

"Has she really?" said her father.

At the sudden sharp wince in the little hand that had nestled so confidently in his own he glanced back just in time to catch the look he so dreaded in her eyes.

"I--I suppose I ought to tell her," suffered Daphne.

"Tell her--what?" snapped her father.

"Why--my--my story," stammered Daphne. "It wouldn't be quite honorable not to, would it?" Desperately the young

lips tried to recapture some kind of a humorous smile. "Tell--her I mean-- quite frankly, you know--that I'm more or less of a notorious character." In a single quiver the young mouth stripped itself of even this futile attempt at mirth. "No decent woman would ever *choose* to associate with me again, the President said."

In an outburst of quite irrelevant temper, Jaffrey Bretton swung around to wait for the Intruding Lady.

"Is this a tortoise race?" he demanded accusingly. "Are we to die here in our tracks of hunger and thirst?" Without so much as a "By your leave" he snatched the Intruding Lady's hand in his spare one and plunged onward again. As they raced across the spongy, tide-swept sand bar just ahead of a huge blue wave and sighted the white tents at last, he tossed back his head with a whoop of extravagant mirth. "Whatever in the world have I done," he demanded of earth, air, sky, sea, "that I should be marooned on a coral island with *two* beautiful ladies--one of whom is my daughter and the other the bride of another man?"

"S-s-h!" warned Daphne with a twitch of the hand. "There's a stranger at the camp fire!" Dropping her father's fingers and quite ignoring the other lady she ran swiftly ahead, and dodging into a thick clump of beach-grass crouched down like a young Indian to study out the mystery. "Oh, Old-Dad!" she signaled back with her finger on her lips, "it's the--sissiest-looking man! Such queer little narrow shoulders! And the mooniest eyes! And a beard like a silk hand kerchief!"

"Must be the Outlaw," said her father

"The Outlaw?" protested Daphne. "Oh, dear me!" she cried suddenly. "He's seen me! And he's skulking off through the grass with a great roll of furs or something under his arm! Quick! Maybe we're robbed!" Darting out into full view on the beach she stood poised for a single uncertain instant while the Outlaw, as though by magic, vanished from sight.

"Robbed! Oh no," laughed her father. "It's your bathing suit! Next to being the honestest man I know this particular Outlaw happens to be also the most squeamishly modest. Creep around the back way by the palmettos," he ordered, "and put on a skirt! I want to see him!"

Dropping the Brown Khaki Lady's fingers he cupped his hands to his mouth and began to halloo across the little distance.

"Hi there, Alliman!" he called.

"How-do, Mr. Bretton!" came the soft-voiced answer very cautiously, then, from the thicket the man himself emerged with the roll of wildcat skins still clutched in his arms. Daphne certainly had not exaggerated the gentleness of him, nor the narrow shoulders, nor the silky old-fashioned brown beard, nor the bland eyes.

"Come to trade me those cat skins for some pipe tobacco and oranges?" smiled Jaffrey Bretton.

"I--don't--mind," drawled the Outlaw.

As one to whom Time meant nothing nor ever would again, he sat down on the edge of the old wreck and drew his empty pipe from his pocket.

"Just behind that broken spar there you'll find a tobacco tin, I guess," said Jaffrey Bretton. "I rather plan to cache more or less of it around on such shelf-room as the island affords. . . . It's such a blamed nuisance to get way off up the beach somewhere and find you've forgotten your 'baccy'. That's the only conceivable fault I could find with this island," he mused. "There's so little closet room and practically no shelves!"

"Puff, puff, puff," without a flicker of expression the Outlaw sucked at his pipe. "Puff, puff--puff--puff, puff."

With a gesture toward the tents, a nod toward the retreating back of the Brown Khaki Lady, Jaffrey Bretton essayed to re- crank the conversation.

"My ladies," he confided, "have been swimming--wading--running not to say--yachting!"

"Pretty ladies!" blushed the Outlaw.

"Thank you," bowed Jaffrey Bretton.

"Puff, puff, puff, puff, puff," sighed the Outlaw's pipe.

Véry deftly Jaffrey Bretton reached round behind the broken spar for a smoke of his own.

"Any special news this last year?" he asked.

Thoughtfully, from the long monotonous months of heat and glare and squalor and privation and almost absolute isolation, the Outlaw extracted as a sheer gift the one comely fact.

"I--seen--a whole bunch of pink--curlew," he said.

"The deuce you did!" brightened Jaffrey Bretton.

"Any news--up--your way?" droned the Outlaw.

From Europe, Asia, Africa--from the courts of kings and the gossip of queens, from a hundred adventures, from a hundred glittering memories Jaffrey Bretton traded gift for gift.

"I saw the World's Series," he confided. "I saw Frank Baker make his two home-runs."

"N--o?" shivered the Outlaw. Very slowly he removed the pipe from his mouth. For an instant only, a muscle twitched like a sob in his grizzled throat. As though suddenly consumed with bashfulness, he began to shuffle his bare toes in the sand. "Got--got the same President as usual?" he ventured at last.

"As far as I know," said Bretton. "I was in Washington three weeks ago."

"Orange crop good up-state?" persisted the listless voice.

"Good enough, I guess," acquiesced Bretton.

"Anything--special--in the papers these days about Alabama?" mumbled the pipe-clenched lips.

"Alabama's still on the map," admitted Bretton.

"Puff--puff--puff," mused the Outlaw. Then very limply he struggled to his feet. "Say, Martha wants you," he said.

"Martha?" puzzled Jaffrey Bretton. "Wants *me*? . . . What for?"

"She don't say," said the Outlaw, "but she wants you--quick."

"Quick?" gibed Jaffrey Bretton.

"She sure wants you quick," repeated the Outlaw.

"Oh, all right, we'll go now," acquiesced Jaffrey Bretton, "just as soon as I can jump into my khakis! Why, I wouldn't fail Martha for anything in the world! Why, that time the catfish stung me she----" Quite precipitate his face darkened, and then cheered again. "Oh, of course I haven't my launch here," he acknowledged, "but we can go in yours!"

"Oh--no," protested the Outlaw gently. "It'll be night coming back, and I don't calculate on going nowheres in the dark. . . . It ain't healthy to travel in the dark. . . . My mother back home, she always say it ain't healthy no ways to travel in the dark."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Jaffrey Bretton. "Why, Martha may be ill!"

"She sure has got something," sighed the Outlaw, "but it ain't a dyingness. To-morrow'll do."

"It certainly won't do--if Martha's in trouble!" cried Jaffrey Bretton. "We'll go this minute! . . . Wait till I tell the ladies, and we'll all be along just as soon as we can grab up a bite to eat!"

Like a man smitten in his tracks, the Outlaw stopped short and began to twirl his battered slouch hat in his hands.

"Oh--not the ladies!" he protested wanly.

"Sure, we'll take the ladies!" insisted Bretton. "It will be quite an adventure for them."

Dumbly the Outlaw stared for a moment from the Gulf to the sky and back to Jaffrey Bretton's smile again.

"You ain't forgotten Martha's little peculiarity, has you?" he whispered, "about red?" In frankly abject misery he began to retwirl his hat. "One of them ladies had red hair, I notices," he said.

With a whoop of joy, Jaffrey Bretton tossed back his own white head.

"I guess we could muffle it," he laughed.

But the Outlaw recognized no mirth in any thing at the moment.

"It ain't so easy to muffle ladies," he said.

"Oh, shucks!" persisted Jaffrey Bretton. "Trot along."

Reluctantly the Outlaw turned and started for his boat.

"My engine ain't running any too good," he confided plaintively.

"They never do," said Jaffrey Bretton.

"Tain't near likely there's enough gas," deprecated the Outlaw.

"There never is," said Jaffrey Bretton.

With a gesture of sheer weariness the Outlaw submitted to his fate.

"Oh, very well this time," he said, "but I'm going to move. I likes you fine, Mr. Bretton, but I sure am a-going further off. What with Lost Man and Martha this here Gulf is getting too crowded."

Cocking his head abruptly toward the sound of metal ringing on metal, Jaffrey Bretton gestured toward the mangrove-shadowed cove.

"There's good old Lost Man now," he said, "tinkering with your engine."

"Oh--Lost Man's all right," admitted the Outlaw, "only he ain't got any tact."

"Oh, shucks!" repeated Jaffrey Bretton. "*Trot* along, I say! . . . But go over to the food tent first and pick out your trade for the cat skins. Whatever's fair, you know? Anything you please. . . . Strawberries, asparagus, chili con carne--anything, you know, except caviar."

"Yes--I know," rallied the Outlaw. With the slightest possible accentuation of his pace he started up the beach.

Still laughing to himself Jaffrey Bretton bolted for his tent and his khakis.

"Hurry up--hurry up--hurry up!" he called across to the tent that sheltered Daphne and the Intruding Lady. "We're going on an adventure! Heaven knows what it is but something is the matter with Martha. . . . Be sure and bring your sweater--we're liable to be out all night!"

In an incredibly short space of time he reappeared on the "tote path" hurrying back and forth between the camp and the launch with a great jug of drinking water, a khaki-colored blanket or two, and indeterminate tins of coffee and milk and meat.

Very frankly bewildered, but conscientiously determined to be a good sport, the Brown Khaki Lady hurried to help him.

Deflected by some sudden adolescent dreaminess, Daphne was the last to emerge from her tent. In her white shoes and stockings, her short white skirt, her simple little white middie-blouse and severe white tam, all her wild, nymphlike beauty of the surf and the beach seemed to have reverted into sheer childish loveliness and austerity. Craving a yellow cactus bloom to stick in her belt, she plunged off first into the nearest thicket. Chasing a bright blue butterfly, she decided just as impulsively to explore the farther palmetto. Then altogether contritely she started out to find her own way back to the waiting launch and her companions.

Green and dank and lacelike as the vegetation of an aquarium the great trees traced their leaves and branches against the sky. Close in a little bush a storm-blown scarlet bird twittered and preened in its temporary sacristry. High over all throbbed the ecstasy of the surf.

"Oh--*beautifulness!*" gasped Daphne. "In all the world," she thought, "is there any word this moment except just *beautifulness?*"

Then quite suddenly from the green maze just beyond her she heard a word that some other person evidently seemed to consider the biggest word of the moment, and that word was "Jaffrey!" *Jaffrey?* . . . Of all things!

With a lurch of her heart she darted forward just in time to see her father and the Brown Khaki Lady standing like the picture of the Huguenot lovers, with their hands on each other's shoulders. . . . And there was a laugh on the Brown Khaki Lady's lips! But there were tears in her eyes!

"Jaffrey!" cried the Brown Khaki Lady, "since--when have you boasted a daughter?"

Stricken with astonishment and resentment at the deception which had been practised upon her, Daphne dashed out into the open only to find that at some shriller cry than hers both her father and the lady were speeding madly toward the beach, where, huddled somewhat conglomerately in the bow of the launch, the Outlaw was holding Lost Man at bay with a distinctly businesslike-looking gun.

"What in thunder's the matter?" shouted Jaffrey Bretton.

For a single relaxing instant the Outlaw glanced back across his narrow shoulder.

"This-here Lost Man ain't got any tact," he sighed.

"Put that gun down!" cried Bretton. "Why, the poor old chap's twice your age!"

"And--twice my size," confided the Outlaw. But he lowered the gun at least an inch.

"But what's it all about?" insisted Bretton.

Very gloweringly Lost Man essayed to be the real explainer.

"He was silly about a crab," glowered Lost Man.

"'Tweren't, either, silly," argued the Outlaw. "He stepped on a crab and hurted it. There ain't no call to hurt nothing, I say."

"Nice one to talk, you are!" snarled Lost Man. "You--you man-killer, you!"

Quicker than a flash the Outlaw raised his gun again.

"I ain't no man-killer," he droned. "I ain't never in my life killed no man. What I killed was two men--both coming at me double. There ain't no man living, I tells you, more peaceful than me. . . . But when I'm moonshining"--in an instant the flaccid lips had tightened into a single merciless line--"but when I'm moonshining I don't stand no monkeyshining!"

"Oh, cut it out!" said Jaffrey Bretton. "Here come the ladies!"

"I forgot the ladies!" collapsed the Outlaw. Blushing like a schoolboy he tucked his gun back in his belt, and began to tinker with the engine.

But the ladies, it seemed, were not over-quick about coming.

A little impatiently Jaffrey Bretton turned back to meet them. The Brown Khaki Lady was frankly scared. But Daphne, though white as a sheet, admitted no trepidation.

"Oh, don't you think he's too dangerous to go with?" shivered the Brown Khaki Lady.

"Nonsense!" laughed Jaffrey Bretton. "He's as gentle as a lamb."

"If you handle him right," supplemented the Brown Khaki Lady.

"Isn't most everything dangerous," laughed Jaffrey Bretton, "if you don't handle it right? A fifth-story window? A knife and fork? A blank sheet of paper? The buttons on your coat? Yet only a fool jumps through the fifth-story window, or tries to cram the sheet of paper into his eye, or--" With a gasp of apprehension he turned suddenly on Daphne. "You *are* white!" he said.

Who was this woman--what was she to her father?

Twice Daphne opened her lips to cry out the question--the accusation, the bewilderment that was consuming her. Then, with a really heroic effort, she swung in her tracks and ran off at full speed toward the launch.

"Hurry up, you--you slow-pokes!" she turned and called back when neither the quiver of her lips nor the blur of her eyes could be gleaned through the distance.

In another five minutes, with a great churn of water, a great chug of engine, a great stench of gasoline, the little old rickety launch was on its way.

It was still very bright, very hot; but already, as though for sheer weight and wiltedness, the huge sun lolled in its orbit, and like a turbulent bed smoothed out at last for the night the green mangrove-pillow and white sand-sheet of the fast-receding shore gleamed soft and cool at last above the taut blue blanket of the Gulf.

Perched high in the bow of the launch Daphne sat staring back at her traveling companions--the puny Outlaw, the gigantic Lost Man, her own most distinguished-looking father, and the mysterious lady. Like a crippled phonograph record her mind seemed to catch suddenly on that phrase "her most distinguished-looking father and the mysterious lady--the mysterious lady." . . . And they were all bound somewhere on a mysterious errand--an all-night mysterious errand concerning some mad woman who didn't like red and-- and---Quite alarmingly her heart began to pound and pound and pound! "And a month ago," she thought, "I was getting up when bells rang, and going to bed when bells rang, and thinking when bells rang, and stopping thinking when bells rang!" In a curious little shiver she looked up suddenly to find Lost Man's eyes fixed on hers with a distinctly benign and apostolic smile, but even as he smiled he hunched his shoulders up, clapped his hands together and burst once more into the old English song:

"Diaphenia, like the daffadowndilly,
White as the sun, fair as the lily. . . ."

With a single outcry, Daphne tossed back her head and shrieked her nerves into space.

"Good!" said her father. "Now you'll feel better!"

II

IT was dark when they sighted the yellow lantern light on Martha's Island. Darkness drops down so suddenly in the far south! It's rather spooky! Rather a nice spooky, though, if you happen to be a reasonably innocent Northerner looking for thrills. It's only poor souls like Lost Man and the Outlaw, and perhaps even Martha herself, to whom Darkness symbolizes a stab in the back, a shot from ambush, or God knows what!

To Daphne, this night, the darkness was all a-tingle with magic and pain. High overhead in ineffable crispness the blue-black dome of the sky seemed fairly crackling with stars. Close around her in murky mystery the great Gulf chuckled

and prattled of coral and pearl. From the dark, huddled group in the stern of the boat not a face or a feature flared familiarly to hers. And drowned in the shuddering gasp and throb of the engine her father's deep-voiced raillery, even the Brown Khaki Lady's light laughter, sounded like something from another world.

It was Daphne's own little world that concerned her most at that moment, a world in chaos!

"My father is false to me!" mutinied her wild little heart. "He has deceived me! And about a lady!" woke jealousy. "We didn't *need* another lady! And what earthly reason could two people have for pretending to be strangers when they really were lovers? But how could two people possibly be lovers," she questioned suddenly with an entirely new stab of bewilderment and pain, "if one of them was already married to somebody else? If one of them indeed was actually on a honeymoon? Even though at the particular moment she might have run away from her honeymoon? Marriage was marriage, people said! You had to play it fair! Everybody had to play it fair! It was like a game! Even people who cheated in business wouldn't think of cheating in games! It wasn't good sportsmanship! It wasn't----" Feverishly her fancy quickened and raged at all its pulses. "If my father isn't good," she tortured, "who is good? If my father isn't good, what is good? If my father isn't good--what's the use of anybody being good?"

Defiantly she lifted her eyes to the stars. And the stars laughed at her! Distractedly she turned her ear to the Gulf and heard the Gulf nudging the poor old launch in its ribs!

Then like the bumpy end of a dream, infinitely alarming, irresistibly awakening, the little launch snubbed its nose into wood in stead of a wave, and the voyage was over!

Gracing the upper step of a peculiarly water-logged and dilapidated looking pier the yellow lantern flared down its wan welcome to the voyagers' eyes. There was not a soul in sight, nor any sign of human habitation except the lantern and the ruined pier.

"Truly it must be very lonesome for a lantern--living all alone like this," observed the Brown Khaki Lady's faintly mocking voice.

Then suddenly out of the further shadows where pier and land presumably met, creeping low on its belly, and whimpering with excitement, emerged a little dark body edging frenziedly toward them.

"Why--what the dickens?" cried Jaffrey Bretton. "Why, how in thunder? Well, I should think Martha *had* 'got something! Why it's Creep-Mouse!" he shouted, and jumped ashore.

Scramblingly the Brown Khaki Lady followed after him.

"Here! Wait for me!" she begged.

As he swung round to help her a single phrase passed his lips.

"Pull down your hat-brim!" he ordered. "In this light your hair looks almost crimson!"

Then man, and woman, and dog faded into the shadow.

With a grunt of indifference, Lost Man and the Outlaw resumed their eternal job of tinkering with the engine. Shadows working on shadows!

"Oh, a lot anybody seems to care what be comes of me!" quivered Daphne. "Even Old-Dad didn't say 'Good-bye'. Even Creep-Mouse-- didn't say Howdy! What's it all about?" she questioned tartly. "What's--what's anything all about?" With a swift experimental impulse she slid over to the edge of the fore-deck and tested the shallow tide with one slender foot and ankle. In an other instant while the two men wrangled she had slipped over into the water and was speeding up the unknown beach. "I'll go find something of my own!" raged her wild little heart. "Something that *will* say 'Good-bye' to me! Something that *will* say 'Howdy!' Good--bad--living or dying--something all my own!"

Indifferent to the clogging sand, impervious to the scratch and snag, stumbling over wreckage, dodging through palmetto, unconscious of her breathlessness, unhampered by her loneliness, fired only by a strange sort of exhilaration, a weird new sense of emancipation, she sped on through the excitant dark, till tripping suddenly on some horrid slimy thing like the dead body of a shark she pitched over head-first into a tangle of beach- grass, and crawling out on all fours into the clean, sweet sand again, crawled into the spurting flash of a revolver shot whose bullet just barely grazed the wincing lobe of her ear.

Tight as a vise a man's arms closed around her!

"My God!" gasped a man's voice, "I thought you were a panther or a bear--or something!"

Struggling to free herself Daphne snatched her small flash-light from her pocket and flamed it full on the man's face.

"Why--what the--the dickens?" she babbled hysterically. "Why-- how in the world?" she rallied desperately. "Well--I should think Martha *had* 'got something! Why--why, it's the--the Kissing Man!" she cried.

With widening eyes and a dropped jaw the man returned the stare.

"Y-you?" he stammered.

Fumbling round through the sand for his own larger lantern he flashed a steadier flare of light upon the scene.

"What--are--you--doing here--and crawling on your hands and knees?" he asked. His face was ashy gray.

"Why, I'm running away!" glowed Daphne. Her eyes were like stars, the flush in her cheeks flaunting and flaming like a rose-colored flag.

"Running away?" quickened the man. "From what?"

"I don't know!" laughed Daphne.

"To--what?" questioned the man.

"I don't care!" laughed Daphne.

With another perceptible start the young man turned upon her.

"Don't you know it's not safe for you to be alone like this?" he stormed. "Don't you know how wild this country is? Don't you know there are bears and panthers and wild cats and snakes and----. And I almost shot you," he repeated dully. "Except for this-- this infernal tremor in my right hand that everybody is trying to cure me of--I should probably have killed you."

"Do you really mean," cried Daphne with a fresh shock of excitement, "that except for just one little chance I might be lying here dead this very minute? Dead and all over, I mean? Tennis and parties and new hats and everything all over and done with? As dead and all over as--as Noah?" she gasped.

"Yes," acknowledged the man.

Solemnly for a moment in the poignant awe of it all the jaded worldly-wise face and the eager ingenuous young face measured this matter of life or death in the depths of each other's eyes.

Then for sheer woman-nature the girl edged a little bit nearer to the poor man who had almost killed her. And for sheer man-nature the man put his arm around the poor girl whom he had almost killed. It was sheer Nature's nature though that blew a strand of the girl's bright, fragrant hair across the man's lips.

With a sound like a snarl the man edged off again.

"Whew, but my nerves are jumpy!" he said. In the flare of the lantern light the scar on his face showed suddenly with extraordinary plainness, and as though a bit conscious of the livid streak he brushed his hand casually across his mouth and cheek bone. "Tell a fellow again," he said, "about this running away business. What's the game?"

"It isn't a game at all," flared Daphne. "I tell you I'm running away!"

"But what about that stern parent of yours?" grinned the man.

"My father is more interested in another lady!" cried Daphne. "He's all but forgotten my existence. Oh, of course I don't mean he's deserted me," she explained with hysterical humor. "It's merely that for the time being and for all time to come," she quickened suddenly, "I've *got* to have a life of my own!"

"It's an original idea," said the man.

At the faint tinge of mockery in the words all the hot, unreasoning anger surged back into Daphne's heart again.

"Oh, you needn't make fun of me!" she cried. "And you needn't try to stop me! I'm a Bretton, you know! And all the Brettons are wild! Oh, awfully wild! I read it in the paper! And I--I'm going to be the wildest of them all!"

"Just exactly--how wild--are you planning to be?" asked the man. Simultaneously with the question he lifted the lantern and flashed it like a spot-light on the girl's elfish beauty, the damp skirt moulding her slender limbs, the bright disheveled hair slipping out from the prim little tarn, the sailor-collared blouse dragged down just a little bit too far from the eager, unconscious young throat! "Just exactly--how wild--are you planning to be?"

"Oh, as wild as *wild*!" gloated Daphne. "I'm going to have an aeroplane! I'm going to have a--a----"

With an odd little laugh the man jumped to his feet, and held out his hand to Daphne.

"Where I live," he chuckled, "aeroplanes grow on trees. You're just the little girl I'm looking for! Come along!"

"Come along where?" laughed Daphne, with her hand already in his.

"Oh, just 'along--along!'" urged the young man with a laugh that almost exactly duplicated her own. "For Heaven's sake never spoil a good start by worrying about a poor finish!"

"You talk just a little bit like my father," winced Daphne.

"Maybe I talk like him," laughed the young man, "but I don't walk like him! No more straight and narrow for me! You're perfectly right, little girl, about this game of being good! I've tried it a whole month now--and believe me, there's--nothing in it! Why, even the gods don't intend you to be good!" he laughed. "When they proffer you sweets on a golden plate they certainly can't expect you to refuse 'em!"

"I never ate from a golden plate!" laughed Daphne, as snatching her little hand loose she jumped across the edge of a wave.

"Oh, please don't run away from *me!*" entreated the young man. "Whoever you run away from--oh, please don't run away from *me!* It isn't exactly fair, you know! It isn't----" Flashing his lantern aloft he stood for a single instant with his slender, fastidiously flanneled figure silhouetted incongruously against the wild, primitive background of cactus and wreckage. Then in a faint paroxysm of coughing, light and figure faded out.

"Oh, I forgot," cried Daphne. "Why, of course we mustn't run!" All the excitement in her turned suddenly to tears. "After all," she confided impetuously, "running away on an island isn't so awfully satisfying! No matter how far you ran it would always be just 'round and round!" Compassionately she turned back towards him.

"Oh, I don't know!" snapped the young man. "Some islands, you know, aren't quite as round and round as others! This one for instance----" With a spring he was at her side, his queer, fascinating face thrust close to hers, his vibrant hands thrilling her shoulders. "You--little--blessed baby!" he cried, "if you're really looking for an adventure--let's make one! But while we're about it--for Heaven's sake let's make it a whopper! Let's--let's pretend that you are a beggar maid!" he laughed excitedly, "and that I am a fairy prince!" Once again he flashed his lantern across her lovely disheveledness. "Pon my soul," he exulted, "you look heaps more like a beggar maid than I do like a fairy prince! But if I could prove that I was *your* fairy prince----"

"Yes--if you could prove that you were my fairy prince----" laughed Daphne.

"Pumpkin coach--and all?" cried the man. His hands on her shoulders were like electric shocks.

"Pumpkin coach and all!" whispered Daphne. To save her soul she could not have told just why she whispered.

With an odd little smile the young man released his hold on her shoulders and snatched her hand again.

"Then come quick!" he cried.

Maybe it wasn't "running," but it was very much like it! Zig-zag across the beach, up through the palmetto thicket, clattering across an unexpected pile of old tin cans, out into the soft sand again of a sheltered cove, a coral harbor, where blazing with lights like a Christmas tree a big house-boat lay at its moorings.

"There!" cried the young man, "the pumpkin coach!"

"Why--wherever in the world did it come from?" gasped Daphne. Her heart was beating so that she could scarcely speak. "Wherever--in the world?"

Swaying a little on her feet her shoulder brushed ever so slightly against her companion's, and she turned to find herself snatched into the steel-sinewed arms, the relentless dove-voiced urgency of the first passion she had ever seen! This was no hoydenish tussle with an unnerved man who thought you were a panther! This was no snub-nosed smother against the breast of a boy who was trying to keep you from screaming! This was no idyl of the Class Room, no airy persiflage of the poets! But Passion itself! Raw Passion, too! A thing tender, terrifying, beyond her wildest dreams of tenderness of terror! The desperate, determinate, all but irresistible pleading of a man who was fighting if not for life itself, at least for the last joy that his life would ever know!

"Oh, little girl!" he pleaded, "I'm mad about you! Do you doubt it? Absolutely mad!" His question marks were kisses, his exclamation points, more kisses. "Ever since that night, only six weeks ago, was it, when I stumbled on you in the hotel? I was drunk then, wasn't I? Well, I'm sober enough now! But drunk or sober there hasn't been a minute since, day or night, when I haven't been trying to follow you! Give me your lips!"

"I won't!" said Daphne.

"I tell you I can't live without you," urged the man. "I won't live without you! Your father's quite right, I haven't got a whole lot of time, but think how we'd pack it! Hawaii, Japan, the moon if you'd crave it! 'Eat, drink and be merry'--and tomorrow you still live! It's only I that have got to die! You shall love me, I say! You *shall!* Merciful God! Am I to live like a spoiled child all my days and be robbed at this last of the only real thing I ever wanted?"

"My--my father----" struggled Daphne. It was a struggle of soul as well as body.

"Your father is a real man," conceded the vibrant, compelling voice, "but he's only a real man, and with a real man's needs. There's bound to be another woman sometime. There's another woman even now you say? What place then is

left for you? But come with me, I say, and as long as there's breath left in my body you shall be first, last and only! And after that----" he shivered ever so slightly, "Mrs. Sheridan Kaire won't have to worry, I guess, overmuch about anything. Oh, I've been a devil, I know! I don't deny it! I----"

"You--you mean you've kissed other women?" cried Daphne, "Like-- this?"

"Yes--several--other--women," winced the insatiate lips, "but not like this! Or this! Or *this!*"

"I won't give you *my* lips," said Daphne.

"You little spit-fire!" exulted the man. "You--you young panther! *You blessed little pal!* You and I together--and the world well lost!"

With a catch of his breath that was almost a sob he tilted her chin towards the light and stared deep into her young unfathomable eyes. His own eyes were hot with tears, and the scar across his cheek twitched oddly at the dimple.

"Wanted--to--be as wild as an aeroplane, did you?" he questioned with extraordinary gentleness. "And they crucified you for a wanton in the Halls of Learning! Also in the Sunday supplement next to the Comic Section!" At the answering shiver of her body something keener than tears glinted suddenly in his eyes. But his voice never lifted from its gentleness. "And they always will crucify you, little girl," he said, "in this fuddy-duddy boarding school world you've been living in! As long as you live, little girl, some prude will be mincing forward from time to time to see if the nails are holding the cross itself still in the full glare. But the bunch I run with, little girl, would rate you as a saint! Call it a wild bunch if you want to, but wouldn't you rather be laughed at for a saint than spat at for a devil?"

"Ye-s," quivered Daphne.

"Then come!" said the man.

Daphne did not stir.

Once again the vibrant fingers stroked along her pulsing wrist. "What you need," crooned the persuasive voice, "for what ails-- you, is to whoop things up a bit, not whoop 'em down. Which statement," he grinned, "though it may not spell righteousness, remains at least the truth. So come!" he quickened. "And if you want to go wild, we'll go wild! And if you want to go tame, we'll go tame! Heaven or hell, I don't care--as long as it's together!"

From the glittering house-boat in the little bay a bell tolled out its resonant news that the hour was eight o'clock.

"Hurry up!" urged the man with the faintest possible rasp of anxiety in his voice. "For Heaven's sake if we're going let's go while the going is good! No bungling! No fiasco! All I want from you," he turned and confided with sudden intensity, "is your promise that if we do start you'll see the thing through! My honor not to make a fool of you pledged against your honor not to make a fool of me! Girls are so unreliable."

"Girls?" winced Daphne.

From the glittering house-boat a woman's laugh rang out with curious congruity.

But when Daphne winced this time, she was in a lover's arms again, encompassed by a lover's tenderness, coaxed by a lover's voice.

"Oh, I don't pretend for a moment," crooned the persuasive voice, "that I've got just the crowd on board that I would have chosen for this particular sort of get-away. Nevertheless----" With a chuckle that would have been brutal if it had not been so exultant he bent down and brushed his lips across Daphne's throbbing temple. "Nevertheless," he chuckled, "of all the crowds that ever crowded anybody, this one represents perhaps the one most ready to eat from my hand. I haven't got much sense, it seems, nor yet a long life, but what I have got," he laughed out suddenly, "I've got for fair! And that's money!" In a silence that was almost sinister he stood for an instant staring off at the house-boat's gay-lanterned outline against the dark fluttery palms. "Thought they'd yank me back from all this did they?" he questioned hotly. "Back to an old Board Meeting in a New York snow-storm? Not much! 'If you want your damned old library,' I wired 'em, 'come ahead down here and thrash it out where a fellow can argue without frost biting his tongue, and be catching a tarpon or two on the side at the same time.' Wired 'em tickets and everything, the whole damned outfit, architect and all! Heap-sight easier though than going back to New York! But if I don't want to give 'em the library," he grinned with sudden malice, "I don't have to, you know--even now! There's nothing in my father's will, I mean, that compels me to give it. My father's will merely suggests that I give it, advises me to give it, 'with such subsequent moneys,' he quoted mockingly, 'as may comprise my estate' at the time I cash in. But of all the big stiff," he shuddered, "that I ever saw, Claudia Merriwayne leads them all, not even excepting her new Dean or her Oldest Trustee!"

"Claudia--Merriwayne?" gasped Daphne.

"Oh, of course, in my day," persisted Kaire, "I have had grace at my table, and some disgrace now and then! But Greek?"

And Latin? and Doric columns? And the 'influence of concrete on young character?' *Why where are you?*" he turned and called suddenly through the darkness. Gropingly his arms reached out and snatched her to him again, and for the first time she yielded limply, and lay like a bruised rose against his breast. "Why, I can't even hear you breathing!" he cried. "Why, you might be dead, you are so still! And your little hands are like ice! And----"

"Did--you--say--that--that Miss Claudia Merriwayne--was on that boat out there--with you?" faltered Daphne.

"Why, yes," shrugged the man, "I think that's the lady's name. Why--why, shouldn't she be there? All the colleges are closed now, aren't they, for the Christmas holidays? Why, surely you don't mean that you care?" he laughed. "That you don't like my having the dame?"

"*Care?*" hooted Daphne. Like a wraith suddenly electrified all the fire, the nerve, the sparkle, the recklessness came surging back to her!

Through every quiver of his overwrought nerves he sensed the strange almost psychic change come over her, a brighter gold to the hair, a deeper blue to the eyes, a quicker pulse in the slender throat. Every tender line of her thrown suddenly into italics, every minor chord crashing into crescendo! If she had been beautiful in the rompish escapade of the beach, and the single wistful silence of the moment before, her beauty was absolutely maddening to him now.

With a little quick cry that was almost like a challenge she reached up and touched him on the shoulder. It was her first caress.

"Oh, all right! I'll go with you!" she cried excitedly. "But on one condition only!"

"A hundred conditions!" quickened the man, "so long as you make them before we start!"

"It's about our 'start' that I'm making this one!" cried Daphne. Her flesh was flaming with blushes but neither her heart nor her mind knew just why she blushed. "It's--it's about your drunkenness!" she flamed. "After we're man and wife, with my faults as well as yours, we'll have to do the best we can, think it out, fight it out, maybe we can get somebody to help us! But until we're man and wife, I must not be embarrassed--or humiliated! Badness that knows that it's badness, that's one thing! But silliness that doesn't know it's silliness, I just couldn't stand it, that's all!" Shrewdly her young eyes narrowed to his. "You're--you're quite right what you said on the beach just now! No one can guarantee his ending! But it's an awful goose, Sheridan Kaire, who doesn't guarantee his start! So if I pledge you, Sheridan Kaire," flamed the proud little face, "that once started I *will* see the whole thing through, it is pledged on the understanding that you will protect the--the dignity of that start?"

Across the man's impatient face a dark unhappy flush showed suddenly.

"I get you!" he said. "I will be very careful about my drinking."

"But as to a pledge from you," cried Daphne, "that you wouldn't back out and make a fool of *me*--why, it just never would have occurred to me to ask it! It doesn't occur to me even now! Why-- why should you make a fool of me?" she questioned. "Why, how could you make a fool of me? You love me, don't you?" she triumphed.

"I--love--you," said the man.

"Oh, all right, then!" cried Daphne. "'Nuff said! Let's go!"

Snatching a silver whistle from his white flannel pocket the man blew sharply once--twice--three times. Simultaneously with the signal a slight commotion was visible on the house-boat.

"They'll be over for us right away," said the man. "Just as soon as they can get the little boat launched."

With her small hand slipped into his, Daphne stood pawing the sand like a pony while she watched the operations.

"Will it be--*my* house-boat?" she thrilled.

"It will be your house-boat," smiled the man.

"And my gay lanterns?" danced Daphne.

"And your gay lanterns," smiled the man.

"And my money?" cried Daphne. "And my library?"

"And your *everything*," smiled the man.

With an absolutely elfish cry Daphne threw back her head and began to laugh.

"Oh, I'm not a bit afraid to go with you!" she laughed. "Maybe I ought to be! But I'm not! I'm not! Maybe it's because I'm too excited to be afraid! Maybe it's because," she flamed, "I am never going to be afraid of anything--ever any more! Oh, I'm an-- awful kid," she paled and flamed again, "I don't even know just what marriage is! But--" Wild as the humor of nymph or faun the queer little cry burst from her lips again. "But I know I must never deceive you!" she cried. "I

know that much at least! So-- so maybe you won't want to take me," she cried, "when I tell you that Miss Claudia Merriwayne was the President who expelled me from college!"

"*What?*" snapped Sheridan Kaire. "The devil you say! *What?* Oh, so that's why you were willing to come? Just to get even? Just to----Now I must have been some thick," he frowned, "not to have sized up that that was the bunch who expelled you from college. Thicker even than I thought I was! Seeing only your picture in the paper, sizing up only your name!" Then quite suddenly he put back his head and began to laugh. "Of all the comic operas!" he hooted. "Of all the Heaven-sent situations! We'll give them their old library or not just as you say," he hooted. "Well----" Then with a gesture that seemed to be all ardor and no gentleness he reached out and drew her back to him. "I don't care why you come," he cried, "as long as you come!"

"Oh, won't it be glorious," danced Daphne, "to surprise them so! I'm going to pull my hair way down over my face like this and this," she illustrated with eager fingers, "so that they won't know me at all until I'm ready--I'll look so wild!"

"Everything's going to be glorious!" said the man. "H-st! Here comes the launch!"

Like an excited child Daphne ran to meet it. Close at her shoulder followed the man. Glancing back at him swiftly through the bright maze of her hair, a single challenge, half mischievous, half defiant, flashed from her lips and eyes.

"Glorious! Glorious! *Glorious!*" she laughed. "But I will-- never give you my lips!"

All defiance and no mischief, the man's laugh answered the challenge.

"I sha'n't--care what--you give me," he said, "when I'm once fixed so that I can take what I want!"

With a swish of keel and sand the little launch landed at their feet.

The nattily uniformed sailor who manned the launch was too well trained in his master's service to show a flicker of surprise or curiosity concerning his master's errands. But a master's weakness being only too often the man's, the only blunder of his ten years service slipped now from his faintly alcoholic lips.

"Good evening, Dighton!" nodded his master.

"Good evening, sir!" saluted the man with punctilious formality.

"Here, fix those cushions a little better!" pointed his master as he helped the vague white figure into the boat. "Here, Dighton, give the lady a hand!"

Lifting his eyes for the first time to the little lady's laughing face peering out half-affrighted from her bright disheveled hair, Dighton the man gave a purely involuntary gasp, and stumbled a bit clumsily over some shadowy obstacle.

"That's all right, Dighton," laughed his master. "She's got the looks to knock most any man over! Your new Mistress, Dighton!" he called out proudly.

"Your--your new Mistress?" bungled the man's addled lips.

Scarcely sensing the unhappy twist, but lashed like a whip by the single expletive and ghastly silence that followed it, Daphne curled up in her cushions and prattled her excitement into space.

"Oh, what a night!" she cried. "Oh, what tall cocoanut palms! Oh, what bright stars! Oh--oh--oh, whatever in the world shall I do about clothes?" she questioned precipitously. Gayer and gayer her little laugh flashed from her lips. "Why, just for common humanity," she gloated, "Miss Merriwayne will have to lend me a nightie! And shoes and stockings! And a dress! Oh, won't I look funny in Miss Merriwayne's great big clothes?" Dismayed at the unbroken silence she turned and stared up wondering-eyed at the furious, frowning man beside her. "Why--what's the matter Sheridan Kaire?" she whispered. "You look so--sort of--as though your face hurt? Does it?" With her eyes drawn as though by some irresistible fascination to the pale zig-zagged outline of his scar, she asked the one childish question that was left on her lips. "Whoever hurt you so?" she questioned. "Was it in a--a brave war or something? How ever in the world could----"

"Hush!" snarled the man. "For God's sake, hush!" Then in passionate contrition he bent down through the darkness and touched his lips to her finger tips. "Forgive me," he pleaded, "my nerves *are* jumpy!"

Brightly the house-boat loomed up before them. In another moment they would be alongside.

Once more the man bent down to the little figure beside him.

"Just once," he demanded, "from your own lips, I want to hear it! It wasn't I who incited you to run away--was it? It was your own idea, I mean? You'd already made up your mind for some sort of a running--before you stumbled on me? I'm simply the direction you decided to run in?" For a single instant across his worldly young face the question of his own responsibility flecked his lean features into an almost exaggerated asceticism. "I'm not specially anxious, you know, to pose as a seducer of the young."

"As a what?" questioned Daphne.

Then softly thudding into the big house boat's side the little launch finished its journey, and only the chance of laughter was left to either the man or the girl.

"Bang!" flew a little ladder to the launch. "Creak!" strained a rope. With a patter of soft-soled feet a half dozen white-sailed forms came running! A dark blue officer peered down from the deck! An extra lantern flashed! And another! And another! From some far shadowed corner a piano and violin swept blithely into melody!

Then through hands and lips infinitely more discreet than Dighton's, but eyes not nearly so blank, the sparkling, spirited, utterly disheveled, utterly unexplainable little figure followed the master of the house-boat to the luxuriant, softly lighted cabin, where gathered round an almost priceless mahogany table two frowning, serious-minded women, and three frowning serious-minded men sat pouring over a great flare of blue prints.

"Nothing," affirmed President Merriwayne's clear, incisive voice at the moment, "nothing--I believe, so affects the human mind as a noble appearance."

With a laugh about as mirthless as a maniac's, but a humor fairly convulsed with joy, Sheridan Kaire took a single glance at Daphne, and drew her into the room.

"Behold, Ladies and Gentlemen," he announced, "my Pirate Queen! The future arbiter of my fortunes!"

From the priceless mahogany table five chairs jerked back as though by a single thud.

Five pairs of eyes flared suddenly on Daphne, lapped up the beauty of her, the disheveledness, the audacity, and blinked their lids with astonishment.

"Is--is it dramatics?" quavered the older lady's fine patrician voice. "What a--what a child!"

"Dramatics?" bridled Miss Merriwayne. As though the unrecognized figure before her was deaf, dumb, blind, she lifted her lorgnette in frowning scrutiny. "Some of the poor whites down here are extraordinarily good looking," she conceded, "but don't you really think, Mr. Kaire, that your jest is just a little-- little----"

"Jest?" said Sheridan Kaire.

From the deck just above their heads the thud of a dragging anchor rope sounded suddenly, and the sharp cry of orders passed from one sailor to another.

"In ten minutes at least," laughed Kaire, "or in five, Heaven knows if we can make it, we shall *all* be off!" With a quite unnecessary air of diablerie he turned and chucked Daphne under the chin.

From the further side of the lamp, beyond the unmistakable architect, beyond the unmistakable trustee, a figure not yet distinct, rose slowly into view. It was John Burnarde. Very courteously he advanced towards his host. Not a muscle of his face twitched, not an accent of his voice either lifted or fell.

"Truly, Mr. Kaire," he suggested smilingly as one might have smiled at a maniac, "don't you think perhaps it might be better to finish the discussion outside? No matter what a bachelor may contend his rights to be as regards his personal affairs with women, you will hardly insist, I think, on pursuing said affair while my mother and President Merriwayne remain your guests? Surely, tomorrow, when you are more yourself again----"

"I am not drunk!" flared Sheridan Kaire, "and what's more you haven't seen me drunk this whole week more than once! Or, at most, twice!"

"Drunk or sober," said John Burnarde quite unflinchingly, "I request that you do not involve us in any of your escapades!"

"Escapades?" scoffed Kaire. "You----"

From the shadow to which she had partly retreated, Daphne sprang out, and brushed the bright hair from her eyes.

"Why John!" she cried, "don't you know me? It's Daphne! Daphne Bretton!"

"*What?*" staggered the new dean. "You? Why, Daphne! Why----"

"What difference is it to you who it is?" interposed Kaire a bit roughly.

But before anybody could answer the President herself had jumped to her feet.

"*You*, Daphne Bretton?" she gasped accusingly. "*You?* What-- are--you--doing here? Isn't it enough that you have disgraced your college without adding this fresh escapade to your career? What--what wild, unprincipled doings are you up to now? Is there no shame in you? No----" With an imperious gesture she turned to her host. "Surely, Mr. Kaire," she implored him, "you are not in earnest about this girl? Are we really to understand for one moment that you contemplate allying yourself with this girl? Putting the stewardship of your great fortune in her hands? A girl with such

a history? A girl with such a character?"

"Miss Bretton's character is not under discussion here," said John Burnarde decisively.

"Once again," snapped Sheridan Kaire, "I ask what affair Daphne Bretton's character is to you?"

"It's this to me," began John Burnarde with his tortured eyes fairly raking the beloved young face before him. (What *was she* doing here?) ached every pulse in his body. So lovely, so irresponsible, so strangely all alone with this notorious young roue.) "It's this to me," he repeated dully, glanced back for a single worried second at his frail mother's dreadful pallor, and crossed his arms on his breast. "*What* is it to me, Daphne?" he asked.

"It's this to him," said Daphne fearlessly. "He liked me a little, but when the trouble came, it had to stop. It wasn't his fault! My father said it wasn't his fault! There were merely other things--other people, that had to be considered. It's all right. It's quite all right!" Defiantly the little chin lifted. "Quite all right! I'm going--away--with Sheridan Kaire!"

With a piteously vain effort John Burnarde's mother struggled to reach her crutch and lapsed helplessly back into her chair again. Only her white up-turned face betrayed her shock.

But for once in his life John Burnarde did not notice his mother.

"Oh, no--no!" he cried. "You don't know what you're doing! A lovely--lovely--young girl like you to give yourself to a man like Kaire with a reputation so notorious that----"

"I'm not too notorious--I notice--for you people--to beg libraries from," drawled Sheridan Kaire. Then quite suddenly he leaned back against the wainscoating of the cabin and began to laugh sardonically. "Jabber all you want to," he said. "It's a good way to pass the time! Just a minute more now and we'll be off, beating it for Key West or Galveston--or any other place where the parsons are thickest and quickest! Miss Daphne Bretton and Mr. Sheridan Kaire--heavily chaperoned by President Claudia Merriwayne! All the newspapers will lean heavily on that chaperone item! So square it any way you want to with your college, Miss Merriwayne!" he bowed. "Now that you have squared it with Daphne!" More hilariously yet he yielded to his mirth, and called loudly for the Steward. "Champagne for everybody, to- night!" he ordered. "Guests, crew, cabin boys, everybody! If the cat won't drink it, drown him in it! Drat libraries!" he shouted lustily. "*This is my Bachelor Dinner!*"

Swishing like a serpent's hiss, Miss Merriwayne started for her cabin. As she passed Daphne she drew her skirts aside with a gesture that would have been sufficiently insulting without any further action. But her tongue refused to be robbed of its own particular reprisal.

"As I have remarked once before," she murmured icily, "you--you little wanton!"

"*Not so fast!*" cried a new voice from the doorway. Towering, white head and brown shoulders over everybody, Jaffrey Bretton loomed on the scene.

"Oh--Hades!" sighed the master of the house-boat.

"*Not so fast, anybody!*" begged Jaffrey Bretton. If the smile on his face was just a little bit set it was at least still a smile. Quite casually above the spurt and flare of his inevitable match and his inevitable cigarette his shrewd glance swept the gamut of startled faces. "*What's* all the rumpus about?" he quizzed. Simple as the question was it seemed for some reason or other to put a queer sort of pucker into everybody's pulses.

("Oh, what a place!" shivered the oldest trustee. "Why did we ever come?") ("Oh, what a man!" quivered the architect. "I wish I had designed him!")

Ignoring all other pulses, Jaffrey Bretton turned to Miss Merriwayne. With sincere and unaffected interest he appraised the majestic if somewhat arrogant bloom of what had been only a mere bud of good looks and ambition twenty years before.

"You are certainly very handsome, Clytie," he affirmed.

"Clytie?" gasped the oldest trustee.

"C-Clytie?" stammered Daphne.

"Miss Merriwayne and I were boy and girl friends together," observed Bretton with unruffled blandness. "But for the moment it is not personal reminiscence that concerns me most." Towering, dominant, absolutely relentless, but still serene, he blocked Miss Merriwayne's exit. "Just--what, Clytie," he asked, "were you calling my little girl?"

"You heard what I called her, Mr. Bretton!" said Miss Merriwayne. "I called her a wanton!"

Above the flare of a fresh match and a fresh cigarette Jaffrey Bretton restudied her face.

"And--do--you--find it convenient now to retract it?" he asked.

"I am not in the habit of retracting my statements," said Miss Merriwayne.

"S--o?" mused Jaffrey Bretton. As though by pure accident, his eyes strayed to the blue prints on the table. "What have we here?" he smiled, "building plans?"

Sardonically from his own particular silence Sheridan Kaire's laugh rang out.

"Those are the plans for the new library," he confided, "that your daughter and I are considering giving to her--to her Alma Mater!"

Humor for humor Jaffrey Bretton's laugh answered his. "Good stuff!" he said, "the one bright thought!"

"And you?" he addressed one stranger, "are the--the possible architect?"

"I am," conceded the architect.

Very definitely Jaffrey Bretton drew back a little from the door and pointed to the passageway. "Trot along!" he smiled. "And you?" he asked the old gentleman.

"I am Miss Merriwayne's oldest trustee," asserted that dignitary with some unctuousness.

"Trot along!" smiled Jaffrey Bretton.

With punctilious courtesy he waved the Dean's lovely old mother after them. "For the moment," he begged her, "you will pardon my peremptoriness? The thing that remains to be said is said best to the least numbers."

"But I--I like--your little girl!" protested the frail but determinate aristocrat.

"So do I!" smiled Bretton, but nodded her out.

"Who are you?" demanded Bretton of the only man but Kaire who remained.

"I am John Burnarde!" said the man, quite invincibly.

"I thought so!" said Bretton.

"And as Miss Merriwayne's rather special representative at this time," added John Burnarde, "I refuse to leave the room while she remains!"

"Oh, I like *you*!" said Bretton. "I've always rather liked you!"

But whether I did or not!" he crisped, "you've *got* to stay! You and Miss Merriwayne, and Daphne, and myself!" With a toss of his white hair he flung a message to the master of the house-boat. "Sorry to bully your guests so, Kaire!" he said. "But not knowing the plan of your boat, and being too formal to rummage around very much," he added dryly, "this cabin seemed somehow the surest place for a rather private conversation. . . . Shall you still remain with us as our host?"

"I certainly shall!" snapped Kaire.

"You are perfectly welcome," smiled Jaffrey Bretton. "And you notice, perhaps--that the engine has not started?"

"I notice only too damned well," said Kaire, "that the engine has not started!"

Out of the shadowy curve of Sheridan Kaire's jealous arm Daphne sprang suddenly forward.

"Oh, Old-Dad!" she besought him, "please--Please--don't make such a fuss! What's the good of it? What's the use? If I'm bad, I'm bad! And--unless I'm going crazy, too--what is there left but *fun*?"

"But you see you're all wrong," smiled her father. "You're not 'bad' at all! Without any question whatsoever you're the goodest person here!"

"Oh--Old-Dad!" scoffed Daphne.

"But I mean it," said her father. "The little fracas at college was only a mistake. Richard Wiltoner's mistake, indeed, rather than yours--except in so far as you dared him into the making of it. Oh, shucks!" shrugged her father. "Everybody makes mistakes!"

"Not mistakes like mine!" flared Daphne.

"Oh, yes, they do," smiled her father. "So, please, I beg of you don't go bad just on that account! Truly, you'd be surprised if you knew how many staid grown people of your acquaintance have made very similar mistakes. Now take Miss Merriwayne and myself, for instance. Twenty----"

With a gasp of horror Miss Merriwayne reached out and touched him on the arm. Her face was stark, but even now she did not lose altogether the poise so long and laboriously acquired. "Some other time--some other day," she essayed desperately, "I will be very glad to--to discuss old days with you. But now-- this moment--your remarks--your

suggestions are--are ribald. Have you no--no honor?" she implored him.

"None--any--longer that conflicts with my daughter's honor," said Jaffrey Bretton. To the several pairs of startled eyes raised to his, Jaffrey Bretton gave no glance. Every conscious thought in his body was fixed at the moment on Daphne. "Come here, Honey," he said.

With embarrassment but no fear Daphne came to him.

"Let me pass!" ordered Miss Merriwayne.

"It is not convenient," said Jaffrey Bretton.

Across Daphne's tousled head, past Claudia Merriwayne's statuesque shoulder, he stared off retrospectively into space. "What I have to say," he confided, "will take only an instant Twenty years ago," he mused, "Miss Merriwayne and I were trapped in a situation quite astonishingly similar to Daphne's college tragedy. . . . Except that in our case there were four thoughtless youngsters involved instead of two--and infinitely more kissing. . . . Let me see," he turned suddenly to Daphne. "In your case I believe there was no kissing?"

"I should think not!" raged Daphne.

"U-m-m-m," mused her father. "Well--there was certainly *some* kissing in ours."

"This is outrageous!" cried Miss Merriwayne. "Let me pass!"

With a smile that would have been insolent if it had not been so brooding, Jaffrey Bretton spread his arms across the doorway.

"You are a bigger girl, Clytie, than you used to be," he said. "You can't slip out of this situation quite as easily as you slipped from the other."

With a shrug of his shoulders he turned and stared into space again. When he glanced back at his companions it was with just a little bit of a start.

"Oh, yes--I forgot," he said. "There was a door--that time, that wasn't blocked. And the other boy jumped through the window. . . . What possible haven was there left," he asked, "for the panic-stricken little room-mate except in my arms? She smelt of violets, I remember," he mused, "and her throat was very white. Nobody ever knew about the presence of the other boy. And only the four of us knew about Cly--'Miss Merriwayne' I would say. But if Miss Merriwayne had come back," he quickened ever so slightly, "and acknowledged frankly that she, also, had been present, the school authorities, I suppose, would hardly have judged the unintentional tete-a-tete as harshly--as they did. . . . Even at the eleventh hour, if she had been willing to come back and acknowledge it or at the twelfth for the matter of that--or even at one o'clock or two, while the outraged Powers harangued on the case But by three o'clock, that timorous little room-mate, seeing no other exit, slashed a door through her little white throat and fled away.

"So you see, Daphne," he smiled, "that even across a mistake like *that*----"

"You mean," blanched Daphne, "that----"

Like a man straining very slightly toward more air the new Dean's throat muscles lifted.

On Kaire's face alone the grin remained half a grin, anyway.

"Sailed away from a sinking wreck
With a--something--something--on her deck,"

he quoted diabolically.

"*Hush!*" warned Jaffrey Bretton.

"I had my own life to consider!" flared Claudia Merriwayne.

"You had your own life to consider," bowed Jaffrey Bretton.

"My people were very poor!" flared Claudia Merriwayne. "They had made great sacrifices to educate me! Already, even then, my chances of future academic distinction were the sole topics in my home!"

"Already," acquiesced Jaffrey Bretton, "your chances of future academic distinction were the sole topics in your home!
. . .

"So you see, Daphne," he turned and readdressed his little girl suddenly, "so you see that, even across a mistake like *that*, people may yet achieve real honors and much usefulness!"

Like a man a little bit weary, his arms dropped down to his sides again, but his figure still blocked the doorway.

"That is all, Clytie," he bowed. "And you may rest assured, of course, that neither Daphne nor Mr. Kaire nor I will ever repeat the little anecdote which I have just quoted--unless Daphne herself shall contend that Richard Wiltoner should know. . . . Mr. Burnarde, of course, needs no guarantees, having already proved with fearless courtesy that your interests are his."

With frank cordiality he swung about and held out his hand to Burnarde.

"The best of luck to you, Burnarde! in all things!" he smiled. "If Fate had ordained you to marry my little girl, you certainly would have made a fine Friend-in-Law for me as well as an honorable lord and master for Daphne! . . . And after the first haste of the honeymoon was over what good times we would have had together--you and I! Winter nights and an open fire!--our books--our pipes--a plate of apples--a jug of cider--and the Classics! With Daphne sitting low--somewhere on a little stool-- just a little bit off, somehow, on the edge of it all? Very beautiful? Very miraculous? Very soul-satisfying to the eye-- service of your senses? Darning your stockings, perhaps? Or freshening up your second-best dress suit? With her little bright head cocked ever so slightly to one side, listening, yearning, starving for the 'Pipe of Pan' which neither you nor I, Burnarde, will ever hear again nor recognize, probably, if we did. . . . You chaps, Burnarde, whose hearts grow in the shape of Books--you chaps who mix the best ink-knowledge of the world with your own good blood--you love very purely, very ideally. No man could fail to trust you. But, Youth, Burnarde, brooks no rivals, either of work or play. And in the decision between two women--which more men have to make than any woman, thank God, ever guesses--you have chosen, I think--very wisely!"

Crackling with starch Miss Merriwayne swung sharply around.

"I consider it exceedingly impertinent," she affirmed, "for you to link my name with Doctor Burnarde's in any way at just this time! There is not the slightest excuse for it, not the slightest justification."

"It was Doctor Burnarde's--mother that I referred to," smiled Bretton, and bowed both the Dean and the President from the room.

If the little gasp that slipped from his lips expressed relaxation as did Daphne's sharp sigh, or Kaire's somewhat breathy grin, such relaxation was at least quite mutually curtailed. Without any hesitancy whatsoever the cabin door closed very definitely behind Miss Merriwayne, and from the clicking lock Jaffrey Bretton extracted the key and threw it down on the mahogany table.

"Now for--*you*, Sheridan Kaire!" he said.

"I am all here," grinned Kaire. "Also--incidentally, there are other keys to the cabin door."

"Why, of course there are other keys to the cabin door," conceded Bretton with perfect good humor. From his own pocket as he spoke he drew forth a bunch of keys, freed them from their controlling ring, and tossed them in confused and confusing muddle after the cabin key. "Any of us can get out of this cabin in two minutes," he confided. "But it is not my intention that anybody should bolt from it in much less time than that. Many a man has cooled his original purposes in the time that it takes to fit an unfamiliar key to a perfectly familiar lock. Also, while we are rating incidental things, it does not seem best to me that, with Lost Man and Alliman waiting in the launch, we should run any risk of being rushed from outside. If one of us should sneeze, for instance--or raise his voice in any special emphasis?--Alliman is so deplorably impulsive with his shot-gun."

"I get you!" said Kaire. "There is not to be any fuss."

"You get me perfectly," bowed Bretton. "Now for the--the discussion." Quite casually he walked over to the mahogany table, sat down, took a single interested glance at the blue prints and swept them all aside. "Let's all be seated," he said.

Very reluctantly Daphne came forward into the light and slid down into the chair opposite him.

"I--I look so funny," she deplored.

"You certainly do," said her father. "Yet I would be willing to wager," he smiled quite unexpectedly, "that of all the variant ladies who have been entertained in this room there has never been a lovelier one or--one more tempting."

"*Sir?*" bridled Kaire. With the dark flush rising once again to his cheek-bones he sprang forward to the table and perched himself on the edge of it with a sinister sort of nonchalance. "*Sir?*" he repeated threateningly.

"Oh, don't concern yourself for a moment with my daughter's tender sensibilities," begged Bretton. "Their conversation--you must understand--is still in my hands."

Somberly for a moment each man concerned himself with the lighting of a fresh cigarette.

Then Bretton jerked back his chair.

"Just what was your plan, Kaire?" he asked.

"I had planned," said Kaire, without an instant's hesitation, "to take Daphne to the first port we could make and marry

her any old way she wanted to be married."

"Why?" asked Bretton.

"*Why?*" snarled Kaire. "*Why?* Well, what an extraordinary question! Why does any man marry any woman?"

"For so many different reasons," said Bretton, "that it rather specially interested me to hear just what yours were."

"Why, I'm crazy about her!" flushed Kaire. "Utterly mad! Never saw anything in my life that I wanted so much!"

"Well--*you can't have her!*" said Bretton.

"By the Lord!--I *will* have her!" cried Kaire. "Why--why shouldn't I have her?" he demanded. "Fate fairly threw her into my arms just now, didn't it? I didn't know you people were here! I didn't know where in thunder you people were!--or how I was going to find you with your blooming old dog! Sitting on the beach I was, all in the dark--and--and the girl comes crawling right into my arms! Most shot her, I did!--thought she was some kind of a varmint! Thought----"

"Daphne----" said her father.

With an impetuous gesture Kaire flung the interruption aside.

"She'd have run away with someone!" he cried. "Not to-night, of course! But soon! Next week! Next month! She was all primed for it! And you can't stop 'em when they once get started!--not the high-spirited ones!--not when they're hurt and mad, too! And she might have done a heap sight worse than run away with me! I'm going to worship her! I'm going to give her everything she wants! I'm going to take her every place she wants to go! Why, six months from now she won't even remember that she went to the damned old college! Six months from now she'll think that being expelled from college was something she read in a comic paper! And I'm--going--to take--her," he said, with a suddenly lowered and curiously sinister positiveness, "whether you like it or not!--because she has given me her word!"

"Is that true, Daphne?" asked her father.

Like a little white whirlwind Daphne jumped to her feet.

"Why, of course it's true, Old-Dad!" she stormed. "Live or die, sink or swim, I have given Mr. Kaire my solemnest word that I will marry him!"

"An absolutely--unconditional word?" probed Bretton.

"On one condition only!" triumphed Daphne.

"And that condition----" drawled her father.

"Is a matter of confidence between your daughter and me," interposed Kaire hastily.

"I respect the confidence," said Bretton. "But only a fool could fail to make half a guess of what that condition was. . . . You are keeping unconscionably sober."

"What I keep is my own business!" snapped Kaire.

"Per--haps," conceded Bretton. Quite casually, as one whom neither Time nor Circumstance particularly crowded, he picked up an ivory paper cutter from the table and studied it with some intentness before he spoke again.

"Just what--were you doing on Martha's Island to-night, Kaire?" he asked.

"What were you doing yourself?" quizzed Kaire.

"Do you trade your answer for mine?" smiled Bretton.

"Certainly!" said Kaire.

"I was there because Martha sent for me," said Bretton. "I thought she was in some sort of trouble. I had no idea it was about you and the dog. . . . You were a brick about the dog, Kaire!" he brightened abruptly. "And I sha'n't soon forget it! *But you can't have my daughter!*"

Unflinching eye for unflinching eye, Sheridan Kaire answered the challenge.

"I most always look Martha up when I'm down this way," he confided informationally. "I knew Martha in Paris twelve years ago."

"And loved Martha in Paris twelve years ago?" murmured Bretton.

"Everybody loved Martha in Paris twelve years ago, you know!" shrugged Kaire.

"No, I didn't know," said Bretton. "I was in New Zealand about that time. It was at an insane asylum in Chicago that I first saw Martha."

"At an insane asylum?" frowned Kaire. "I knew she'd gone queer, but I never knew it was as queer as that."

"It was quite as queer as that," said Bretton, a bit dryly. "Right in the midst of one of her best vaudeville acts, it seems, she went into hysterics because a man in the front row had on a red tie--and on the way home to her hotel she fainted in her carriage at a scarlet hat in some brilliantly lighted shop window. So they shut her up. And a medical friend of mine was quite a bit interested in the case. Most extraordinarily simple his explanation was. No Indian massacres involved, no hidden Bluebeard Chambers. Something as trivial, perhaps, as a kitten's cut foot bleeding across a child's first white dress--a nervous injury so trivial that no one had stopped to investigate it. . . . But thirty years afterward, when Life got ready to smash her, it went back thirty years and smashed her there! Seems sort of too bad though," mused Bretton, "to have to be shut up just because you can't digest red. Some people, you know, can't digest oysters. And at least two friends of mine experience an almost complete mental stoppage at the very mention of Suffrage. Yet *they* are still at large! . . . So we got Martha out of the asylum," he quickened, "and reinvested her life and her fortunes in an all-green jungle, where, except for a curious impression that I am her benefactor, and the unspoken but doubtless persistent apprehension that she may even yet sight the crimson of a gay yacht-cushion or the flare of a tourist's sweater and revert to chaos again, she seems to me perfectly normal." With a little grim smack of his lips he seemed to bite off the end of his narrative. "And that, Sheridan Kaire," he snapped, "is the full and complete account of my acquaintance with Martha. . . . But yours----" he attested very slowly, very distinctly, "was not the full and complete account of yours!"

With his voice as quiet as a knife Kaire swung round from his table corner.

"Since when, Mr. Bretton," he asked, "has it been considered healthy for one man to call another a liar?"

"Whatever worry you have about the healthiness of anything," smiled Bretton, "should concern yourself, I think--rather than me. . . . No one will ever shut *me* up," he smiled, "because, like poor Martha, I also am just a little bit color-mad! 'Seeing red' though isn't what bothers me, you understand?--it's seeing *yellow*!"

"You think I have a yellow streak?" flushed Kaire.

"Most of us have," smiled Bretton. "But yours--at the moment-- looks to me unduly broad!"

"Why, Old-Dad!" flamed Daphne. "How can you speak so to--to the man I'm going to marry?"

"But you see--you're not going to marry him!" smiled her father.

"I tell you I am!" flamed Daphne. "I have given my word!"

"And she'll keep it, too!" triumphed Kaire. "High-strung kids always do, somehow! Whatever else they smash--china, hearts, laws--they never seem to break their words!--not before they're twenty, anyway!" he grinned with sudden diablerie. "And Daphne is only eighteen!"

"Hanged if you're not rather an amusing cuss!" admitted Bretton. Very coolly he narrowed his eyes to the insolent young face before him. "I--I recognize your charm! Two parts devil to one part imp--and all the rest of it. The mysterious fascination of your scar with every emotion you feel in the World traveling up and down its white track--in an open car! Truly, I'm sincerely sorry about your health!"

"Oh, quit twitting about my lungs!" snarled Kaire.

"Lungs?" questioned Bretton with faintly raised eyebrows. "Lungs? Oh, dear me--there are several other things about your looks--besides lungs--that I don't like!" Mercilessly, but not maliciously, he jumped up and crossed to a spot directly confronting Kaire. "With your waggish humor," he said, "and your inherently sportsmanlike instincts, you might have made a pretty good lad if you'd only started earlier." Piercingly his eyes probed into Kaire's. "But my little girl," he said, "isn't-- going--to pay--because you didn't start earlier!"

With an oath Kaire sprang to his feet.

"I'm not the only man in the world who's been wild!" he cried. "And you know it--if anybody does!"

"You're the only man I think of at the moment," said Bretton, "who isn't pretty sorry about it when it comes to offering his stale hand to the first real woman of his life."

"Is--that--so?" sneered Kaire.

"It's--so," said Bretton very quietly. With a single glance at Daphne he turned to Kaire again, struck another match, lit another cigarette. "Love isn't an overcoat, you know, Kaire," he said. "It's underclothes! The White Linen of Life! And there seems to be something--peculiarly and particularly offensive to a fastidious body--in being proffered personal linen which still retains even the scent--let alone the sweat of a previous relation The Almighty, our Mothers, and our Ministers, may forgive us our slovenly dinginess or our careless laundering, being all of them more or less Museum Collectors and interested inherently in our historical values or the original fineness of our weave-or the ultimate endurance of our warp and woof. But the Almighty--and our Mothers--and our Ministers--don't have to *wear* us, Kaire! Not next to their skins! Don't have to sleep with us--wake with us--live with us--die with us!" The hand that

held the cigarette trembled very slightly, the eyes that glanced back again at Daphne were dark and poignant with pain. "You are perfectly right, Kaire! No man knows better than I the mess that a chap may make of his life--nor how poor the fabric that I, personally--in the common experience of men--will have to offer the woman I love . . . very worn it will be, very frayed!--but at least it has been cleansed in the bitter tears of regret!"

"Is that--so?" sneered Kaire.

"It is--so," persisted Bretton. "And God knows that neither Piety nor Wit nor anything in the world but sheer Good Luck pulled me ashore in time. But, like other half-drowned men, I suppose, I had neither wit nor time to choose my landing. Rocks, sands, valleys, mountains, all looked like miracles to me. So, mistaking austerity for purity, and severity for integrity, I married a woman to whom the slightest caress was a liberty, and marriage itself a sacrilege. In being sorry for myself I have not altogether, I trust, failed to be sorry for her. We are made as we are made. But it is only natural I suppose--that I should like my daughter to be a Good Lover. I believe in Good Lovers. But no one can make a good lover who is mated to a poor one!"

"I'll risk the kind of Lover I am!" cried Kaire.

"*I won't!*" affirmed Bretton.

"There are also some things that I won't do!" grinned Kaire. "I won't release your daughter from her promise!"

"She doesn't love you, you know?" warned Bretton. "Even granting perfectly frankly that you have excited her wonderment, 'wonderment' isn't love. We're all of us put together on a more or less hasty plan, I suppose, but just because some forgotten basting thread gives us an odd tweak now and then doesn't mean, you know, that the actual seams of our existence are ripping any."

"I don't care what anything means," said Kaire, "as long as Daphne has given me her promise to marry me."

"But the promise is so hysterical," argued Bretton. "The sublime adolescent idiocy of the Boy on the Burning Deck, with fame for one generation and caricature for eternity."

"I'm not interested in eternity," said Kaire.

"What are you interested in?" asked Bretton.

"In--myself!" said Kaire.

Very soberly for a moment Bretton frowned off into space.

"Kaire," he resumed at last rather quickly, "you are making a brutal mistake. Listen! There is a lad up North who was made for Daphne!--a fine lad!--a clean lad! With young energies to match her young energies! And young mysteries to mate her young mysteries! And young problems to steady her young problems! Across the mutual innocence of their little disaster it is absolutely inevitable that each should have received a peculiarly poignant sex-image of the other. Except for you-- except for *this*--who knows but what----"

"There will be time enough for that when I am through," said Kaire. "Six months--ten--a year at the most."

"When you are through?" said Bretton very quietly. "The tender soul of a young girl who marries a man like you--is not over-apt to survive the experience."

Defiantly and unscrupulously Kaire delivered his ultimatum.

"It is not my responsibility," he said, "where any train goes after I get off!"

"That is your last word?" asked Bretton.

"It is my last word," grinned Kaire.

"And yours, Daphne?" quizzed her father.

"I will not break my word!" persisted Daphne. "I will not! I will not!" Her cheeks were raging red as though with fever, her eyes oddly aglint. "I will not! I will not!" she repeated.

"All right then, Kaire," said Jaffrey Bretton. "I'm going to smash you!"

"Oh, no, you won't!" laughed Kaire. "That's the limitation of good men like you! You'll think you're going to smash me!-- you'll have every intention indeed of smashing me!--push me way to the edge!--but never quite over! Something won't let you! Honor, I believe you call it."

"I--am--going--to push you--over the edge," said Bretton. "I am going to send for Martha."

"Martha?" cried Kaire. His face was suddenly ashy gray. Then abruptly his laugh rang out again.

"There hasn't been power in heaven or earth for ten years," he scoffed, "that could bring Martha out of her green

jungle when even so much as the smoke of a yacht showed on her horizon! Even if she could slip by her attendant!" he scoffed, "or her Chinese cook!--or----"

"Martha is in the passageway--just outside," pointed Bretton. "About three feet, I should think, from where you are standing!"

"What?" staggered Kaire.

"And I am going to push Martha to the edge and over," said Bretton very quietly. "And you to the edge and over--and jump in after you with every wallowing truth I know--if by so doing, the little girl I begot in bewilderment and ignored in indifference-- but have found at last in love and understanding remains on the safe side!"

With eyes half crazed Daphne stood staring from her father's grim face to Sheridan Kaire's blanching features.

"Do you mean----" she gasped, "that there is another woman? Someone who has a--a claim? Someone who----"

"We will let Martha tell her own story," said Jaffrey Bretton. Very softly he stepped to the table and began to rummage among the loose keys. "I have tried not to act impulsively," he said. With unmistakable significance he glanced back at Kaire. "It will take me at least a minute, Kaire," he said, "to fit a key to this door. . . . As I have remarked once before-- many men have found time to change their minds in a minute."

"I have better things to do in a minute than change my mind!" boasted Kaire. As stealthily as a cat he slipped round the table to Daphne and took her in his arms while Jaffrey Bretton tinkered with the lock.

"Oh, my little beautiful!" he implored her. "My white--white darling! My lily girl! The only sweet--the only decent love I've ever known! You won't fail me now, will you? I have not failed *you*! I never claimed," he besought her, "that there had never been any other women! Surely you're not going to hold any silly Past against me? You, my good angel! My-- --" Unconsciously his excited voice slipped from its whisper. "From to-day on!" he vowed. "From----"

"From what time to-day on?" asked Bretton a bit dryly.

Vaguely through the opening door loomed the white figure of a woman with her elbow crooked across her eyes. Except that the lamp in the cabin was not unduly bright she might have been any normal person shielding her dark-attuned optic nerves from some unexpected glare. Yet the tropical pallor that gleamed both above and below the crooked elbow was oddly suggestive of floridness, and the faded muslin gown of a skirt-and-sleeve fashion ten years outlawed, molded her sumptuous figure with all the sleek sensuousness of satin.

"Martha," said Jaffrey Bretton very gently, "this cabin is hung with crimson, cushioned with crimson, carpeted with crimson! Will you still come if I ask you to?"

"It ees as I have said, Mr. Bret-ton," answered the faintly foreign voice.

Then Kaire with a cry sprang forward and slammed the door in the woman's wincing face.

"Stop! Stop, Bretton!" he begged. "Just a minute! Just a minute!--give me one tiny little more minute to think!" His forehead was beaded with sweat his hands shaking like aspens.

"I have one more minute I will be very glad to give you," said Bretton.

Like a person distracted, Kaire stood staring all around him. Half askance from over his shoulder his glanced flashed back at Daphne, wavered an instant, and settled again on her face with a curious sort of gasp.

"Do--do you *still* hold to your word?" he stammered.

Fevered, frightened, strangling back her sobs as best she could, Daphne lifted her strained but indomitable little face to his.

"I--will--not break my word!" she smiled.

On Sheridan Kaire's incongruous, dissolute face, a smile as tortured-sweet as hers quickened for a single unbelievable instant and was gone again. As one puzzled only, he turned back to Bretton, and stood staring almost vacantly into the older man's impatient eyes. Then quite abruptly he turned and started toward the door.

"I--I feel a little faint," he said. "A little queer. . . . I will be back in a moment!"

With a sharp bang the door shut behind him. In the passage outside they heard a single rough word, a woman's imperious protest, the soft thud of feet on a thick carpet, and a cabin boy's shrill call.

On the carved mahogany shelf in the cabin the clock went on about its business--one minute--three--five--ten. Through the open portholes a faint breeze sucked at the crimson silk curtains, and ripple to creak, and creak to ripple, the houseboat yearned to the tide and the tide to the houseboat.

Daphne's eyes never left the clock. Weirdly exultant, excitedly heroic, she kept the ill-favored tryst.

Blurred in the smoke of his cigarette, Jaffrey Bretton's vivid white head merged like a half-erased drawing into the big shimmering mirror behind him. It was just as well, perhaps, that the twist of his mouth was hidden from Daphne's eyes.

There was no sound of voices in the outer passageway to herald Sheridan Kaire's return: just a little stumble on the edge of a rug--an unwonted fumble with the door handle. It wasn't defiance that backed him up now against the support of the wainscoating, but a very faint uncertainty in his legs. There was nothing uncertain, however, about his face. Geniality, not to say, jocularity, wreathed it from ear to ear and from brow to chin.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting so long, dear--dear people," he beamed. "But a Host has so many responsibilities Overseeing the pantries and the--the libraries and the ladies!" he beamed. "Why--why, I can't help my way with the ladies!" he turned and explained with half-mocking anxiety to Jaffrey Bretton's absolutely inscrutable face. "Always, ever since I was a little boy," he deprecated, "I've been the Village cut-up! So was my father before me, and his father before--before me. Too bad, isn't it?" he questioned sharply. "Such a nice family! And so lively!" At an unexpected glimpse of his face in the mirror he turned back to meet Daphne's staring face. "Now this scar of mine, darling--darling," he confided dramatically, "you want to know where I got it? All the ladies always want to know where I got it! Just as soon as a lady gets up her courage to ask me about it," he chuckled, "then I always know she's really beginning to think of me! You asked if I got it in a 'brave war,'" he chuckled. "Sure I got it in a brave war. Only the brave--deserve affairs," he parodied lightly. "It was in Smyrna," he confided, "when I was eighteen. I--I made a little poem about it:

"There was a young Princess of Smyrna,
Of love I endeavored to learn her,
But her father in hate cleft a seam through my pate,
Now wasn't that the deuce of a turn-a?"

Precipitately and without the slightest warning he plunged down into a chair and began to whimper maudlinly while with one uncertain finger tip he traced and retraced the twitching, zig-zagged scar. "It--it isn't nice, is it?" he babbled idiotically. "And I was such a pretty boy? . . . Ladies shouldn't ask such questions," he babbled. "Not just as you're going to kiss 'em. It--it makes dead faces floating between! It--isn't nice! Oh, Daphne darling--darling----"

But with a little scream of release Daphne's hand was already on the door knob.

"Oh, come quick, Old-Dad!" she cried. "It's *all over!* It's all canceled! He's broken *his* promise! He's----"

In a single bound her father was at her side.

"Oh, I hope I haven't said anything that I shouldn't have!" babbled Kaire. With a desperate effort he struggled to his feet and raised his arms after the manner of one who is just about to lead a cheer. "Now, all together, ladies and gentlemen!" he cried.

"There was a young lady from Smyrna,
Of--of Smyrna----"

Across his flaccid mouth the odd little smile tightened suddenly in a single poignant flash of bewilderment and pain. "Oh, you Little Good Works Business!" he grinned. "You--you----"

Then, before their startled eyes, he pitched over headlong on the table, gave a queer twitch of his shoulders, and lay very quiet, with a little flush of blood spreading redder and redder from his lips.

But before Jaffrey Bretton could snatch Daphne from the sight, her overtaxed brain had collapsed into delirium. Dodging down the narrow passageway with the dreadful little burden in his arms he stumbled almost immediately on Martha's crouching figure.

"Martha!" he cried. "There's something redder than curtains in the cabin back there! Run and get Kaire's man!"

"Kaire's *man?*" scoffed the woman shrilly. Robbed in that single instant of all her inhibition she turned and sped madly for the reddest thing that she would ever know, every thought in her awakened brain, every flash of her jeweled hands keyed suddenly to service.

Close behind her a cabin boy came hurrying. Champagne and crystal glasses were on his tray.

Roused from a half-completed nap Kaire's man came running to the scene.

Like an old hound scenting disaster Lost Man himself loomed unexpectedly in the doorway. With his great tunic-swathed height, his sharply dilating nostrils, he seemed bristling suddenly with some strange new sort of authority. For a single instant his beetling brows glowered to the stark, startled faces around him. Then out of--God knows what stained-glass memories-- out of God knows what chanced associations he burst forth resonantly into the opening lines of the Episcopal burial service.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth----"

With a gasp from his own frazzled nerves Jaffrey Bretton pushed mercilessly past him.

"Oh, cut it out, Lost Man," he cried. "This isn't death--yet! Kaire's man knows just what to do, and has got a chance to do it--probably--even one or more times yet! Go get the launch ready, you and Alliman! If there's nothing here we can do, we'll go *quick!*"

"Where?" stared Lost Man.

"Back to our own island, you idiot!" snapped Bretton. "And pack up everything we've got! And catch that coast steamer in the morning! We're going North," he paled, "as fast as we can get there! I want a brain specialist for my little girl!" Stumbling along after Lost Man with his babbling burden in his arms, he stepped down into the waiting launch.

Already with his gnarled calloused hands Alliman the outlaw was wringing strange cries from the reluctant engine. Up from a somber shadow in the bow the brown khaki lady lifted a startled but unquestioning face.

"Let me hold her!" insisted Lost Man. "I know how to hold 'em--the little lambs!" Like some vaguely parodied picture of "The Good Shepherd" the old man gathered the little limp figure into his arms, and retreated to the stern of the boat.

Half resentful, half relieved, Bretton hesitated an instant and then merged himself into the shadowy bow.

With a grunt of triumph Alliman started the launch gulfward. With creaks and groans and puffy sighs the old engine rallied to the task. Except for the chop of waves against the bow, the trickle of tides at the stern, no other sound broke the black silence except Lost Man's crooning monotone.

"There--there--there--there--there," crooned Lost Man. "There-- there--there--there--there!" When he wasn't saying "There-- there--there," he seemed to be trying to sing. Very laboriously, very painstakingly, word by word and note by note he was straining very evidently to dig up something from his memory.

"Bring to--little children (he struggled)
Visions--sweet--of Thee,
Guard the sailors tossing (he quavered)
On the--the deep blue sea."

Along the whole dark shadowy length of the launch, the Outlaw's face alone shone wanly bright and reasonably clear-featured in the flare from the engine. Bloodless as the salt-pork that he fed on, dank-haired as the swamps and glades that encompassed him, brooding on Heaven knows what Past or what Future--a single convulsive tremor passed his pipe-clenched lips.

"Say, Boss," he said, "on them home runs of Baker's, was they straight-away hits? Or did they go over some fence?"

III

IT WAS the Northern March--very cold, very snowy, very blustery, when Daphne woke from her last bad dream.

Brisk, bleak, absolutely literal, the frosted roofs and gables of a pleasant suburban landscape gleamed sociably at her through every casement window.

No squawking pelicans screeched like steam-whistles into her splitting eardrums. No interminable flights of sea gulls dragged their sharp-feathered wingpoints across her naked eyeballs. On the slime and stench of a dead shark's body her little foot had forever stopped slipping.

"Why--why, how--perfectly extraordinary!" woke Daphne.

It seemed to be a pretty room. A little too neat, perhaps, a little too impersonal, to be one's very own. But by no means as plushly impersonal as a hotel, and by no means as poison-neat as a hospital.

"Wherever--in--the world--am I?" puzzled Daphne.

Very cautiously, very experimentally, she began to investigate her most immediate surroundings.

"I am at least in a very pretty--pale blue--wadded silk wrapper," she discovered with eminent satisfaction. "Also, on an astonishingly comfortable couch with at least a hundred pillows . . . Oh--I hope the bow on my pigtail matches my pale blue wrapper!" she quickened expectantly. But there was no pigtail. Shockingly to her uplifted hands her short-cropped head loomed round and crisp and fluffy as a great worsted ball. "Oh, dear-- oh, dear--oh, dear!" she gasped. "If I am dead and born again--I am a boy!" Wilting down discouragedly into her "hundred pillows" one slender hand dropped weakly to the floor. "Life is very empty," she said. "Everything in life is very empty--everything." Along her sluggish

spine a curious little thrill passed suddenly. "There is a nose in my hand!" she gasped. "A *lovin'* nose! Creep-Mouse!" she cried out desperately. "Is it--possible that it's your lovin' nose?"

"Perfectly possible!" thudded Creep-Mouse's essentially practical tail. "Perfectly possible," swished and fawned the bashful little fur body.

"This is certainly very extraordinary," struggled Daphne. "Instead of being anything that I thought it was, it is quite evidently some sort of a bewitchment. I am a boy! But Creep-Mouse is still Creep-Mouse! I who went to sleep *real* have waked up in a Fairy Story! But *what* Fairy Story?" she shivered. "And *what* page?"

Quite inadvertently her eyes strayed to the little white table at the head of her couch. In the middle of the table shone a silver bell.

"It would be interesting," mused Daphne, "to ring that bell and see who comes! If it's the 'Hunch-Backed Pony'--then I'll know, of course, that I'm in the Russian Fairy book. And if it's Snow White--" very cautiously she struggled up from her pillows and reached for the silver bell. "But I must ring you very--little-y," she faltered in her weakness. "So that whatever comes will surely be very little." Then with an impetuous wilfulness that surprised even herself she grabbed up the bell with both hands and rang it and rang it and *rang* it!

In the corridor somewhere a door slammed and footsteps came running--running! Her doorhandle turned! A portiere wrenched aside!

"It's the seven bears story--*life size!*" she screamed. And opened her eyes to Richard Wiltoner. Like a silver bomb the bell whizzed by his head. "Get out of my room!" she screamed. "Get out of my room before I'm expelled again!"

"Silly!" laughed Richard Wiltoner. "I'm visiting in your house! They told me to answer your bell!"

"My house?" collapsed Daphne. "Don't blame this house on me! I don't even know where I am!"

"Why, you're in your own home!" laughed Richard Wiltoner. "Just wait a minute and I'll call your people. . . . Everybody rushed outdoors to help a horse that fell on the ice."

"Fell on the ice? How nice," mused Daphne. "Why--why, I can rhyme again!" she exulted suddenly with softly clapping hands. "Why, I'd forgotten all about it!" Then a little bit bewilderedly the white brow clouded. "Richard," she asked, "you--you said 'everybody' rushed out. What do you mean--'everybody'?"

"Why, your father, Mr. Bretton," said Richard, "and Mrs. Bretton."

"Mrs. Bretton?" jumped Daphne. Very limply she sank back into her pillows again. "Oh, I knew it," she said. "I've waked in the wrong story!" Quite severely she seemed to hold Richard responsible for the mistake. "Oh--no, Richard," she corrected him. "In the story I belong in there's no Mrs. Bretton. Just Mr. Bretton!--Mr. Jaffrey Bretton!--a tall man," she endeavored to illustrate, "with snow-white hair!"

"The very lad," laughed Richard, "and Mrs. Bretton. She's a brick! She's got red hair. Oh, I didn't mean to be funny!" he apologized hastily.

"Funny?" flamed Daphne. Flushing, paling, flushing again--a dozen conflicting emotions seemed surging through her brain. "Richard?" she questioned. "Have you ever lost anything?"

"I've lost both my parents," said Richard, "and three sisters-- and I don't remember any of them."

"Haven't you anything left?" asked Daphne.

"I've got one brother," said Richard. "The crippled brother, you know? And my horse, Brainstorm."

"Do you love them?" questioned Daphne.

"I love Brainstorm," said Richard.

"I've had trouble, too," sighed Daphne. "I've lost my father and my hair."

"Someone seems to have found your father," laughed Richard in spite of himself. "But whatever in the world have you done with your hair?"

"That's just it, Richard," said Daphne. "Will you look in the top bureau drawer?"

Flushing forty colors Richard opened the top bureau drawer. He was handsome enough when he wasn't embarrassed. But under embarrassment he glowed like stained glass with a light behind it. "There are ribbons here," he pawed. "And--and things! But no hair!"

"Oh, isn't it--awful?" shivered Daphne. "Well, is there a hair brush? I would so like to look all right when my--my stepmother comes."

"Just as though she hadn't seen you looking all kinds of wrong for weeks and weeks!" scoffed Richard. But very

obediently he brought the hair brush.

"Just where do you think you'd better begin?" worried Daphne.

"I?" stammered Richard. "I?" With a wild little lunge he commenced the attack.

"My! But you're bumpy!" winced Daphne. "Don't you think that maybe it would be better to use the bristly side of the brush?"

"Oh, I say!" apologized Richard, "I *am* rattled!" With reconstructed acumen he resumed the task.

"Oh, *that's* nice," purred Daphne. "In a book I was reading there was the funniest thing--the husband in it was always brushing his wife's hair."

"How funny!" acquiesced Richard.

"Oh--awfully funny," purred Daphne. "I guess there's a good deal more to this marriage-business," she observed sagely, "than some of us had supposed."

"Very likely," admitted Richard.

"Less nonsense, I mean," reflected Daphne. "But more hair-brushing--and putting away winter clothes, and----"

"Oh, I wish I had a wife," hooted Richard, "to put away my winter clothes!"

"I wish you had!" laughed Daphne. For the first time her mind went back to her little college tragedy with purely historical interest instead of pain. "Oh, I wish you had! That dress suit you bumped my nose against smelled so strong of camphor--I couldn't get it out of my nostrils all winter! Why, we're both laughing!" she exclaimed with sudden astonishment.

"Why shouldn't we?" argued Richard Wiltoner. In the midst of the reflection a most curious expression flashed across his eyes.

"*Wouldn't* it have been funny," he said, "if you *had* married me--that time I asked you?"

"We'd have fought like cats and dogs, I suppose," said Daphne.

"But at least," laughed Richard, "you would have been putting away my winter clothes--just about now."

"And you--" retaliated Daphne.

"I'm already--brushing your hair!" laughed the boy.

"Let's never marry anybody," suggested Daphne. "Not for years!"

"I can't!" said Richard. "Not for years and years and years!-- not to make a girl comfortable, I mean! There won't be any money. . . . There's my brother, you know; and I've got so many animals. . . . It's queer about animals," he stammered, "you-- you can't fail the old ones when they're old, and you can't fail the young ones when they're young. It's like any other kind of family, I suppose," he smiled. "All fun and all responsibility! But never any time! And never any money!" Quite furiously he resumed the hair-brushing. "Oh, after all," he remarked, "*this* isn't so awfully different from getting the snarls out of Brainstorm's mane. Only Brainstorm's mane is brown. And yours?" With a cry of sheer joy he stood off and surveyed his handiwork. "And yours--" he laughed, "looks like a bunch of short-stemmed jonquils!"

"Oh, how--awful!" cried Daphne.

"No, it's cunning," flushed Richard.

A little bit teased by the laugh, Daphne met her own embarrassment with a fresh command.

"Oh, please--run quick now," she begged, "and tell my people as you call them--that a Lady-Who-Has-Been-Long-Away--sends her love and is home again!"

"You're too slow with your invitation," called her father's voice from the doorway. "We've already arrived!" With a most curious merge of excitement and serenity Jaffrey Bretton and the Intruding Lady walked into the room.

"How do you do?" said Daphne, with the faintest possible tinge of formality.

"Why, very well indeed," said her father, a bit casually. "How's yourself?" His more immediate attention at the moment seemed fixed on Richard and the waving hair brush.

"Oh, I'm all right," drawled Daphne very evenly. Then, with all the sudden tempestuous intensity of a child, she threw her arms in the air. "Only, I don't see--even yet," she cried, "just what Richard Wiltoner is doing here."

With a quite unexplainable laugh her father dropped down on the edge of her couch.

"Why it's--it's about potatoes!" he laughed. "Richard is getting to be some farmer! He's written a magazine article about

some new potato scheme of his. It's very interesting! I like experiments! I'm going to finance it. Not much, you know, but just a little. Just enough to take the strain off--and leave the push on. We'll go over in the spring when it's planting time," he began to laugh all over again, "and see that the experiment is started properly."

Quite severely Daphne drew back into her pillows. "I don't think it's very nice of you, Old-Dad," she said, "to laugh so at Richard's farming. Farming is a very--very noble profession, I think."

"It certainly is," conceded her father.

"And have you rabbits, Richard, as well as potatoes?" she questioned with unbroken gravity. "And will there be jonquils? And new pigs?"

"There's liable to be 'most everything by that time," admitted Richard.

"Oh, all right then," brightened Daphne. "I think I'll come, too! I've thought a good deal about potatoes, myself!" With a little sigh, half fatigue, half contentment, she glanced up at her father just in time to intercept the glance of "white magic" that passed between him and the Intruding Lady. In an instant her little spine stiffened again. "Only--Richard," she smiled up bravely, "we unmarried people must surely stand by each other! Even after you go away maybe you'll write me about the rabbits and things? It's just a little bit lonely sometimes," quivered the smile, "to be the only unmarried person in the house."

With a perceptible quiver of her own smile the Intruding Lady came forward and dropped down on the couch just in front of Old-Dad.

"Oh, Little Girl," she said, "don't you think you're ever--ever going to like me any?"

"Why, I like you now," whispered Daphne.

"And I'd like to like you--lots--only----" A bit worriedly the fluffy head turned and re-turned on its pillows. "Only--I don't understand," fretted Daphne, "about your having so many honeymoons."

"So many 'honeymoons?'" smiled the Intruding Lady. "Why, I'm thirty-two years old! And this is the very first honeymoon I've ever had in my life!"

"Why--why, you said you were on a honeymoon--down South!" frowned Daphne.

"So I did!" laughed the Intruding Lady. "And so I was! But I never said it was *my* honeymoon!"

"Old-Dad--thought it was your honeymoon!" accused Daphne.

"Yes--I meant him to!" laughed the Intruding Lady. "Just for a little while I meant him to! . . . We'd had such a quarrel--ever since the winter before! Love at first sight it seemed to be!-- and quarrel at first sight too!"

"Oh, dear me--dear me," worried Daphne. "The more I hear about this 'Love' the more complicated it seems. There's even more study to it--I believe--than going to college."

"Oh, a great deal more study to it than going to college!" attested the Intruding Lady.

"But *whose* honeymoon--was it?" persisted Daphne.

"Why, it was the honeymoon," mused the Intruding Lady, "of a very silly little chorus girl and an unduly wise New York magnate. He was very much pleased with everything about her, it seemed, except her Grammar--so I was brought along to mend the Grammar. Now wasn't that a perfectly idiotic thing to do?" she turned quite unblushingly to ask Old-Dad. "Where there are so many perfectly beautiful things to learn on a honeymoon to waste any time learning Grammar? Oh, of course, I know perfectly well"--she returned a bit quickly to Daphne--"that it was very wrong indeed of me to run away from them--that it caused the old magnate, at least, a considerable amount of anxiety. Only, of course, I never dreamed for a moment," she acknowledged, "that the yacht would go off without me! I merely thought," she blushed, "I merely heard," she blushed, "that that was Jaffrey Bretton's Island."

"And you found him with me!" giggled Daphne, "all cuddled up in the sand."

"Yes," blushed the Intruding Lady.

With the cloud still on her brow Daphne studied the Intruding Lady's face with an entirely brand-new interest.

"But, how ever in the world," she demanded, "could anybody quarrel with my father?"

As though wanting to give full consideration to the question, the Intruding Lady glanced back at her husband before she essayed to face Daphne again.

"Why, really," she answered, "don't you suppose--that perhaps-- it's because he's so tall?"

"Hardly," said Daphne.

"Well, then--maybe," mused the Intruding Lady, "it's because he's so--so funny?"

"Not at all," said Daphne.

"Well--just possibly--of course," smiled the Intruding Lady, "it's because I have red hair!"

"Now you're talking!" said Jaffrey Bretton.

But no smile ruffled Daphne's gravity.

"Were you a--a sort of a teacher?" she questioned.

"Yes, a sort of a teacher," admitted the Intruding Lady.

"Where?" asked Daphne.

"Oh, on houseboats and yachts and things," smiled the Intruding Lady. "Just a sort of traveling teacher. That's why I didn't quite understand your father at first--I suppose," she acknowledged. "Our lives were so far apart."

"Do you think you understand me?" whispered Daphne.

"Oh, I understand you perfectly," smiled the Intruding Lady.

"Then what are you going to teach me?" quivered Daphne. "There are so many things I want to know! Who Lost Man was! Why people like the Outlaw *are*! Did--did Sheridan Kaire--break his word on purpose to free me?"

From the Intruding Lady's merry eyes a most astonishing tear rolled suddenly.

"First of all, Little Girl," she said, "I'm going to try very-- very hard to teach you to love me!"

"I'm--I'm enjoying my first lesson very much thank you," smiled Daphne faintly.

"Heaven bless my soul!" cried her father quite abruptly, "I'd forgotten all about smoking!" Adroitly with match and cigarette he proceeded to remedy the omission, brooding thoughtfully all the while on his daughter's wistful young face the positive, generous womanliness of his own chosen mate the splendid clean-limbed, clean-souled promise of the young lad before him. With more emotion than he cared to show he bent down suddenly and gathered Creep-Mouse into his arms. "There--there isn't a man in the world," he affirmed, "who has as good a--as good a dog as I have!"

"Dog?" deprecated Richard Wiltoner quite unexpectedly. "Family I guess is what you mean!"

"But even yet," questioned Daphne worriedly of the Intruding Lady, "everything's been so sudden and queer--even yet I don't quite seem to realize just how you figure in my story?"

"Why, I don't suppose I figure at all," smiled the Intruding Lady very modestly, "except in so far as I do my bit towards making a Happy Ending.

"Happy Ending?" quickened Jaffrey Bretton. "Why this--is just the Happy Beginning!"

THE END.