

FICTION

Dorothy Canfield Fisher

The Squirrel-Cage

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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FICTION



PAUL STOOD BY HER, LOOKING DOWN INTO HER EYES, BENDING OVER HER, SMILING, PRESSING, CONFIDENT, MASTERFUL (PAGE 96)

THE SQUIRREL-CAGE

BY
DOROTHY CANFIELD

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
JOHN ALONZO WILLIAMS



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THE SQUIRREL-CAGE

BOOK I

THE FAIRY PRINCESS

CHAPTER I

AN AMERICAN FAMILY

The house of the Emery family was a singularly good example of the capacity of wood and plaster and brick to acquire personality. It was the physical symbol of its owners' position in life; it was the history of their career, written down for

all to see, and as such they felt in it the most justifiable pride. When Mr. and Mrs. Emery, directly after their wedding in a small Central New York village, had gone West to Ohio they had spent their tiny capital in building a small story-and-a-half cottage, ornamented with the jig-saw work and fancy turning popular in 1872, and this had been the nucleus of their present rambling, picturesque, many-roomed home. Every step in the long series of changes which had led from its first state to its last had a profound and gratifying significance for the Emerys, and its final condition, prosperous, modern, sophisticated, with the right kind of woodwork in every room that showed, with the latest, most unobtrusively artistic effects in decoration, represented their culminating well-earned position in the inner circle of the best society of Endbury.

Moreover, they felt that just as the house had been attained with effort, self-denial and careful calculations, yet still without incurring debt, so their social position had been secured by unremitting diligence and care, but with no loss of self-respect or even of dignity. They were honestly proud both of their house and of their list of acquaintances and saw no reason to regard them as less worthy achievements of an industrious life than their four creditable grown-up children or Judge Emery's honorable reputation at the bar. In their youth they had conceived of certain things as worth attaining. They had worked hard for these things and their unabashed pleasure in possessing them had the vivid and substantial quality which comes from a keen memory of battles with a world none too ready to grant human desires.

The two older children, George and Marietta, could remember those early struggling days with almost as fresh an emotion as that of their parents. Indeed, Marietta, now a competent, sharp-eyed matron of thirty-two, could not see the most innocuous colored lithograph without an uncontrollable wave of bitterness, so present to her mind was the period when they painfully groped their way out of chromos.

The date of that epoch coincided with the date of their first acquaintance with the Hollisters. The Hollisters were Endbury's First Family; literally so, for they had come up from their farm in Kentucky to settle in Endbury when it was but a frontier post. It was a part of their superiority over other families that their traditions took cognizance of the time when great stumps from the primeval forest stood in what was now Endbury's public square, the hub of interurban trolley traffic, whence the big, noisy cars started for their infinitely radiating journeys over the flat, fertile country about the little city. The particular Mrs. Hollister who, at the time the Emerys began to pierce the upper crust, was the leader of Endbury society, had discarded chromos as much as five years before. Mrs. Emery and Marietta, newly admitted to the honor of her acquaintance, wondered to themselves at the cold monotony of her black and white engravings. The artlessness of this wonder struck shame to their hearts when they chanced to learn that the lady had repaid it with a worldly-wise amusement at their own highly-colored waterfalls and snow-capped mountain-peaks. Marietta could recall as piercingly as if it were yesterday, in how crestfallen a chagrin she and her mother had gazed at their parlor after this incident, their disillusioned eyes open for the first time to the futility of its claim to sophistication. As for the incident that had led to the permanent retiring from their table of the monumental salt-and-pepper "caster" which had been one of their most prized wedding presents, the Emerys refused to allow themselves to remember it, so intolerably did it spell humiliation.

Even the oldest son, prosperous, well-established manufacturer that he was, could not recall without a shudder his first dinner-party. A branch of the Hollisters had moved next door to the Emerys and, to Mrs. Emery's great satisfaction, an easy neighborly acquaintance had sprung up between the two families. Secure in this familiarity, and not distinguishing the immense difference between a chance invitation to drop in to dinner and a formal invitation to dine, the young business-man had almost forgotten the date for which he had been bidden. Remembering it with a start, he had gone straight from his office to the house of his hosts, supposing that he would be able, as he had done many times before, to wash his face and hands in the bath-room and brush his hair in the room of the son of the house.

The sight of a black man in evening dress, who opened the door to him instead of the usual maid, sent a vague apprehension through his preoccupied mind, but it was not until he found himself in the room set apart for the masculine guests and saw everyone arrayed in "swallow-tails," as he thought of them, that he realized what he had done. The emotion of the moment was one that made a mark on his life.

He had an instant's wild notion of making some excuse to go home and dress, for his plight was by no means due to necessity. He had a correct outfit of evening clothes, bought at the urgent command of his mother, which he had worn several times at public dinners given by the city Board of Trade and once at a dancing party at the home of the head of his firm. However, the hard sense which made him successful in his business kept him from a final absurdity now. He had been seen, and he decided grimly that he would be, on the whole, a shade more laughable if he appeared later in a changed costume.

He was twenty-one years old at that time; he considered himself a man grown. He had been in business for five years and his foot was already set firmly on the ladder of commercial success on which he was to mount high, but not for nothing had he felt about him all his life the inextinguishable desire of his family to outgrow rusticity. He chided himself for unmanly pettiness, but the fact remained that throughout the interminable evening the sight of his gray striped trousers or colored cuffs affected him to a chagrin that was like a wave of physical nausea. Four years later he had

married a handsome young lady from among the Hollister connections, and, moving away to Cleveland, where no memory of his antecedents could handicap him, had begun a new social career as eminently successful as his rapid commercial expansion. He forced himself sometimes to think of that long-past evening as one presses on a scar to learn how much soreness is left in an old wound, and he smiled at the little tragedy of egotism it had been to him. But it was a wry smile.

A brighter recollection to all the Emerys was the justly complacent and satisfied remembrance of the house grounds during the first really successful social event they had achieved. It was a lawn-fete, given for the benefit of St. Luke's church, which Mrs. Emery and Marietta had recently joined. Socially, it was the first fruits of their conversion from Congregationalism. The weather was fine, the roses were out, the very best people were there, the bazaar was profitable, and the dowager of the Hollister matrons had spoken warm words of admiration of the competent way in which the occasion had been managed to Mrs. Emery, smiling and flushed in an indomitably self-respecting pleasure. The older Emerys still sometimes spoke of that afternoon and evening as parents remember the hour when their baby first walked alone, with something of the same mixture of pride in the later achievements of the child and of tenderness for its early weakness.

The youngest of the Emerys, many years the junior of her brothers and sister, knew nothing at all of the anxious bitter-sweet of these early endeavors for sophistication. By the time she came to conscious, individual life the summit had been virtually reached. It is not to be denied that Lydia had witnessed several abrupt changes in the family ideal of household decoration or of entertaining, but since they were exactly contemporaneous with similar changes on the part of the Hollisters and other people in their circle, these revolutions of taste brought with them no sense of humiliation. Such, for instance, was the substitution for carpets of hardwood floors and rugs as oriental as the purse would allow. Lydia could remember gorgeously flowered carpets on every Emery floor, but since they also covered all the prosperous floors in town at the same time, it was not more painful to have found them attractive than to have worn immensely large sleeves or preposterously blousing shirt waists, to have ridden bicycles, or read E. P. Roe, or anything else that everybody used to do and did no more. She could remember, also, when charades and book-parties were considered amusing pastimes for grown-ups, but in passing beyond these primitive tastes the Emerys had been well abreast of their contemporaries. The last charade party had not been held in *their* parlors, they congratulated themselves.

A philosophic observer who had known the history of Mrs. Emery's life might have found something pathetic in her pleasure at Lydia's light-hearted jesting at the funny old things people used to think pretty and the absurd pursuits they used to think entertaining. It was to her a symbol that her daughter had escaped what had caused her so much suffering, the uneasy, self-distrusting dread lest she might still be finding pretty things that up-to-date people thought grotesque; lest suddenly what she had toiled so painfully to obtain should somehow turn out to be not the "right thing" after all. Marietta did not recall more vividly than did her mother the trying period that had elapsed between their new enlightenment on the subject of chromos and the day when an unexpected large fee from a client of Mr. Emery (not yet Judge) enabled them to hang their Protestant walls with engravings of pagan gods and Roman Catholic saints. For their problem had never been the simple one of merely discovering the right thing. There had always been added to it the complication of securing the right thing out of an income by no means limitless. The head of the household had enjoyed the success that might have been predicted from his whole-souled absorption in his profession, but Judge Emery came of old-fashioned rural stock with inelastic ideas of honesty, and though he was more than willing to toil early and late to supply funds for his family and satisfy whatever form of ambition his women-folk might decree to be the best one, he was not willing to take advantage of the perquisites of his position, and never, as the phrase in the town ran, "made on the side." Of his temptations and of his stout resistance to them, his wife and children knew no more, naturally, than of any of the other details of his professional life, which, according to the custom of their circle, were as remote and hidden from them as if he had departed each morning after his hearty early breakfast into another planet; but his wife was proud of the integrity which she divined in her husband and, as she often declared roundly to Marietta, would not have exchanged his good name for a much larger income.

Indeed, the acidity which for Marietta lingered about the recollection of their efforts to make themselves over did not exist in the more amply satisfied mind of her mother. The difference showed itself visibly in the contrast between the daughter's face, stamped with a certain tired, unflagging intensity of endeavor, and the freshness of the older woman. At thirty-two, Marietta looked, perhaps, no older than her age, but obviously more worn by the strain of life than her mother at fifty-six. Sometimes, as she noted in her mirror the sharp lines of a fatigue that was almost bitterness, she experienced a certain unnerving uncertainty, a total lack of zest for what she so eagerly struggled to attain, and she envied her mother's single-minded satisfaction in getting what she wanted.

Mrs. Emery had enjoyed the warfare of her life heartily; the victories for their own sake, the defeats because they had spurred her on to fresh and finally successful efforts, and the remembrance of both was sweet to her. She loved her husband for himself and for what he had been able to give her, and she loved her children ardently, although she had been sorely vexed by her second son's unfortunate marriage. He had always been a discordant note in the family

concert, the veiled, unconscious, uneasy skepticism of Marietta bursting out openly in Henry as a careless, laughing cynicism, excessively disconcerting to his mother. She sometimes thought he had married the grocer's daughter out of "contrariness." The irritation which surrounded that event, and the play of cross-purposes and discord which had filled the period until the misguided young people had voluntarily exiled themselves to the Far West, remained more of a sore spot in Mrs. Emery's mind than any blow given or taken in her lifelong campaign for distinction. She admitted frankly to herself that it was a relief that Harry was no longer near her, although her mother's heart ached for the Harry he had seemed to her before his rebellion. She fancied that she would enjoy him as of old if the litter of inconvenient persons and facts lying between them could but be cleared away; with a voluntary blindness not uncommon in parents, refusing to recognize that these superficial differences were only the outward expression of a fundamental alienation within. At all events, it was futile to speculate about the matter, since the width of the continent and her son's intense distaste for letter-writing separated them. She had come, therefore, to turn all her attention and proud affection on her youngest child.

It seemed to her sometimes that Lydia had been granted her by a merciful Providence in order that she might make that "fresh start all over again" which is the never-realized ideal of erring humanity. Marietta had been a young lady fourteen years before, and fourteen years meant much--meant everything to people who progressed as fast as the Emerys. Uncertain of themselves, they had not ventured to launch Marietta boldly upon the waves of a society the chart of which was so new to them. She had no coming-out party. She simply put on long skirts, coiled her black hair on top of her head, and began going to evening parties with a few young men who were amused by the tart briskness of her tongue and attracted by the comeliness of her healthful youth. She had married the first man who proposed to her--a young insurance agent. Since then they had lived in a very comfortable, middling state of harmony, apparently on about the same social scale as Marietta's parents. That this feat was accomplished on a much smaller income was due to Marietta's unrivaled instinct and trained capacity for keeping up appearances.

All this history had been creditable, but nothing more; and Mrs. Emery often looked at her elder daughter with compunction for her own earlier ignorance and helplessness. She could have done so much more for Marietta if she had only known how. Mrs. Mortimer was, however, a rather prickly personality with whom to attempt to sympathize, and in general her mother felt the usual -in-law conclusion about her daughter's life: that Marietta could undoubtedly have done better than to marry her industrious, negligible husband, but that, on the whole, she might have done worse; and it was much to be hoped that her little boy would resemble the Emerys and not the Mortimers.

No such philosophical calm restrained her emotions about Lydia. She was in positive beauty and charm all that poor Marietta had not been, and she was to have in the way of backing and management all that poor Marietta had lacked. It seemed to Mrs. Emery that her whole life had been devoted to learning what to do and what not to do for Lydia. As the time of action drew nearer she nerved herself for the campaign with a finely confident feeling that she knew every inch of the ground. Her expectancy grew more and more tense as her eagerness rose. During the long year that Lydia was in Europe, receiving a final gloss, even higher than that imparted by the expensive and exclusive girls' school where she had spent the years between fourteen and eighteen, Mrs. Emery laid her plans and arranged her life with a fervent devotion to one end--the success of Lydia's first season in society. Every room in the house seemed to her vision to stand in a bright vacancy awaiting the arrival of the debutante.

CHAPTER II

AMERICAN BEAUTIES

On the morning of Lydia's long-expected return, as Mrs. Emery moved restlessly about the large double parlors opening out on a veranda where the vines were already golden in the September sunlight, it seemed to her that the very walls were blank in hushed eagerness and that the chairs and tables turned faces like hers, tired with patience, toward the open door. She had not realized until the long separation was almost over how unendurably she had missed her baby girl, as she still thought of the tall girl of nineteen. She could not wait the few hours that were left. Her fortitude had given way just too soon. She must have the dear child now, now, in her arms.

She moved absently a spray of goldenrod which hid a Fra Angelico angel over the mantel and noted with dramatic self-pity that her hand was trembling. She sat down suddenly, and lost herself in a vain attempt to recall the well-beloved sound of Lydia's fresh young voice. A knot came in her throat, and she covered her face with her large, white, carefully-manicured hands.

Marietta came in briskly a few moments later, bringing a bouquet of asters from her own garden. She was dressed, as always, with a severe reticence in color and line which, though due to her extreme need for economy, nevertheless gave to the rather spare outlines of her tall figure a distinction, admired by Endbury under the name of stylishness. Her rapid step had carried her half-way across the wide room before she saw to her surprise that her mother, usually so self-contained, was giving way to an inexplicable emotion.

"Good gracious, Mother!" she began in the energetic fashion which was apt to make her most neutral remarks sound combative.

Mrs. Emery dried her eyes with a gesture of protest, adjusted her gray pompadour deftly, and cut off her daughter's remonstrance, "Oh, you needn't tell me I'm foolish, Marietta. I know it. I just suddenly got so impatient it didn't seem as though I could wait another minute!"

The younger woman accepted this explanation of the tears with a murmured sound of somewhat enigmatic intonation. Her thin dark face settled into a repose that had a little grimness in it. She began putting the flowers into a vase that stood between the reproduction of a Giotto Madonna and a Japanese devil-hunt, both results of the study of art taken up during the past winter by her mother's favorite woman's club. Mrs. Emery watched the process in the contemplative relief which follows an emotional outbreak, and her eyes wandered to the objects on either side the vase. The sight stirred her to speech. "Oh, Marietta, how *do* you suppose the house will seem to Lydia after she has seen so much? I hope she won't be disappointed. I've done so much to it this last year, perhaps she won't like it. And Oh, I *was* so tried because we weren't able to get the new sideboard put up in the dining-room yesterday!"

Mrs. Mortimer glanced without smiling at a miniature of her sister, blooming in a shrine-like arrangement on her mother's writing-desk. She shook her dark head with a gesture like her father's, and said with his blunt decisiveness, "Really, Mother, you must draw the line about Lydia. She's only human. I guess if the house is good enough for you and father it is good enough for her."

She crossed the room toward the door with a brisk rattle of starched skirts, but as she passed her mother her hand was caught and held. "That's just it, Marietta--that's just what came over me! *Is* what's good enough for us good enough for Lydia? Won't anything, even the best, in Endbury be a come-down for her?"

The slightly irritated impatience with which Mrs. Mortimer had listened to the first words of this speech gave way to a shrewd amusement. "You mean that you've put Lydia up on such a high plane to begin with that whichever way she goes will be a step down," she asked.

"Yes, yes; that's just it," breathed her mother, unconscious of any irony in her daughter's accent. She fixed her eyes, which, in spite of her having long since passed the half-century mark, were still very clear and blue, anxiously upon Marietta's opaque dark ones. She felt not only a need to be reassured in general by anyone, but a reluctant faith in the younger woman's judgment.

Marietta released herself with a laugh that was like a light, mocking tap on her mother's shoulder. "Well, folks that haven't got real worries will certainly manufacture them! To worry about Lydia's future in Endbury! Aren't you afraid the sun won't rise some day? If ever there was any girl that had a smooth road in front of her--"

The door-bell rang. "They've come! They've come!" cried Mrs. Emery wildly.

"Lydia wouldn't ring the bell, and her train isn't due till ten," Mrs. Mortimer reminded her.

"Oh, yes. Well, then, it's the new sideboard. I am so--"

"It's a boy with a big pasteboard box," contradicted Mrs. Mortimer, looking down the hall to the open front door.

Seeing someone there to receive it, the boy set the box inside the screen door and started down the steps.

"Bring it here! Bring it here!" called Mrs. Mortimer, commandingly.

"It's for Lydia," said Mrs. Emery, looking at the address. She spoke with an accent of dramatic intensity, and a flush rose to her fair cheeks.

Her olive-skinned daughter looked at her and laughed. "What did you expect?"

"But he didn't care enough about her coming home to be in town to-day!" Mrs. Emery's maternal vanity flared up hotly.

Mrs. Mortimer laughed again and began taking the layers of crumpled wax-paper out of the box. "Oh, that was the trouble with you, was it? That's nothing. He had to be away to see about a new electrical plant in Dayton. Did you ever know Paul Hollister to let anything interfere with business?" This characterization was delivered with an intonation that made it the most manifest praise.

Her mother seconded it with unquestioning acquiescence. "No, that's a fact; I never did."

Mrs. Mortimer in her turn had an accent of dramatic intensity as she cried out, "Oh! they are American Beauties! The

biggest I ever saw!"

The two women looked at the flowers, almost awestruck at their size.

"Have you a vase?" Mrs. Mortimer asked dubiously.

Mrs. Emery rose to the occasion. "The Japanese umbrella stand."

There was a pause as they reverently arranged the great sheaf of enormous flowers. Then Mrs. Emery began, "Marietta--" She hesitated.

"Well," Mrs. Mortimer prompted her, a little impatiently.

"Do you really think that he--that Lydia--?"

Marietta accepted with a somewhat pinched smile her mother's boundary lines of reticence. "Of course. Did you ever know Paul Hollister to give up anything he wanted?"

Her mother shook her head.

Mrs. Mortimer rose with a "Well, then!" and the air of one who has said all there is to be said on a subject, and again crossed the room toward the door. Her mother drifted aimlessly in that direction also, as though swept along by the other's energy.

"Well, it's a pity he is not here now, anyhow," she said, adding in a spirited answer to her daughter's expression, "Now, you needn't look that way, Marietta. You know yourself that Lydia is very romantic and fanciful. It would be a very different matter if she were like Madeleine Hollister. She wouldn't need any managing."

Mrs. Mortimer smiled at the idea. "Yes, I'd like to see somebody try to manage Paul's sister," she commented.

"They wouldn't *have* to," her mother pointed out, "she's so levelheaded and sane. But Lydia's different. It's part of her loveliness, of course, only you do have to manage her. And she'll be in a very unsettled state for the first week or two after she gets home after such a long absence. The impressions she gets then--well, I wish he were here!"

Mrs. Mortimer waved her hand toward the roses.

"Of course, of course," assented her mother, subsiding peaceably down the scale from anxiety to confidence with the phrase. She looked at the monstrous flowers with the gaze of acquired admiration so usual in her eyes. "They don't look much like roses, do they?" she remarked irrelevantly.

Mrs. Mortimer turned in the doorway, her face expressing an extreme surprise. "Good gracious, no," she cried. "Why, of course not. They cost a dollar and a half apiece."

She did not stop to hear her mother's vaguely assenting reply. Mrs. Emery heard her firm, rapid tread go down the hall to the front door and then suddenly stop. Something indefinable about the pause that followed made the mother's heart beat thickly. "What is it, Marietta?" she called, but her voice was lost in Mrs. Mortimer's exclamation of surprise, "Why it can't be--why, *Lydia!*"

As from a great distance, the mother heard a confused rush in the hall, and then, piercing through the dreamlike unreality of the moment, came the sweet, high note of a girl's voice, laughing, but with the liquid uncertainty of tears quivering through the mirth. "Oh, Marietta! Where's Mother? Aren't you all slow-pokes--not a soul to meet us at the train--where's Mother? Where's Mother? Where's--" The room swam around Mrs. Emery as she stood up looking toward the door, and the girl who came running in, her dark eyes shining with happy tears, was not more real than the many visions of her that had haunted her mother's imagination during the lonely year of separation. At the clasp of the young arms about her face took light as from an inner source, and breath came back to her in a sudden gasp. She tried to speak, but the only word that came was "Lydia! Lydia! Lydia!"

The girl laughed, a half-sob breaking her voice as she answered whimsically, "Well, who did you expect to see?"

Mrs. Mortimer performed her usual function of relieving emotional tension by putting a strong hand on Lydia's shoulder and spinning her about. "Come! I want to see if it *is* you--and how you look."

For a moment the ardent young creature stood still in a glowing quiet. She drank in the dazzled gaze of admiration of the two women with an innocent delight. The tears were still in Mrs. Emery's eyes, but she did not raise a hand to dry them, smitten motionless by the extremity of her proud satisfaction. Never again did Lydia look to her as she did at that moment, like something from another sphere, like some bright, unimaginably happy being, freed from the bonds that had always weighed so heavily on all the world about her mother.

Before she could draw breath, Lydia moved and was changed. Her mother saw suddenly, with that emotion which only mothers know, reminiscences of little-girlhood, of babyhood, even of long-dead cousins and aunts, in the lovely face blooming under the wide hat. She felt the sweet momentary confusion of individuality, the satisfied sense of complete

ownership which accompanies a strong belief in family ties. Lydia was not only altogether entrancing, but she was of the same stuff with those who loved her so dearly. It gave a deeper note to her mother's passion of affectionate pride.

The girl turned with a pretty, defiant tilt of her head. "Well, and how *do* I look?" she asked; and before she could be answered she flew at Mrs. Mortimer with a gentle roughness, clasping her arms around her waist until the matron gasped. "*You* look too good to be true--both of you--if you are such lazybones that you wouldn't go to the station to meet the prodigal daughter!"

"Well, if you will come on an earlier train than you telegraphed--" began Mrs. Mortimer, "Everybody's getting ready to meet you with a brass band. What did you do with Father?"

The girl moved away, putting her hands up to her hat uncertainly as though about to take out the hat-pins. There was between the three a moment of that constraint which accompanies the transition from emotional intensity down to an everyday level. In Lydia's voice there was even a little flatness as she answered, "Oh, he put me in the hack and went off to see about business. I heard him 'phoning something to somebody about a suit. We got through the customs sooner than we thought we could, you see, and caught an earlier train."

Mrs. Emery turned her adoring gaze from Lydia's slim beauty and looked inquiringly at her elder daughter. Mrs. Mortimer understood, and nodded.

"What are you two making faces about?" Lydia turned in time to catch the interchange of glances.

Mrs. Emery hesitated. Marietta spoke with a crisp straightforwardness which served as well in this case as nonchalance for keeping her remark without undue significance. "We were just wondering if now wasn't a good time to show you what Paul Hollister did for your welcome home. He couldn't be here himself, so he sent those." She nodded toward the bouquet.

As Lydia turned toward the flowers her two elders fixed her with the unscrupulously scrutinizing gaze of blood-relations; but their microscopic survey showed them nothing in the girl's face, already flushed and excited by her home-coming, beyond a sudden amused surprise at the grotesque size of the tribute.

"Why, for mercy's sake! Did you ever see such monsters! They are as big as my head! Look!" She whirled her hat from the pretty disorder of her brown hair and poised it on the topmost of the great flowers, stepping back to see the effect and laughing, "They don't look any more like roses, do they?" she added, turning to her mother. Mrs. Emery's answer rose so spontaneously to her lips that she was not aware that she was echoing Marietta. "Good gracious, no; of course not. They cost a dollar and a half apiece."

Lydia neither assented to nor dissented from this apothegm. It started another train of thought in her mind. "As much as all that! Why, Paul oughtn't to be so extravagant! He can't afford it, and I should have liked something else just as--"

Her sister broke in with an ample gesture of negation. "You don't know Paul. If he goes on the way he's started--he's district sales manager for southern Ohio already."

Lydia paid to this information the passing tribute of a moment's uncomprehending surprise. "Think of that! The last time Paul told me about himself he was working day and night in Schenectady, learning the business, and getting--oh, I don't know--fifty cents an hour, or some such starvation wages."

Mrs. Mortimer's bitterly acquired sense of values revolted at this. "What are you talking about, Lydia? Fifty cents an hour starvation wages!"

"Well, perhaps it was five cents an hour. I don't remember. And he worked with his hands and was always in danger of getting shot through with a million volts of electricity or mashed with a breaking fly-wheel or something. He said electricians were the soldiers of modern civilization. I told that to a German woman we met on the boat when she said Americans have no courage because they don't fight duels. The idea!"

She began pulling off her gloves, with a quick energetic gesture. Mrs. Mortimer went on, "Well, he certainly has a brilliant future before him. Everybody says that--" She stopped, struck by her rather heavy emphasis on the theme and by a curious look from Lydia. The girl did not blush, she did not seem embarrassed, but for a moment the childlike clarity of her look was clouded by an expression of consciousness.

Mrs. Emery made a rush upon her, drawing her away toward the door with a displeased look at Marietta. "Never mind about Paul's prospects," she said. "With Lydia just this minute home, to begin gossiping about the neighbors! Come up to your room, darling, and see the little outdoor sitting-room we've had fixed over the porch."

Mrs. Mortimer was not given to bearing chagrin, even a passing one, with undue self-restraint. She threw into the intonation of her next sentence her resentment at the rebuke from her mother. "I still live, you know, even if Lydia has come home!" As Mrs. Emery turned with a look of apology, she added, "Oh, I only wanted to make you turn around so that I could tell you that I am going to bring my two men-folks over here to-night, to the gathering of the clans, and that

I must go home until then. Dr. Melton and Aunt Julia are coming, aren't they?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Lydia. "It doesn't seem to me I can wait to see Godfather. I sort of half-hoped he might be here now."

"Well, *Lydia!*" her mother reproached her jealously.

"Oh, you might as well give in, Mother, Lydia likes the little old doctor better than any of the rest of us."

"He talks to me," said Lydia defensively.

"*We* never say a word," commented Mrs. Mortimer.

Lydia broke away from her mother's close clasp and ran back to her sister. She was always running, as though to keep up with the rapidity of her swift impulses. She held her subtly-curved cheek up to the other's strongly-marked face. "You just kiss me, Etta dear," she pleaded softly, "and stop teasing."

Mrs. Mortimer looked long into the clear dark eyes with an unmoved countenance. Then her face melted suddenly till she looked like her mother. She put her arms about the girl with a fervent gesture of tenderness. "Dear little Lydia," she murmured, with a quaver in her voice.

CHAPTER III

PICKING UP THE THREADS

After she was alone she looked again at the miniature of Lydia. The youthful radiance of the face had singularly the effect of a perfect flower. Mrs. Mortimer glanced at the hat still drooping its wide brim over the rose where Lydia had forgotten it, and stood still in a reverie that had, from her aspect, something of sadness in it. After a moment she sighed out, "Poor little Lydia!"

"What's the matter with Lydia?" asked someone behind her.

She turned and faced a dark, elderly personage, the robust dignity of whose bearing was now tempered with shamefacedness. Mrs. Mortimer's face sharpened in affectionate malice. "What are you doing here at this hour of the morning?" she asked with a humorously exaggerated air of amazement. "No self-respecting man is ever seen in his house during business hours!" She went on, "Oh, I know well enough. You let Mother have her first to make up for her being sick and not able to go to meet her ship; but you can't stay away."

The Judge waved her raillery away with a smile. The physical resemblance between father and daughter was remarkable. "I asked you what was the matter with Lydia," he repeated.

Mrs. Mortimer's face clouded. "Oh, it's a hateful, horrid sort of world we're all so eager to push her into. It's like a can full of angleworms, everlastingly squirming and wriggling to get to the top. I was just thinking that it would be better for her, maybe, if she could always stay a little girl and travel 'round to see things."

"Why, Etta! I tell you *I'm* glad to have Lydia get through with her traveling 'round. Maybe I can see something of her if I hurry up and do it now before your mother gets things going. I won't after that, of course. I never have."

To this his daughter had one of her abrupt, disconcerting responses. "You'd better hurry and do it before you get so deep in some important trial that you wouldn't know Lydia from a plaster image. There are more reasons than just Mother and card parties why you don't see much of her, I guess."

Judge Emery forbore to argue the point. "Where are they now?" he asked.

"Oh, upstairs, out of my way. Mother's usual state of mind about Lydia is more so than ever, I warn you. She thought I wasn't refined enough company."

"Now, Etta, you know your mother never thought any such thing."

"Well, I know she was inconsistent, whatever she thought. While we were here alone she was speculating about Paul Hollister like anything. And yet, because I just happened to mention to Lydia that he is getting on in the world, I got put down as if I'd tried to make her marry him for his prospects."

There was an edge in her voice which her father deprecated, rubbing his shaven chin mildly. He deplored the appearance of a flaw in the smooth surface of harmony he loved to see in his family.

"Well, you know, Marietta, we aim to have everything about right for Lydia. She's all we've got left now the rest of you

are settled."

The deepening of the careworn lines in the woman's face seemed a justification for the undisguised bitterness of her answer. "I don't see why nobody must breathe a word to her about what everybody knows is so. What's the use of pretending that we'd be satisfied or she'd be comfortable a minute if Paul didn't promise to be a money-maker--or at least to have a good income?"

She turned away and walked rapidly down the hall, followed by her father, half apologetic, half reproachful. "Why, Daughter, you don't grudge your sister! We couldn't do so much for you; but we're better off since you were a young lady and we want Lydia to have the benefit."

Mrs. Mortimer paused on the veranda and stood looking in a troubled silence at the broad, well-kept lawn, stretching down to the asphalt street, shaded by vigorous young maples. Her father waited for her to speak, too good a lawyer to spoil by superfluous words the effect of a well-calculated appeal.

Finally she turned to him contritely. "I'm hateful, Dad, and I'm sorry. Of course I don't grudge dear little Lydia anything. Only I have a pretty hard time of it scratching along, and when I'm awfully tired of contriving and calculating how to manage somehow and anyhow, it's hard to come up to the standard of saying everything's lovely that you and Mother want for Lydia."

"Anything the trouble specially?" asked her father guardedly.

"Oh, no; same old thing. Keeping up a two-maid and a man establishment on a one-maid income, and mostly not being able to hire the one maid. There aren't *any* girls to be had lately. It means I have to be the other maid and the man all of the time, and all three, part of the time." She was starting down the step, but paused as though she could not resist the relief that came from expression. "And the cost of living--the necessities are bad enough, but the other things--the things you have to have not to be out of everything! I lie awake nights. I think of it in church. I can't think of anything else but the way the expenses mount up. Everybody's getting so reckless and extravagant and I *won't* go into debt! I'll come to it, though. Everybody else does! We're the only people that haven't oriental rugs now. Why, the Gilberts--and everybody knows how much they still owe Dr. Melton for Ellen's appendicitis, and their grocer told Ralph they owe him several hundred dollars--well, they have just got an oriental rug that they paid a hundred and sixty dollars for. Mrs. Gilbert said they 'just *had* to have it, and you can always have what you have to have.' It makes me sick! Our parlor looks so common! And the last dinner party we gave cost--" She detected a wavering in her father's attention, as though he were listening for sounds inside the house, and broke off abruptly with a hurt and impatient "Oh, well, no matter!" and ran down the steps.

Judge Emery called after with a relieved belittling of her complaints, "Oh, if that's all you mean. Why, that's half the fun. I remember when you were a baby your mother did the washings so that we could have a nurse to take you out with the other children and their nurses."

Mrs. Mortimer was palpably out of earshot before he finished his exhortation, so he wasted no more breath but turned back eagerly in response to a call from Lydia, who came skimming down the hall. "Oh, Daddy dearest, it's a jewel of a little sitting-room, the one you fixed up for me--and Mother says we can serve punch there the night of my coming-out party."

Mrs. Emery was at her heels. Her husband laughed at his wife's expression, and drew her toward him. "Here, Mother, stop staring at Lydia long enough to welcome me home, too." He bent over her and rubbed his cheek against hers. "Come, tell me the news. Are you feeling better?" He gave her a little playful push toward the door of the parlor. "Here, let's go in and visit for a while. I'm an old fool! I can't do any work this morning. I kept Lydia from telling me a thing all the way from New York, so that we could hear it together."

Lydia protested. "Tell you! After those monstrous great letters I've written! There's nothing you don't know. There's nothing much to tell, anyhow. I've been museumed and picture-galleried, and churched, and cultured generally, till I'm full--up to there!" She drew her hand across her slim white throat and added cheerfully, "But I forgot the most of that the last three months in Paris. Nearly every girl in the party was going home to come out in society, and of course we just concentrated on clothes. You don't mind, do you?"

As she hesitated, with raised eyebrows of doubt, her mother, heedless of what she was saying, was suddenly overcome by her appealing look and drew her close with a rush of little incoherent tender cries choked with tears. It was as though she were seeing her for the first time. Judge Emery twice tried to speak before his husky voice was under control. He patted his wife on the shoulder. "There, there, Mother," he said vaguely. To Lydia he went on, "You've been gone quite a while, you know, and--well, till you have a baby-girl of your own I guess you won't have much notion of how we feel."

Lydia's dark eyes filled, responsive to the emotion about her. "I'm just about distracted," she cried. "I love everybody and everything so, I can't stand it! I want to kiss you both and I can't make up my mind which to kiss first--and it's that

way about everything! It's all so good I don't know what to begin on." She brought their faces together and achieved a simultaneous kiss with a shaky laugh. "Now, look here! If we stand here another minute we'll all cry. Come and show me the house. I want to see every single thing. All the old things, and all the new ones Mother's been writing about." She seized their hands and pulled them into the parlor. "I've been in this room already, but I didn't see it. I don't believe I even touched the floor when I walked, I was so excited. Oh, it's lovely--it's lovely!"

She darted about the room like a humming-bird, recognizing what was familiar with fond little exclamations. "Oh, that darling little wicker chair!--the picture of the dog!--oh! oh! here's my china lamb!" and crying out in admiration over new acquisitions.

"Oh, Mother, what a perfectly lovely couch--sofa--what do you call it? Why, it is so beautifully *different*! Wherever did you get that?"

Mrs. Emery turned to her husband. "There, Nathaniel, what did I tell you?" she triumphed.

"That's one of your mother's latest extravagances," explained Judge Emery. "There's a crazy fad in Endbury for special handmade furniture. Maybe it's all right, but I can't see it's so much better than what you buy in the department stores. Grand Rapids is good enough for me."

"He doesn't like the man who made it," said Mrs. Emery accusingly.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Lydia, rubbing her hand luxuriously over the satin-smooth, lusterless wood of the sofa's high back.

Judge Emery replied, with his laugh of easy, indifferent tolerance for everything outside the profession of the law, "Oh, I never said I didn't like him; I only said he struck me as a crack-brained, self-willed, conceited--"

Lydia laughed. She thought her father's dry, ironic turns very witty.

"I never saw anything conceited about him," protested Mrs. Emery, admitting the rest of the indictment.

Judge Emery sat down on the sofa in question and pulled his tie into shape. "Well, folks are always conceited who find the ordinary ways of doing things not good enough for them. Lydia, what do you think of this tie? Nobody pays a proper attention to my ties but you."

"I've brought you some beauties from London," said Lydia. Then reverting with a momentary curiosity to the subject they had left, "Whatever does this man do that's so queer?"

"Oh, he's just one of the back-to-all-fours faddists," said her father.

"Back-to-all-fours?" Lydia was dim as to his meaning, but willing to be amused.

"That's just your father's way," exclaimed Mrs. Emery, who had not her daughter's fondness for the Judge's tricks of speech.

"He lives as no Dago ditch-digger with a particle of get-up-and-get in him would be willing to," said Judge Emery finally.

Lydia turned to her mother.

"Why, it's nothing that would interest you in the least, dear," said the matron, taking in admiringly Lydia's French dress. "Only for a little while everybody was talking about how strangely he acted. He was an insurance man, like Marietta's husband, and getting on finely, when all of a sudden, for no reason on earth, he threw it all up and went to live in the woods. Do you mean to say you only paid twenty dollars for that dress?"

"In the woods!" repeated Lydia.

"Yes; the real woods. His father was a farmer, and left him--why you know, you've been there ever so many times--the Black Rock woods, the picnic woods. He has built him a little hut there and makes his furniture out of the trees."

Lydia's passing curiosity had faded. "Not quite twenty, even--only ninety-two francs," she at last answered her mother's question. "You never saw anything like the bargains there in summertime. Well, I should think your carpenter man *was* crazy." She glanced down with satisfaction at the hang of her skirt.

"Oh, not dangerous," her mother reassured her; "just socialistic, I suppose, and all that sort of thing."

"Well, who's crazier than a socialist?" cried her father genially. He added, "Where are you going, Daughter?"

Lydia stopped in the doorway, with a look of apology for her lack of interest in their talk. "I thought I'd just slip into the hall and see if there's anything new there. There's so much I want to see--all at once."

Her fond impatience brought her parents forward with a start of pleasure, and the tour of inspection began. She led them from one room to another, swooping with swallow-like motions upon them for sudden caresses, dazzling them

with her changing grace. She liked it all--all--she told them, a thousand times better than she remembered. She liked the new arrangement of the butler's pantry; she loved the library for being all done over new; she adored the hall for being left exactly the way it was. The dining-room was the best of all, she declared, with so much that was familiar and so much that was new. "Only no sideboard," she commented. "Have they gone out of fashion while I was away?"

Mrs. Emery, whose delight at Lydia's approval had been mounting with every breath, looked vexed. "I knew you'd notice that!" she said. "We tried so hard to get the new one put in before you got back, but Mr. Rankin won't deliver a thing till it's just so!"

"Rankin!" cried Lydia, stopping so short in one of her headlong rushes across the room that she gave the impression of having encountered an invisible obstacle, "Who's that?"

"Oh, that's the crazy cabinet-maker we were talking about. The one who--"

"Why, I've met a Mr. Rankin," said Lydia, with more emphasis than the statement seemed to warrant.

"It's a common enough name," said her mother, struck oddly by her accent.

"But here, in Endbury. Only it can't be the same person. He wasn't queer; he was awfully nice. I met him once when a crowd of us were out skating that last Christmas I was home from school; the time when you and Father were in Washington and left me at Dr. Melton's with Aunt Julia. I used to see him there a lot. He used to talk to the doctor by the hour, and Aunt Julia and I were doing that set of doilies in Hardanger work and we used to sit and sew and count threads and listen."

"That's the one," said her father. "Melton has one of his flighty notions that the man is something wonderful."

"But he wasn't queer or anything then!" protested Lydia. "He never talked to me any, of course, I was such a kid, but it was awfully interesting to hear him and Godfather go on about morals, and the universe, and the future of man, and such--I never heard such talk before or after--but it can't be that one!" Lydia broke off to marvel incredulously at the possibility. "He was--why, he was awfully nice!" she fell back on reiteration to help out her affirmation.

"They say there's queer blood in the family, and I guess he's got his share," Judge Emery summed up and dismissed the case with a gesture of finality. He glanced up at a tall clock standing in the corner, compared its time with his watch, exclaimed impatiently, "Slow again!" and addressed himself with a householder's seriousness to setting it right.

A new aspect of the matter they had been discussing struck Lydia. "But what does he--what do people do about him?" she asked.

This misty inquiry was as intelligible to her mother as a cipher to the holders of a key. "Oh, he's very nice about that. He has dropped out of society completely and keeps out of everybody's way. Of course you see him when he comes to set up a piece of his furniture or to take an order, but that's all. And he used to be so popular!" The regret in the last clause was that of a thrifty person before waste of any kind. "I understand he still goes to Dr. Melton's a good deal, but that just counts him in as one of the doctor's collection of freaks; it doesn't mean anything. You know how your godfather goes on about--" She broke off to look out the window. "Oh, Lydia! your trunks are here. Quick! where are your keys? It seems as though I couldn't wait to see your dresses!" She hurried to the door and vanished.

Lydia did not stir for a moment. She was looking down at the table, absorbed in watching the dim reflections of her pink finger-tips as she pressed them one after another upon the dark polished wood. Her father opened the door of the clock with a little click, but she did not heed it. She drew her hand away from the table and inspected her finger-tips intently, as though to detect some change in them. When her father closed the clock-door and turned away she started, as though she had forgotten his presence. Her gaze upon him gave him an odd feeling of wonder, which he took to be apologetic realization that he had spent a longer time oblivious of her than he had meant. His explanation had a little compunction in it. "I have a time with that pendulum always. I can't seem to get it the right length!"

Lydia continued to look at him blankly for a moment. Then she drew a long breath and took an aimless step away from the table. "Well, if that isn't too queer for anything!" she exclaimed.

Judge Emery stared. "Why, no; it's quite common in pendulum clocks," he told her.

CHAPTER IV

THE DAWN

The morning after her return from Europe, Lydia awoke with a start, as though in answer to a call. The confusion of the last days had been such that she had for a moment the not uncommon experience of an entire blankness as to her whereabouts and identity. Realization of where and who she was came back to her with much more than the usual neutral relief at slipping into one's own personality as into the first protection available against the vague horror of nihilism. After an instant's uncomfortable wandering in chaos, Lydia found herself with a thrill of exultation. She was not negatively relieved that she was somebody; she rejoiced to find herself Lydia Emery. She pounced on her own personality with a positive joy which for a moment moved her to a devout thanksgiving.

It all seemed, as she said to herself, too good to be true--certainly more than she deserved. Among her unmerited blessings she quaintly placed being herself, but this was the less naive in that she placed among her blessings nearly everything of which she was conscious in her world. Her world at this time was not a large one, and every element in it seemed to her ideal. Her loving, indulgent father, who always had a smile for her as he looked up over his newspaper at the table, and who, though she knew he was too good to be wealthy, always managed somehow to pay for dresses just a little prettier than other girls' clothes; her devoted, idolizing mother, whose one thought was for her daughter's pleasure; her rich big Brother George in Cleveland, whom she saw so seldom, but whose handsome presents testified to an affection that was to be numbered among the objects of her gratitude; good, sharp-tongued Sister Etta, who said such quick, bright things and ran her house so wonderfully; Aunt Julia, dear, dear Aunt Julia, whose warm heart was one of Lydia's happiest homes, and Aunt Julia's brother, Dr. Melton--ah, how could anyone be grateful enough for such an all-comprehending, quick-helping, ever-ready ally, teacher, mentor, playmate, friend and comrade as her godfather!

As she lay in her soft white bed and looked about her pretty room with an ineffable sense of well-being, it seemed to her that everything that had happened to her was lovely and that the prospect of her future could contain only a crescendo of good-fortune. It was not that she imagined for herself a future remarkably different in detail from what was the past of the people about her. Even now at what she felt was the beginning of the first chapter, she knew the general events of the story before her; but this morning she was penetrated with the keenest sense of the unfathomable difference it made in those events in that they were about to happen to her. She had been passively watching the excited faces of people hurling themselves down-hill on toboggans, but now she was herself poised on the crest of the slope, tense with an excitement not only more real, but somehow more vital to the scheme of things, than that felt by other people who had made the thrilling trip before her.

She lay still for a few moments, luxuriating in the innocent egotism of this view of her future, which was none the less absorbing for being so entirely unterrifying, and then sprang up, impatient to begin it. No one else in the house was awake. She saw with surprise that it was barely five o'clock. She wondered that she felt so little sleepy, since she had been up late the night before. All the family and connections had gathered, and she had talked with an eager breathlessness and had listened as eagerly to pick up all those details of home news which do not go into letters; those insignificant changes and events that make up the physiognomy of an existence, without which one cannot again become an integral part of a life once familiar. It had been a fatiguing, illuminating evening.

A change of mood had come in the night. As she dressed she felt that, in some way, neither the fatigue nor the illumination had lasted on through the blankness of her sound young sleep. She felt restlessly fresh and vigorous, like a creature born anew with the morning light, and she did not feel herself as yet an integral part of the busy, absorbing life to which she had returned. The countless tendrils of Endbury feelings, standards, activities, brushed against her, but had not as yet laid hold on her. Europe had never been more real to her young-lady eyes than an immense World's Exposition, rather overwhelmingly full of objects to be inspected, and now, here in Ohio, even that impression was dim and remote. But so, also, was Endbury; she had left the one, she had not yet arrived at the other. She felt herself for the moment in a neutral territory that was scarcely terrestrial.

The silent house was a kingdom of delight to be rediscovered. She wandered about it, enchanted with the impressions which her solitude gave her leisure to savor and digest. She threw open a window, and was struck with the sweet freshness of the morning air, as though it were a joy new in the history of the world. She looked out on the lawn, with its dew-studded cobwebs, and felt her heart contract with pleasure. When she stepped out on the veranda, the look of the trees, the breath of the light wind across her cheek, the odor of dawn, all the indefinable personality of that early hour was like an enchantment about her.

She ran out to her favorite arbor and plucked one of the heavy clusters of purple grapes, finding their cool acidity an exquisite surprise. She raised her face to the sky with wonder. She had never, it seemed to her, seen so pure yet colorful a sky. The horizon was still faintly flushed with the promise of a dawn already fulfilled in the fresh splendor of the sunbeams slanting across the fresh splendor of her own youth.

Never again did Lydia see the things she saw that morning. Never again did she have so unquestioningly the happy child's conception of the whole world as magically centered in indulgent kindness about herself. As she looked up the clean, empty street stretching away under the shade of its thrifty young trees, it seemed made only to lead her forward into the life for which she had been so long preparing herself. Endbury, with its shops, its bustle of factories so

unmeaning to her, the great bulk of its inexplicable "business," existed only as the theater upon the stage of which she was to play the leading role in the drama of life--she almost consciously thought of it in those terms--which, after some exciting and pleasurable incidents and a few thrilling situations, was to have a happy ending, none the less actual to her mind because lost in so vague a golden shimmer. Her father's house, as familiar to her as her hand, took on a new and rich dignity as the background for the unfolding of that wonderful creature, herself; that unknown, future, grown-up self, which was to be all that everyone who loved her expected, and more than she in her inexperience knew how to expect.

She was in a little heaven, made up of the most ingenuous aspirations, the innocence of which seemed to her a guarantee of their certain fulfillment. Her fervent desire to be good was equal to and of the same quality as her desire to be a successful debutante. It would make her family so happy to have her both. These somewhat widely diverging aims were all a part of the current of her life, the impulse to be what those she loved would like to have her. It was not that she was willing to give up her own individuality to gratify the impulse, but rather that she did not for an instant conceive of the necessity for such a sacrifice. It was part of her immense happiness that she had always loved to be what it pleased everyone to have her, and that, apparently, people wished to have her only what she wished to be. She was like a child guarded by her elders from any knowledge of forbidden food. All the goodies of which she had ever heard were hers for the asking. In such a carefully arranged nursery it would be perversity to doubt the everlasting quality of the coincidence between one's desires and one's obedience. It was no more remarkable a coincidence than that both dew and sunshine were good for the grass over which she now ran lightly to another corner of the grounds about her parents' house. Here, just outside the circle of deep shade cast by an exuberantly leaved maple, she stood for a moment, her hands full of grapes, her eyes wandering about the green, well-kept double acres called diversely in the family "the grounds" (Mrs. Emery's name) and "the yard." Lydia always clung to her father's name; she had very little inborn feeling for the finer shades of her mother's vocabulary. Mrs. Emery rejoiced in the careless unconsciousness of the importance of such details, but she felt that Lydia should be cautioned against going too far. It was one of the girl's odd ways to be fond of the few phrases left over in the Emery dictionary from their simpler earlier days. She always called the two servants "the girls" or "the help" instead of "the maids," spoke of the "washwoman" instead of the "laundress," and, as did her father, called the man who took care of the grounds, ran the furnace, and drove the Emery's comfortable surrey, the "hired man" instead of the "gardener" or the "coachman," or, in Mrs. Emery's elegantly indefinite phrase, "our man."

Lydia explained this whimsical reaction rather incoherently by saying that those nice old words were so much more fun than the others, and in spite of remonstrance she clung to her fancy with so lightly laughing an obstinacy that neither she nor anyone suspected it of being a surface indication of a significant tendency.

She had occasionally other droll little ways of differing from the family, which were called indulgently "Lydia's notions." Her mother would certainly have thus named this flight out into the early morning. She would have found extravagant, and a little disconcerting, the completeness of Lydia's content in so simple a thing as standing in the first sunshine of an early morning in September, and she would have been unquestionably disturbed, perhaps even a little alarmed, by the beatific expression of Lydia's face as she gazed fixedly up into the sky, the tempered radiance of which was as yet not too bright for her clear gaze.

All the restless joy of a few minutes before, which had driven her about from one delight to another, fused under the sun's first warmth into a trance-like quiet. She stood still in the sunshine, a slow flush, like a reflection of dawn, rising to her cheeks, her lips parted, her eyes bright and vacant. An old person coming upon her at this moment would have been painfully moved by that tragic pity which age feels for the unreasoning joy of youth. She looked a child, open-eyed and breathless before the fleeting beauties of a bubble, most iridescent when about to disappear.

It was a man by no means old who swung suddenly into sight around the corner, walking swiftly and noiselessly upon the close-cut grass, and the startled expression with which he found himself close to Lydia was by no means one of pity. He fell back a step, and in the instant before the girl was aware of his presence his gaze upon her was that of a man dazzled by an incredible vision.

She brought her eyes down to him, and for the space of a breath the expression was hers as well. The sunlight glowing about them seemed the reflection of their faces. Then, for a moment longer, though mutual recognition flashed into their eyes, they did not speak, looking at each other long and seriously.

Finally, with a nymph-like stir of all her slender body, Lydia roused herself. "Well, I can speak--can you?" she asked whimsically. "Don't you remember me?"

The man drew a long breath and took off his cap, showing close-cropped auburn hair gleaming, like his beard, red in the sun. "You took my breath away!" he exclaimed.

"What was the matter with me?" asked Lydia, prettily confident of a compliment to follow.

It came in so much less direct a form than she had expected that before she recognized it she had returned it with naive

impulsiveness.

"I didn't think you could be real," said the man, "you looked so exactly the way this glorious morning made me feel."

"Why, that's just how you looked to me!" she cried, and flushed at the significance of her words.

Before her confusion the other turned away his quiet gray eyes, and said lightly, "Well, that's because we are the only people in all the world with sense enough to get up so early on a morning like this. I've been out tramping since dawn."

Lydia explained herself also. "I just couldn't sleep, it seemed so lovely. It's my first morning home, you know."

"Is it?" responded the man, with a vagueness he made no effort to conceal.

It came over Lydia with a shock that he did not know she had been away. She felt hurt. It seemed ungracious for anyone in Endbury not to have missed her, not to share in the joyful excitement of her final return. "I've been in Europe for a year," she told him, with a dignity that was a reproach.

"Oh, yes, yes; I remember now hearing Dr. Melton speak of it," he answered, with no shade of apology for his forgetfulness. He looked at her speculatively, as if wondering what note to strike for the continuation of their talk. Apparently he decided on the note of lightness. "Well, you're the most important person there is for me to-day," he told her unexpectedly.

Lydia arched her dark eyebrows inquiringly. She was always sensitively responsive, and now had forgotten, like a sweet-tempered child, her momentary pique.

He smiled suddenly, moved, as people often were, to an apparently irrelevant tenderness for her. His voice softened into a playfulness like that of a person speaking to an imaginative little girl. "Why, didn't you learn in school that all wise old nations have the belief that the first person you meet after you go out in the morning decides the fortune of the day for you? Now, what kind of a day are you going to give me?"

Lydia laughed. "Oh, you must tell first! You forget you're the first person I've seen this morning. I'll see what I can do for you after I've seen what you are going to do for me." She added, with a solemnity only half jocular, "But it's ever so much more important in my case, for you're the first person I meet as I begin my life in Endbury. Think what a responsibility for you! You ought to give me something extra nice beside, for not remembering me any better and never noticing that I had been away." She broke into a sunny mitigation of her own severity, "But you can have some grapes, even if you are not very flattering."

The man took the cluster she held out to him, but only eyed them as he answered, "Oh, I remember you very well. You're a niece of Mrs. Sandworth's, or of her husband's, and Mrs. Sandworth is Dr. Melton's sister. You're the big-eyed little girl who used to sit in a corner and sew while the doctor and I talked, and now," he brought it out rotundly, "you've been to Europe for a year, and you're grown-up."

Lydia hung her head laughingly at his good-natured caricature. "Well, but I *have*, really and truly," she protested, "all of that. And I just guess you haven't had two such interesting things happen to you in such a short time as--" She stopped short, struck dumb by a sudden recollection. "Oh, I beg your pardon," she murmured; "I forgot about what they said you had--"

Her expression was so altered, she looked at him with so curious a change from familiarity to strangeness, that his steady eyes wavered a moment in startled surprise. "What's that?" he asked sharply; "I didn't catch what you said."

"Why, nothing--nothing--only they were telling me yesterday about how you--why, it just came over me that you *had* had a great deal happen to you this last year, as well as I."

He looked a relieved and slightly annoyed comprehension of the case. "Oh, that!" he summed it up for her with a grave brevity. "I have lost my father, and I have started life on a new footing during the past year."

Lydia fumbled for words that would be applicable and not wounding. "I was so sorry to hear that--about your father, I mean. And about the other--it must be very--*interesting*, I'm sure."

His silence and enigmatic gaze upon her moved her to a fluttered fear lest she seem ungracious. She added, with a droll little air of letting him see that she was not of the enemy, "I do hope some day you'll tell me all about it; it sounds so romantic."

The young man gave an inarticulate sound, and stroked his ruddy beard to conceal a smile. "It's not," he said briefly. He put his cap back on his head and looked down the street as though his thoughts were already away.

His lack of responsiveness came, Lydia thought, from her having wounded his feelings. "Oh, I'm sure you must have some good reason for doing such a *queer* thing," she said hurriedly. Then, appalled by the words on which the haste of her good intentions had carried her, "Oh, I mean that it's very brave, heroic, of you to have the courage--perhaps something very sad happened to you, and to forget it you--"

The other broke into the laugh he had been trying to suppress. His gray eyes lighted up brilliantly with his mirth. "You're very kind," he said, "you're very kind, but rather imaginative. It doesn't take any courage; quite the reverse. And it's not a picturesque way of doing a retreat from active life. I hope and pray that it's to be a way of getting into it."

The girl's face of bewilderment at his tone moved him to add, a ripple of amusement still in his voice, "Ah, don't try to make me out. I don't belong in your world, you know; I'm real."

Lydia continued to look at him blankly. The obscurity of his remarks was in no way lessened by this last addition, but he vouchsafed no further explanation. "You've given me my breakfast," he said, holding up the grapes; "I mustn't keep you any longer from yours."

He waited for a moment for Lydia to respond to this speech, struck by a sudden realization that it might sound like an unceremonious hint to her to retire, rather than the dismissal of himself he intended. When she made no answer, he turned away with a somewhat awkward gesture of leave-taking. Lydia looked after him in silence.

CHAPTER V

THE DAY BEGINS

She watched him until he was out of sight, and although the vigorous, rhythmic swing of his broad shoulders was like another manifestation of the morning's joyous, buoyant spirit, it did not move her to a responsive alertness. After he had turned a corner, she lowered her eyes to the cluster of grapes she still held; a moment after, without any change in expression, she relaxed her grasp on them and let them fall, turning away and walking soberly back to the house. The dew had already disappeared from the grass. There was now no hint of the dawn's coolness; the day had begun.

Her father met her at the door with an exclamation about her early hours. He would really see something of her, he said, if she kept up this sort of thing. It would be too good to be true if he could breakfast with her every morning. Whereupon he rang for the coffee and unfolded his newspaper. Lydia did not notice his absorption in the news of the day, partly because she was trained from childhood up to consider reading the newspaper as the main occupation of a man at home, but more because on this occasion she was herself preoccupied. When Mrs. Mortimer came in on an errand and was prevailed upon to sit down for some breakfast with her father and sister, there was a little more conversation.

Mrs. Emery had not come down stairs. A slight indisposition which she had felt for several days seemed to have been augmented by the excitement of Lydia's return. She had slept badly, and was quite uncomfortable, she told her husband, and thought she would stay in bed and send for Dr. Melton. It seemed foolish, she apologized, but now that Lydia was back, she wanted to be on the safe side and lose no time. After these facts had been communicated to her older daughter, Mrs. Mortimer asked, "How in the world does it happen that you're up at this hour?"

Lydia answered that she had been inspecting the yard, which she had not seen the day before. She described quite elaborately her tour of investigation, without any mention of her encounter with her early caller, and only after a pause added carelessly, "Who do you suppose came along but that Mr. Rankin you were all talking about yesterday?"

Judge Emery laid down his paper. "What under the sun was he prowling about for at that hour?"

"He wasn't prowling," said Lydia. "He was fairly tearing along past the house so fast that he 'most ran over me before I saw him. I'd forgotten he is so handsome."

"Handsome!" Mrs. Mortimer cried out at the idea. "With that beard!"

"I like beards, sometimes," said Lydia.

"It makes a man look like a barbarian. I'd as soon wear a nose-ring as have Ralph wear a beard."

"Why, everybody who is anybody in Europe wears a beard, or a mustache, anyhow," opposed Lydia. "I got to liking to see them."

"Oh, of course if they do it in Europe, we provincial stay-at-homes haven't a word to say." Mrs. Mortimer had invented a peculiar tone which she reserved for speeches like this, the neutrality of which gave a sharper edge to the words.

"Now, Marietta, that's mean!" Lydia defended herself very energetically; "you know I didn't say it for that." There was a moment's pause, of which Marietta did not avail herself for a retraction, and then Lydia went on pensively, "Well, he may be handsome or not, but he's certainly not very polite."

"He didn't say anything to you, did he?" asked her father in surprise, laying down the paper he had raised again during the passage between the sisters.

Lydia hastily proffered an explanation. "He couldn't help speaking; he almost ran into me, you know. I was standing under the maple tree in the corner as he came around from Garfield Avenue. He just took off his cap and said good morning, and what a fine day it was, and a few words like that."

"I don't see anything so impolite in that. Perhaps he wasn't European in his manners," suggested Mrs. Mortimer dryly. She had evidently arisen in the grasp of a mood, not uncommon with her, when an apparently causeless irritability drove her to say things for which she afterward suffered an honest but fruitless remorse. Dr. Melton had recently evolved for this characteristic of hers one of the explanations which the Emerys found so enigmatic. "Marietta," he said critically, "is in a perpetual state of nervous irritation from eye-strain. She has naturally excellent and normal eyesight, but she has always been trained to wear other people's spectacles. It puts her out of focus all the time, and that makes her snappy."

She had answered explicitly to this vague diagnosis, "Nonsense! The thing that makes me snappy is the lack of an oriental rug in our parlor."

"You're looking at that through Mrs. Gilbert's magnifying glasses," suggested the doctor.

"I'm not looking at it at all, and that's the trouble," Marietta had assured him.

"Absence makes the heart--" the doctor had the last word.

Lydia tried this morning at breakfast to obtain the same advantage over her sister. She flushed with a mixture of emotions and tried in a resentful silence to think of some definable cause for her accusation against Rankin's manners. Finally, "Well, I gave him a bunch of grapes, and he never so much as said thank you. He just took them and marched off."

"Perhaps he doesn't like grapes," suggested Mrs. Mortimer, grim to the last.

After breakfast, when Mrs. Mortimer and her father disappeared, Lydia found herself with a long morning before her. The doctor telephoned that he could not come before noon. Judge Emery, after his proprietary good-by kiss, advised her to be quiet and rest. She looked a little pale, he thought, and he was afraid that, after her cool ocean voyage, she would find the heat of an Ohio September rather trying. Indeed, as Lydia idled for a moment over the dismantled breakfast table she was by no means moved to activity. Dark shades were everywhere drawn down and the house was like a dimly-lighted cave, but through this attempt at protection the sun was making itself felt in a slowly rising, breathless, moist heat.

Lydia climbed the stairs to her mother's room. She was looking forward to a long visit, but finding the invalid asleep she turned away from the door rather blankly. She was as yet too much a stranger in her own home to have at hand the universal trivial half-dozen unfinished tasks that save idle women from the perils of uninterrupted thought. The ribbons were all run in her pretty underwear; she owed no notes to anyone, because she had been at home too short a time to have received any letters; her hair had been washed the last day on the steamer, and her new dresses needed no mending. Her trunks had been unpacked the day before by her mother's competent hands, which had also arranged every detail of her tasteful room until to touch it would disturb the effect.

Lydia began to experience that uneasy, unsettling discomfort that comes to modern people in ordinary modern life if some unusual circumstance throws them temporarily on their own resources. She lingered aimlessly for some time at the head of the stairs, and then, leaning heavily against the rail, began to descend slowly, one step at a time, to prolong the transit. Where the stairs turned she noticed a stain on the crisp sleeve of her white dress. It came, evidently, from one of the grapes she had eaten that morning under the maple tree. A current of cool air blew past her. It was the first relief from the stagnation of the sultry day and, sitting down on the landing, she lost herself in prolonged meditation.

In the obscurity of the darkened hall she was scarcely visible save as a spot of light showing dimly through the balustrade, and she sat so still that the maid, stepping about below, did not see her. On her part, Lydia noticed but absently this slight stir of domestic activity, nor, after a time, louder but muffled noises from the dining-room. Even when the door to the dining-room opened and quick, light steps came to the foot of the stairs, she did not heed them. A confused, hushed sound of someone busy about various small operations did not rouse her, and it was not until the fall of a large object, clattering noisily on the floor, that she became conscious that someone beside the maid was in the hall. She leaned forward, and saw that the object which had fallen was the newel-post of the stairs. It had evidently been detached from its fastenings by the workman who, with his back to her, now knelt over a tool-box, fumbling among the tools with resultant little metallic clicks.

Lydia ran down the stairs, finger on lip. "Hush! Don't make any more noise than you can help. Mother's still asleep." At his gaze of stupefaction she broke into her charming light laugh, "Why, I always seem to strike you speechless. What's

the matter with me now?"

The other emerged from his surprise with a ready, smiling acceptance of her tone, "I was wondering if I oughtn't to apologize to you--if I should ever see you again--for being so curt this morning. And then you spring up out of the ground before me. Well, so I will apologize. I do. I'm very sorry."

They adopted, as in the first part of their earlier talk, the half-humorous familiarity of people surprised in an unconventional situation, but, in spite of this, the young man's apology was not without the accent of serious sincerity.

Lydia responded heartily in kind. "Oh, it was I who was horrid. And--wasn't it funny--I was just thinking--wondering if I should ever have a chance to try to make you see that I didn't mean to be so--" she hesitated, and fell back on iteration again--"so horrid."

The fashionable Endbury boarding-school had not provided its graduate with any embarrassment of riches in the way of expression for various shades of meaning. He answered, lowering his voice as she did, "Oh, you were all right, but I was most objectionable with my impertinent laugh. I'm sorry."

She challenged his sincerity, "Are you really, really?"

"Oh, really, really," he assured her.

"And you want to do something nice to make it up to me?"

"Anything," he promised, smiling at her as at a child.

"You've promised! You've promised!" She indulged herself in a noiseless hand-clasp. "Well, then, the forfeit is to tell me all about it."

"All about what?"

"Goodness gracious! Don't you remember? That's what we were both horrid about. I asked you to tell me about it, and you--"

He remembered, evidently with an amusement not entirely free from annoyance. "Oh, I'm safe. I'll never see you to tell you."

She sat down on the bottom step and drew her white skirts about her. "What's the matter with right now?" she asked, smiling.

"I've got to earn my living right now," he objected, beginning with a swift deftness to bore a tiny hole.

She was diverted for an instant. "What are you doing to our nice old newel-post?" she asked. "I thought they said you were going to set up the new sideboard."

"Oh, that's no job at all; it's done. Didn't you hear me pushing and banging things around? Now I've the job before me of fitting the very latest thing in newel-posts in place of your old one."

The girl returned to her first attack. "Well, anyhow, if it's a long job, it's all the better. Go ahead and talk at the same time. You won't feel you're wasting time."

Their low-toned talk and the glimmering light of the hall made them seem oddly intimate. Lydia expressed this feeling while Rankin stood looking doubtfully at her, a little daunted by the pretty relentlessness of her insistence. "You see, you're not nearly so much a stranger to me as I am to you. Remember how I sewed and listened. I'm a grown-up little pitcher, and my ears are still large. I was remembering just now, before you came in, how strangely you used to talk to Dr. Melton, and I thought it wasn't so surprising, after all, your doing 'most anything queer."

Rankin laughed as he bent over his tools. "Little pitchers have tongues, too, I see."

Either Lydia felt herself more familiar with her interlocutor than before, or one result of her meditation had been the loss of her excessive fear of wounding his feelings. She spoke now quite confidently, "But, honestly, what in the world did you do it for?"

"It?" He made her define herself.

"Oh, you know! Give up everything--lose your chance in society, and poke off into the woods to be a common--" In spite of her new boldness she faltered here.

He supplied the word, with a flash of mirth. "Don't be afraid to say it right out--even such an awful term as workman, or carpenter. I can bear it."

"I knew it!" Lydia exclaimed. "As I was thinking it over on the stairs just now, I said to myself that probably you weren't a bit apologetic about it; probably you had some queer reason for being proud of yourself for doing it."

He cast a startled look at her. "You're the only person in Endbury with imagination enough to guess that."

"But why? why? why?" she urged him, her flexible eyebrows raised in the eagerness of her inquiry. "I feel just as though I were going to hear the answer to a perfectly maddeningly unanswerable riddle."

He had another turn in his attempt at evasion. "It wouldn't be polite to tell you the answer, for what I'm trying to do is to get out of being what everybody you know thinks is the only way to be--except Dr. Melton, of course."

"What's the matter with 'all the people I know,'" she challenged him explicitly.

He laughed and shook his head. "Oh, I've nothing new to say about them. Everybody has said it, from Ecclesiastes to Tolstoi."

"They never say anything about just ordinary folks in Endbury that I know."

Rankin looked at her whimsically. "Oh, *don't* they?"

"*Do* they?" Lydia wondered at the possibility. Presently she brought out, as a patently absurd supposition, "You don't mean to say that Endbury people are wicked?"

"Do you think that none but wicked people are written about in serious books? No; Lord, no! I don't think they are wicked--just mistaken."

"What about? Now we're getting warm. I'll guess in a minute."

He looked a little sadly down at her bright, eager face. "I'm afraid you would never guess. It's all gone into your blood. You breathe it in and out as you live, every minute."

"What? what? what? You can't say it, you see, when it comes right down to the matter."

"Oh, yes, I can; I can ask you if it wouldn't be a tragedy if they should all be killing themselves to get what they really don't want and don't need, and starving for things they could easily have by just putting out their hands."

Lydia's blankness was immense.

He said, with ironic triumph: "You see, when I do say it you can't make anything out of it." After this he turned for a time all his attention to his work.

He had evidently reached a critical point in his undertaking. Lydia watched in silence the deft manipulations of his strong, brown fingers, wondering at the eager, almost sparkling, alertness with which he went from one step to another of the process that seemed unaccountably complicated to her. After he had finally lifted the heavy piece of wood into place, handling its great weight with assurance, and had submitted the joint to the closest inspection, he gave a low whistle of satisfaction with himself, and stepped back to get the general effect. As he did so he happened to glance at the girl, drooping rather listlessly on the stair. He paused instantly, with an exclamation of dismay.

"No; I'm not going to cry," Lydia told him with a very small smile, "but it would serve you right if I did."

The workman wiped his forehead and surveyed her in perplexity. "What, can I do for you?" he asked.

"If you're really serious in asking that," said Lydia with dignity, "I'll tell you. You can take for granted that I am not an idiot or a child and talk to me sensibly. Dr. Melton does. And you can tell me what you started out to--the real reason why you are a common carpenter instead of in the insurance business. Of course if you think it is none of my concern, that's another matter. But you said you would."

Rankin looked a little abashed by the grave seriousness of this appeal, although he smiled at its form. "You speak as though I had my reason tied up in a package about me, ready to hand, out."

Lydia said nothing, but did not drop her earnest eyes.

He thrust his hands into his pockets and returned this intent gaze, a new expression on his face. Then picking up a tool, and drawing a long breath, he said, with the accent of a man who takes an unexpected resolution: "Well, I *will* tell you."

He returned to his work, tightening various small screws under the railing, speaking, as he did so, in a reasonable, quiet tone, with none of the touch of badinage which had thus far underlain his manner to the girl. "It's very simple--nothing romantic or sudden about it all. I did not like the insurance business as I saw it from the inside, and the more I saw of it, the less I liked it. I couldn't see how I could earn my living at it and arrive at the age of forty with an honest scruple left. Not that the insurance business is, probably, any worse than any other--only I knew about it from the inside. So far as I could guess the businesses my friends were in weren't very different. At least, I didn't think I could improve things by changing to them. Also, it was going to grow more and more absorbing--or, at least, that was the way it affected the older men I knew--so that at forty I shouldn't have any other interests than getting ahead of other people in the line of insurance.

"Now, what was I to do about it? I can't make speeches, and nobody but crack-brained soreheads like me would listen to them if I did. I'm not a great philosopher, with a cure for things. But I didn't want to fight so hard to get unnecessary things for myself that I kept other people from having the necessities, and didn't give myself time to enjoy things that are best worth enjoying. What could I do? I bothered the life out of Dr. Melton and myself for ages before it occurred to me that the thing to do, if I didn't like the life I was in, was to get out of it and do something harmless, at least, if I didn't have gumption enough to think of something worth while, that might make things better.

"I like the cabinet-maker's trade, and I couldn't see that practicing it would interfere with my growing all the honest scruples that were in me. Oh, I know that it's the easiest thing in the world for a carpenter to turn out bad work for the sake of making a little more money every day; I haven't any illusions about the sanctity of the hand-crafts. But, anyhow, I saw that as a maverick cabinet-maker I could be pretty much my own master. If I had strength of mind enough I could be honest without endless friction with partners, employers, banks, creditors, employes, and all the rest of the spider web of business life. At any rate, it looked as though there were a chance for me to lead the life I wanted, and I had an idea that if I started myself in square and straight, maybe after a little while I could see clearer about how to help other people to occupations that would let them live a little as well as make money, and let them grow a few scruples into the bargain.

"You see, there's nothing mysterious about it--nor interesting. Just ordinary. I'm living the way I do because I'm not smart enough to think of a better way. But one advantage of it is that I have a good deal of time to think about things. Maybe I'll think of a way to help, later. And, anyway, just to look at me is proof that you don't *have* to get ground up in the hopper like everybody else or shut the door of the industrial squirrel-cage on yourself in order not to starve. Perhaps that'll give some cleverer person the courage to start out on his own tangent."

Lydia drew a long breath at the conclusion of this statement. "Well--" she said, inconclusively; "*well!*" After a pause she advanced, "My sister's husband is in the insurance business."

"You see," said the workman, drilling a hole with great rapidity, "you see I ought not to talk to you. I can't without being impolite."

Lydia seemed in no haste to assure him that he had not been. She pulled absently a loose lock of hair--a little-girl trick that came back to her in moments of abstraction--and looked down at her feet. When she looked up, it was to say with a bewildered air, "But a man has to earn his living."

Rankin made a gesture of impatience, and stopped working to answer this remark. "A living isn't hard to earn. Any healthy man can do that. It's earning food for his vanity, or his wife's, that kills the average man. It's coddling his moral cowardice that takes the heart out of him. Don't you remember what Emerson says--Melton's always quoting it--'Most of our expense is for conformity to other men's ideas? It's for cake that the average man runs in debt.' He must have everything that anyone else has, whether he wants it or not. A house ever so much bigger and finer than he needs, with ever so many more things in it than belong there. He must keep his wife idle and card-playing because other men's wives are. He must have his children do what everyone else's children do, whether it's bad for their characters or not. Ah! the children! That's the worst of it all! To bring them up so that these futile complications will be essentials of life to them! To teach them that health and peace of mind are not too high a price for a woman to pay for what is called social distinction, and that a man must--if he can get it in no other way--pay his self-respect and the life of his individuality for what is called success--"

Lydia broke in with a sophisticated amusement at his heat. "Why, you're talking about Newport, or the Four Hundred of New York--if there is any such thing! The rest of America--why, any European would say we're as primitive as Aztecs! They do say so! Endbury's not complicated. Good gracious! A little, plain, middle-western town, where everybody that is anybody knows everybody else!"

"No; it's not complicated compared with European standards, but it's more so than it was. Why, in Heaven's name, should it strain every nerve to make itself as complicated as possible as fast as it can? We're free yet--we're not Europeans so shaken down into a social rut that only a red revolution can get us out of it. Why can't we decide on a rational--" He broke off to say, gloomily: "The devil of it is that we don't decide anything. We just slide along thinking of something else. If people would only give, just once in their lives, the same amount of serious reflection to what they want to get out of life that they give to the question of what they want to get out of a two-weeks' vacation, there aren't many folks--yes, even here in Endbury that seems so harmless to you because it's so familiar--who wouldn't be horrified at the aimless procession of their busy days and the trivial false standards they subscribe to with their blood and sweat."

"My goodness!" broke in Lydia.

The exclamation came from her extreme surprise, not only at the extraordinary doctrine enunciated, but at the experience, new to her, of hearing convictions spoken of in ordinary conversation. The workman took it, however, for a mocking comment on his sudden fluency. He gave a whimsical grimace, and said, as he began picking up his tools,

"Ah, I shouldn't have given in to you. When I get started I never can stop." His expression altered darkly. "But I hate all that sort of thing so! I *hate* it!"

Lydia shrank back from him, startled, but aroused. "Well, I hate hate!" she cried with energy. "It's horrid to hate anything at all, but most of all what's wrong and doesn't know it's wrong. That needs help, not hate."

He had slung his tool-box on his shoulder before she began speaking, and now stood, ready for departure, looking at her intently. Even in the dim light of the hall she was aware of a wonderful change in his face. She was startled and thrilled by the expression of his eyes in the moment of silence that followed.

Finally, "You've given me something to remember," he said, his voice vibrating, and turned away.

CHAPTER VI

LYDIA'S GODFATHER

Lydia stood where he left her, listening to the sound of his footsteps die down the walk outside. She was still standing there when, some time later, the door to the dining-room behind her opened and a tiny elderly man trotted across the hall to the stairs. Lydia recognized him before he saw that she was there, so that he exclaimed in surprise and pleasure as she came running toward him, her face quivering like a child's about to weep.

"Oh, dear Godfather!" she cried, as she flung herself on him; "I'm so glad you've come! I never wanted so much to see you!"

He was startled to feel that she was trembling and that her cheek against his forehead, for she was taller than he, was burning hot. "Good gracious, my dear!" he said, in the shrill voice his size indicated, "anybody'd think you were the patient I came to see."

His voice, though high, was very sweet--a quality that made it always sound odd, almost foreign, in the midst of the neutral, colorless middle-western tones about him. He spoke with a Southern accent, dropping his *r*'s, clipping some vowels and broadening others, but there was no Southern drawl in the clicking, telegraphic speed of his speech. He now looked up at his tall godchild and said without a smile: "If you'll kindly come down here where I can get at you, I'll shake you for being so foolish. You needn't be alarmed about your mother."

Lydia recoiled from the little man as impulsively as she had rushed upon him. "Why, how *awful*!" she accused herself, horrified. "I'd *forgotten* Mother!"

Dr. Melton took off his hat and laid it on the hall shelf. "I will climb up on a chair to shake you," he continued cheerfully, "if already, in less than twenty-four hours, you're indulging in nerves, as these broken and meaningless ejaculations seem to indicate."

He picked up a palm-leaf fan, lost himself in a big hall-chair, and began to fan himself vigorously. He looked very hot and breathless, but he flowed steadily on.

"I can't diagnose you yet, you know, without looking at you, the way I do your mother, so you'll have to give me some notion of what's the occasion of these alternate seizures and releases of a defenseless Lilliputian godfather." He made a confident gesture toward the upper part of the house with his fan. "About your mother--I know without going upstairs that she is floored with one or another manifestation of the great disease of social-ambitionitis. But calm yourself. It's not so bad as it seems when you've got the right doctor. I've practiced for thirty years among Endbury ladies. They can't spring anything new on me. I've taken your mother through doily fever induced by the change from table-cloths to bare tops, through portiere inflammation, through afternoon tea distemper, through *art-nouveau* prostration and mission furniture palsy, not to speak of a horrible attack of acute insanity over the necessity for having her maids wear caps. I think you can trust me, whatever dodge the old malady is working on her."

He had run on volubly, to give Lydia time to recover herself, his keen blue eyes fixing her, and now, as she wavered into something like a smile at his chatter, he shot a question at her with a complete change of manner: "But what's the matter with *you*?"

Lydia started as though he had suddenly clapped her on the shoulder. "I--why, I--just--" she hesitated, "why, I don't know what *is* the matter with me." She brought it out with the most honest surprise in the world.

Dr. Melton's approval of this answer was immense. "Why, Lydia, I'm proud of you! You're one in a thousand. You'll

break the hearts of everyone who knows you by turning out a sensible woman if you don't look out. I don't believe there's another girl in Endbury who would have had the nerve to tell the truth and not fake up a headache, or a broken heart, or *Weltschmerz*, or some such trifle, for a reason." He pulled himself up to his feet. "Of course, you don't know what's the matter with you, my dear. *I do. I know everything, and can't do a thing. That's me!* Physically, you're upset by Endbury heat after an ocean voyage, and mentally it's the reaction caused by your subsidence into private life after being the central figure of the returned traveler. Last evening, now, with that mob of friends and the family pawing at you and trying to cram-jam you back into the Endbury box and shut the lid down--*that* was enough to kill anybody with a nerve in her body. What's the history of the morning? I hope you slept late."

Lydia shook her head. "No; I was up ever so early.--Marietta came over to borrow the frames for drying curtains, and stayed to breakfast."

Something about her accent struck oddly on the trained sensitiveness of the physician's ear. Her tone rang empty, as with something kept back.

"Marietta's been snapping at you," he diagnosed rapidly.

"Well, a little," Lydia admitted.

The doctor laid the palm-leaf fan aside and took Lydia's slim fingers in both his firm, sinewy hands. "My dear, I'm going to do as I have always done with you, and talk with you as though you were a grown-up person and could take your share in understanding and bearing family problems. Your sister Marietta is not a very happy woman. She has too many of your father's brains for the life she's been shunted into. She might be damming up a big river with a finely constructed concrete dam, and what she is giving all her strength to is trying to hold back a muddy little trickle with her bare hands. The achievement of her life is to give on a two-thousand-a-year income the appearance of having five thousand like your father. She does it; she's a remarkably forceful woman, but it frets her. She ought to be in better business, and she knows it, though she won't admit it. So, don't you mind if she's sharp-tongued once in a while. It's when she feels the muddy water oozing through her fingers."

He fancied that Lydia's eyes on his were a little blank, perhaps absent, and broke off with a short laugh. He was quite hardened to the fact that people never understood his fanciful metaphors, but Lydia, as a child, had used to have a curious intuitive divination of his meaning. After his laugh he sighed and turned the talk.

"Well, and has Flora Burgess been after you to get your impression of Endbury as compared with Europe? Your mother said she wanted an interview with you for next Sunday's *Society Notes*."

Lydia smiled. The subject was an old joke with them. "No; she hasn't appeared yet. I haven't seen her--not since my birthday a year ago, the time she described the supper-table as a 'glittering, scintillating mass of cut-glass and silver, and yet without what could really be called ostentation.' Isn't she delicious! How is the little old thing, anyway?"

"Still trotting industriously about Endbury back yards sowing the dragon's teeth of her idiotic ideas and standards."

"Oh, I remember, you don't like her," said Lydia. "She always seems just funny to me--funny and pathetic. She's so dowdy, and reverential to folks with money, and enjoys other people's good times so terrifically."

"She's like some political bosses--admirable in private life, but a menace to the community just the same."

Lydia laughed involuntarily, in spite of her preoccupation. "Flora Burgess a menace to the community!"

The doctor turned away and began to mount the stairs. "Me and Cassandra!" he called over his shoulder in his high, sweet treble. "Just you wait and see!"

He disappeared down the upper hall, finding his way about the darkened house with a familiarity that betokened long practice.

Lydia sat down on the bottom step to wait for his return. The clock in the dining-room struck twelve. It came over her with a clap that but half a day had passed since she had run out into the dawn. For an instant she had the naive, melodramatic instinct of youth to deck out its little events in the guise of crises. She began to tell herself with gusto that she had passed some important turning-point in her life; when, as was not infrequent with her, she lost the thread of her thought in a sudden mental confusion which, like a curtain of fog, shut her off from definite reflection. Complicated things that moved rapidly always tired Lydia. She had an enormous capacity for quiet and tranquillity. Today she felt that more complicated things were moving rapidly inside her head than ever before--as though she had tried to keep track of the revolutions of a wheel and had lost her count and could now only stare stupidly at the spokes, whirling till they blended into one blur. What was this Endbury life she had come back to? What in the world had that man been talking about? What a strange person he was! How very bright his eyes were when he looked at you--as though he were, somehow, seeing you more than most people did. What did the doctor mean by all that about Marietta? It had never occurred to her that the life of anyone about her might have been different from what it was. What else was there for people to do but what everybody else did? It was all very unsettling and, in this heat and

loneliness, daunting.

Through this vague discomfort there presently pierced a positive apprehension of definite unpleasantness. She would have to tell her mother that she had spent the whole morning talking to Mr. Rankin, and her mother would be cross, and would say such--Lydia remembered as in a distant dream her supreme content with life of only a few hours earlier. It seemed a very bewildering matter to her now.

Ought she so certainly to tell her mother? She lingered for a moment over this possibility. Then, "Oh, of course!" she said aloud, flushing with an angry shame at her moment's parley with deceit.

She heard her mother's door open and turned to see the doctor running down the stairs, his wrinkled little face very grave. "You were right, Lydia, to be anxious about your mother, and I am an old fool! There is no fool like a fluent fool! I'm afraid she's in for quite a siege. There's no danger, thank Heaven! but I don't believe she can be about for a month or more. I'm going to 'phone for a trained nurse. Just see that nobody disturbs her, will you?"

He darted away, leaving Lydia leaning against the newel-post, gasping. The clock in the dining-room chimed the quarter-hour. She cried out to herself, as she climbed the stairs heavily, that she could not stand it to have things happen to her so fast. If all Endbury days were going to be like this one--

She was for a moment brought to a standstill by a realization of depths within herself that she had not dreamed of. She realized, horrified, that on hearing the doctor's verdict her first thought--gone before it was formulated, but still her first thought--had been one of relief that now she need not tell her mother.

It had not occurred to her at all, nor did it now, that she either should or should not tell her father.

CHAPTER VII

OUTSIDE THE LABYRINTH

The Black Rock woods lay glowing under the cloudy autumn sky like a heap of live coals, the maples still quivering in scarlet, the chestnuts sunk into a clear yellow flame, the oaks, parched by the September heat, burnt out into rusty browns. Above them, the opalescent haze of October rose like a faint blue smoke, but within the woods the subdued light was richly colored, like that which passes through the stained glass of a great cathedral. The first of the fallen leaves lay in pools of gold in the hollows of the brown earth, where the light breezes had drifted them.

It was, for the moment, singularly quiet, so, that, as Lydia walked quickly along the footpath, the pleasant rustle of her progress was the only sound she heard. Under a large chestnut she paused, gathering her amber-colored draperies about her and glancing uncertainly ahead to where the path forked. She looked a yellow leaf blown by some current of the air unfelt by the rest of the forest and caught against the rough bark of the tree. After hesitating for a moment, she drifted slowly along the right-hand path, looking about her with dreamy, dazzled eyes. From time to time, she stopped and lifted her face to the light and color above her, and once she stood a long time leaning against a tree, stirring with the tip of her parasol a heap of burning maple leaves. Under her drooping hat her face was almost vacant in a wide beatitude of harmony with the spirit of day. When she walked on again it was with a lighter and lighter step, as though the silence had come to have a lovely meaning for her which she feared to disturb.

The path turned sharply after passing through a thicket of ruddy brambles, and she found herself in a little clearing which the haze of the upper air descended to fill. The yellow chestnuts stood in a ring about the sunburnt grass. It was like a golden cup filled with some magic, impalpable draught.

Through this she now saw a rough little house, brown as an oak leaf, with a wide veranda, under which, before a work-bench, sat Daniel Rankin. His tanned arms moved rhythmically backward and forward, but his ruddy head was high, and his eyes, roving about the leafy walls of the clearing, caught sight of Lydia as soon as she had turned the corner. She stopped short, with a startled gesture, on the edge of the woods, but remained standing quietly while Rankin sprang up from his seat and walked toward her smiling.

"Oh, Miss Emery," he called welcomingly. "I didn't recognize you for a minute. Every once in a while a young lady or a child loses her way from a picnic in the woods and stumbles into my settlement. I always have to hurry to show them there's no danger of the wild man who lives in that house eating them up." He came up to her now, and put out his hand with a frank pleasure.

"I wasn't afraid," said Lydia; "I was startled for a minute, but I knew right away it must be your house. You described it

to me, you know."

"It's very much flattered that you remember its portrait," said the owner. "Won't you honor it some more by sitting down in its veranda for a while? Or must I take you back to your picnic party at once?"

Lydia moved on, looking about her at the piles of boards, half hidden by vines, at the pool of clear water welling up through white sand in front of the house, and at the low rough building, partly covered with woodbine ruby-red against the weather-beaten wood.

"My picnic party's gone home," she explained. "It was only Marietta and her little boy, anyhow. My sister thought it was going to rain, and took the quickest way home. I told Marietta I'd walk across and take the Garfield Avenue trolley line. I must have taken a wrong turn in the path."

They had reached the veranda now, and Lydia sank into the chair which Rankin offered her. She smiled her thanks silently, her face still steeped in quiet ecstasy, and for a long time she said nothing. The quick responsiveness that was at all times her most marked characteristic answered this rare mood of Nature with an intensity almost frightening in its visible joy.

Rankin also said nothing, looking at her reflectively and stroking his close-clipped red beard. Above the faded brown of his work-shirt, his face glowed with color. In the silent interval of the girl's slow emergence from her reverie, his gaze upon her was so steady that when Lydia finally glanced up at him he could not for a moment look away. The limpid unconsciousness of her eyes changed into a startled look of inquiry, as though he had spoken and she had not understood. Then a flush rose to her cheeks, she looked down and away in a momentary confusion, moved in her chair, and began to talk at random.

"So this is where you live. It's lovely. It looks like a fairy story--the little house in the wood, you know--nothing seems real to-day--the woods--it makes me want to cry, they are so beautiful. I've been wondering and wondering what outdoors was looking like. You know poor Mother is sick, and though she's not so awfully sick, and of course we've a trained nurse for her, still I've had to be housekeeper and I haven't had time to breathe. The second girl left right off because of the extra work she thought sickness would make, but it seems to me we've had a million new second girls in the three weeks. It's been awful! I haven't had time to get out at all or to see anybody."

She was quite herself now, and confided her troubles with a naive astonishment, as though they were new to humanity.

"Yes; I've heard ladies say before that it's quite awful," agreed her companion gravely. He swung himself up to sit on his work-bench, his long legs stretched before him, just reaching the ground. "Envy me," he went on, smiling; "I don't have to have a second girl, or a first one, either."

"What *do* you do?" asked Lydia, not waiting, however, for an answer, but continuing her relieved outpouring of her own perplexities. "It's perfectly desperate at home. I haven't had a minute's peace. This afternoon I just got wild, and said I *would* get away from it for a minute, and just ran away. Father's nice about it, but he does look something fierce when he comes home and finds another one left. He says that Mother doesn't have to change more than two or three times a year!" She presented this as the superlative of stability.

Rankin laughed again. Lydia felt more and more at her ease. He was evidently thinking of her pretty looks and ways rather than of what she was saying, and, like all of her sisterhood, this was treatment which she thoroughly understood. For the moment she forgot that he was the man who had startled and almost shocked her by his unabashed presentation, in a conversation with a young lady, of ideas and convictions. She leaned back in her chair and put on some of the gracefully imperious airs of regnant American young-ladyhood. "You must show me all about how you live, and everything," she commanded prettily. "I've been so curious about it--and now here I am."

She was enchantingly unconscious of the possibility of her having seemed to seek him out. "What a perfectly beautiful piece of wood you have in that chair-back." She laid her ungloved, rosy finger-tips on a dark piece of oak. "And so this is where you work?"

"I work everywhere," he told her. "I do all that's done, you see."

"You must have to walk quite a ways to get your meals, don't you?" Lydia turned her white neck to glance inside the house.

Rankin's mouth twitched humorously. "You'll never understand me," he said lightly. "I get my meals myself, here."

Lydia turned on him sharply. "You don't *cook*!" she cried out.

"And wash dishes, and make my bed, and sweep my floor, and, once in a great while, dust."

The romantic curiosity died out of the girl's eyes into a shocked wonder. She glanced at his large brown hands, and seemed about to speak. Nothing came from her lips finally, however, beyond the pregnant "Well!" which seemed the only expression in her vocabulary for extreme surprise. Rankin threw back his head, showing a triangle of very white

throat above his loose collar, and laughed aloud. The sound of his mirth was so infectious that Lydia laughed with him, though half uneasily.

"It's so funny," he explained, "to see the picture of myself I gather from your shocked and candid eyes. I'm so used to my queer ideas nowadays that I forget that what seems perfectly natural to me still seems perfectly crazy to others."

"Well, not *crazy*." Lydia proffered this negation in so halting an accent that Rankin burst into another peal of laughter. "But it must be horrid for you to wash dishes and cook!" protested Lydia, feeling resentful that her inculcated horror of a man's "lowering himself" to woman's work should be taken with so little seriousness. She tried to rearrange a mental picture which the other was continually destroying. "But I suppose it's very picturesque. You cook over an open fire, I imagine."

There was a humorous glint in his eye, "I cook over the best brand of oil-stove that money can buy," he told her, relentlessly, watching her wince from the sordid image. "I have all the conveniences I can think of. All I'm trying to do is to get myself fed with the least expenditure of gray matter and time on my part, and as things are now arranged in this particular corner of the country I find I can do it best this way. It's more work trying to persuade somebody who doesn't want to wait on me than to jump up and do it myself. Also, having brains, I can certainly cook like a house afire."

At this, Lydia was overcome by that openness to conviction from unexpected sources which gave her mother one of her great anxieties for her. "Well, honestly, do you know," she said unexpectedly, "there is a lot in that. I've thought ever so many times in the last two weeks that if Father would let me wait on the table, for instance, I could get on ever so much easier."

"And I'll just warrant," the man went on, "that I've had more time to myself lately than you have, for all I've my living to earn as well as the housework."

"My goodness!" cried Lydia, repudiating the comparison. "That needn't be saying much for you, for I haven't had a minute--not even to sit with Mother as much as I ought."

"What did you have to do that kept you from that?"

"Oh, you're no housekeeper, that's evident, or you wouldn't ask. A man *never* has any idea about the amount of work there is to do in a house. Why, set the table, and sweep the parlors, and change the flower vases, and dust, and pick up, and dust--I don't know what makes things get so dusty. We've got an awfully big house, you know, and of course I want to keep everything as nice as if Mother were up. Everybody expects me to do that!"

"I had a great-aunt," began Rankin with willful irrelevancy, "a very wonderful old woman who taught me most of what I value. She was considered cracked, so maybe that's why I am a freak, and she was as wise as wise! And she had stories that fitted every occasion. One that she used to tell was about a farmer cousin of hers, who had a team of spirited young horses that he was breaking. Everybody warned him that if they ever ran away they'd be spoiled for life, and he got carefuller and carefuller of them. One day he and his father were haying beside a river, and the father, who couldn't swim a stroke, fell in. The horses were frightened by the splash and began to prance, and the son ran to their heads, beside himself with fear. The old man came to the top and screamed, 'Help! help!' and the son answered, fairly jumping up and down in his anguish of mind over his poor old father's fate, 'Oh, help, somebody! Somebody come and help! I can't leave my horses!'"

He stopped. Lydia slid helplessly into the naive question, "Well, did his father drown?" before the meaning of the little parable struck her. She began to laugh, with her gay, sweet inability to resent a joke made at her own expense. "Don't you think you are a good hand at sermon-making!" she mocked him. "It's all very well to preach, but just you tell me what you would have done in my place."

"I should have left those big rooms, filled with things to dust, and let the dust lie on them--even such an awful thing as that!"

Lydia considered this with honest surprise. "Why, do you know, it never occurred to me I could do that!"

Rankin nodded. "It's a common hallucination," he explained. "I've had it. I have to struggle against it still."

"Hallucination?"

"The notion that you belong to the things that belong to you."

Lydia looked at him sidewise out of her clear dark eyes. She was beginning to feel more at home in his odd repertory of ideas. "I wonder," she mused, "if that's why I always feel so much freer and happier in old clothes--that I don't forget that they're for me and I'm not for them. But really, you know, dressmakers and mothers and folks get you to thinking that you are for clothes--you're made to show them off." Rankin vouchsafed no opinion as to this problem of young-ladyhood. "Here's your sister's rain," he said instead, pointing across the clearing, where against the dark tree-trunks fine, clear lines slanted down to the dry grass. Lydia rose in some agitation. "Why, I didn't really think it would rain! I

thought it was just Marietta's--" She glanced down in dismay at her thin low shoes and the amber-colored silk of her ruffled skirt.

Rankin stood up eagerly. "Ah, I've a chance to do you a service. Just step in, won't you, a moment and let me skirmish around and see what a bachelor's establishment can offer to a beautiful young lady who mustn't get wet."

Lydia moved into the wide, low room, saying deprecatingly, "It wouldn't hurt *me* to get wet, you know. But this dress just came from Paris, and I haven't had a chance to show it to anybody yet."

Rankin laughed, hastening to draw up a chair before the hearth, where a few embers still glowed, their presence explained by the autumnal chill which now struck sharply across the room from the open door as the rain began to patter on the roof. The girl looked about her in silence, apparently with surprise.

"Well, how do you like it?" asked the master of the house, throwing some dry twigs on the fire so that the flame, leaping up, lighted the corners, already dusky with the approach of evening. "It's not very tidy, is it?" He began rummaging in a recess in the wall, tumbling out coats and shoes and hats in his haste. Finally, "There!" he cried in triumph, shaking out a rain-coat, "That will keep your pretty French finery dry."

He turned back to the girl, who was sitting very straight in her chair, peering about her with wide eyes and a strange expression on her face. "Why, what's the matter?" he asked.



"YOU SAY BEAUTIFUL THINGS!" HE REPLIED QUIETLY. "MY ROUGH
QUARTERS ARE GLORIFIED FOR ME."

Lydia stood up, with a quick indrawn breath. "I don't know," she said, "what it is. It seems as though I'd been here before. It looks so familiar to me--so good--" She went closer to where, still holding out the rain-coat, he stood on the other side of a table strewn with papers. She leaned on this, fingering a pen and looking at him with a shy eagerness. She was struggling, as so often, with an indefinable feeling which she had no words to express. "Don't you know," she went on, "every once in a while you see somebody--an old man or woman, perhaps, on the street cars, in the street--and somehow the face goes home to you. It seems as though you'd been waiting to see that face again. Well, it's just

so with this room. It has a face. I like it very--" She broke off, helplessly inarticulate before the confusion of her thoughts, and looked timidly at the man. She was used to kindly, amused laughter when she tried, stumblingly, to phrase some of the quickly varying impressions which made her life so full of invisible incidents.

But Rankin did not laugh, even kindly. His clear eyes were more than serious. They seemed to show him moved to an answering emotion. "You say beautiful things!" he replied quietly. "My rough quarters are glorified for me. I've been fond of them before--they're the background to a good many inward struggles and a considerable amount of inward peace, but now--" He looked about him with new eyes, noting the dull gleam of gold with which the chestnut ceiling answered the searching flicker of the fire, the brighter sparkles which were struck out from the gilded lettering on the books which lined the walls, and the diamond-like flashes from the polished steel of the tools on the work-bench at the other end of the room. There was a pause in which the silence within the house brought out the different themes composing the rich harmony of the rain, the steady, resonant downpour on the roof, the sweet whispers of the dried grass under the torrent, the muted thuddings of the big drops on the beaten earth of the veranda floor, and the hurried liquid overflow of the eaves. It was still light enough to see the fine color of the leather that covered the armchairs, and the glossy black of a piano, heaped with a litter of music. Near the piano, leaning against the wall, a violoncello curved its brown crook-neck over the shapeless bag that sheltered it.

Lydia pointed to it. "You're musical!" she said, as if she had made an important discovery.

Rankin roused himself, followed the direction of her gaze, and shook his head. "No; I can't play a note," he said cheerfully, laying the rain-coat down and going to look over the pile of overshoes in a box; "but I like it. My queer old great-aunt left me that 'cello. It had belonged to her grandfather. I believe being so old makes it quite valuable. The piano belongs to an old German friend of mine who has seen better days and has now no place to keep it. Two or three times a week he comes out here with an old cmony who plays the 'cello, and they make music till they get to crying on each other's necks."

"Do you cry, too?" Lydia smiled at the picture.

Rankin came back to the fire with a pair of rubbers in his hand. "No; I'm an American. I only blow my nose hard," he said gravely.

"Well, it must be lovely!" She sighed this out ardently, sinking back in her chair. "I love music so it 'most kills me, but I don't get very much of it. I took piano lessons when I was little, but there were always so many other things to do I never got time to practice as much as I wanted to, and so I didn't get very far. Anyhow, after I heard a good orchestra play, my little tinklings were worse than nothing. I wish I could hear more. But perhaps it's just as well, Mother says. It always gets me so excited. I'm sure I should cry, along with the Germans."

"They would like that," observed her host, "above everything."

"Father keeps talking about getting one of those player-pianos, but Mother says they are so new you can't tell what they are going to be. She says they may get to be too common."

Rankin looked at her hard. "Would you like one?" He asked this trivial question with a singular emphasis.

"Why, I haven't really thought," said Lydia, considering the matter.

The man looked oddly anxious for her answer.

Finally, "Why, it depends on how much music you can make with them. If they are really good, I should want one, of course."

Rankin smiled, drew a long breath, and fell sober again as if at a sudden thought.

"I don't see any oil-stove," said the girl, skeptically, looking about her.

"Oh, I have a regular kitchen. It's there," he nodded back of him; "and two rooms beside for me and for Dr. Melton or my Germans, or some of my other freak friends when they stay too long and miss the last trolley in to town. Oh, I have lots of room."

"It looks really rather nice, now I'm here and all," Lydia vaguely approved; "though I don't see why you couldn't have gone on more like other folks and just changed some things--not been so *awfully* queer!"

Rankin was kneeling before her, holding out a pair of rubbers. At this remark he sat back on his heels, and began: "My great-aunt said that there was a man in her town who had such a terrible temper that his wife was in perfect terror of him, and finally actually died of fear. Everybody was paralyzed with astonishment when, two or three years after, one of the nicest girls in town married him. People told her she was crazy, but she just smiled and said she guessed she could get along with him all right. Everything went well for a week or two, and then one day he said the tea was cold and not fit for a pig to drink, and threw the cup on the floor. She threw hers down and broke it all to smash. He stared and glared, and threw his plate down. She set her lips and banged her own plate on the hearth. He threw his knife and fork

through the window. She threw hers after, and added the water-pitcher for good measure."

Lydia's astonishment at this point was so heartfelt that the raconteur broke off, laughed, and ended hastily, "I spare you the rest of the dinner-service. The upshot of it was that every dish in the house was smashed and not a word spoken. Then the man called for his carriage (he was a rich man--that sort usually is), drove to the nearest china-store, bought a new set, better than the old, took it back, and lived in peace and harmony with his wife ever after. And here is the smallest pair of rubbers I can find, and I shall have to tie these on!"

Lydia watched the operation in silence. As he finished it and rose to his feet again, "What was that all about?" she inquired simply.

"Compromise," he answered. "There are occasions when it doesn't do any good."

"Does it do such a lot of good to go off in the woods by yourself and do your own cooking?" asked Lydia with something of her father's shrewd home-thrusting accent. "What would happen if everybody did that?"

Rankin laughed. "Everybody'd have a good time, for one thing," he answered, adding, more seriously, "The house of Rimmon may be all right for some people, but *my* head isn't clear enough."

Lydia looked frankly at a loss. She did not belong to the alert, quickly "bluffing" type of young lady. "Rimmon?" she asked.

"He's in the Bible."

"That's a good reason why I've never heard of him," she said ruefully.

"All I meant by him was that people who conform outwardly to a standard they don't really believe in, are in danger of getting most awfully mixed up. And certainly they don't stand any chance of convincing anybody else that there's anything the matter with the standard. What's needed isn't to upset everything in a heap, but to call people's attention to the fact that things could be a lot better than they are. And that's hard to do. And who ever called more people's attention to that fact than an impractical, unbalanced nobleman who took to cobbling shoes for the peace of his soul? There wasn't a particle of sense to what Tolstoi *did*, but--" He stopped, hesitating in an uncertainty that Lydia understood with a touching humility.

"Oh, you needn't explain who Tolstoi is. I've heard of him."

"Well, you mustn't imagine I'm anything like Tolstoi!" cried the young man, laughing aloud at the idea, "for I don't take a bit of stock in his deification of working with your muscles. That was an exaggeration he fell into in his old age because he'd been denied his fair share of manual work when he was young. If he'd had to split kindlings and tote ashes and hoe corn when he was a boy, I bet he wouldn't have thought there was anything so sanctifying about callouses on your hands!"

"Oh, dear! You're awfully confusing to me," complained Lydia. "You always seem to be making fun of something I thought just the minute before you believed in."

Rankin looked intensely serious. "There isn't an impression I'd be sorrier to give you," he said earnestly. "Perhaps the trouble is that you don't as yet know much about the life I've got out of."

"I've lived in Endbury all my life," protested Lydia.

"There may still be something for you to learn about the lives of its men," suggested her companion.

"If you think it's so wrong, why don't you reform it?" Lydia launched this challenge suddenly at him with the directness characteristic of her nation.

"I have to begin with reforming myself," he said, "and that's job enough to last me a long while. I have to learn not to care about being considered a failure by all the men of my own age who are passing me by; and I don't mind confessing to you that that is not always easy--though you mustn't tell Dr. Melton I'm so weak. I have to train myself to see that they are not really getting *up* so fast, but only *scrambling* fast over slipping, sliding stones; and then I have to try to find some firm ground where I can make a path of my own, up which I can plod in my own way."

The tone of the young people, as they talked with their innocent grandiloquence of these high matters, might have been taken for that of a couple deep in some intimate discussion, so honestly serious and moved was it. There was a silence now, also like the pause in a profoundly personal talk, in which they looked long into each other's eyes.

The clock struck five. Lydia sprang to her feet. "Oh, I must hurry on! I told Marietta to telephone home that I'd be there at six."

She still preserved her charming unconsciousness of the unconventionality of her situation. A European girl, brought up in the strictest ignorance of the world, would still have had intuitions to make her either painfully embarrassed or secretly delighted with this impromptu visit to a young bachelor; but Lydia, who had been allowed to read

"everything" and the only compromise to whose youth had been fitful attempts of the family to remember "not to talk too much about things before Lydia," was clad in that unearthly innocence which the advancing tide of sophistication has still left in some parts of the United States--that sweet, proud, pathetic conviction of the American girl that evil is not a vital force in any world that she knows. The young man before her smiled at her in as artless an unconsciousness as her own. They might have been a pair of children.

"You've plenty of time," he assured her. "Though I live so far out of the world, the Garfield Avenue trolley line is only five minutes' walk away. Oh, I'm prosaic and commonplace, with my oil-stove and trolley cars. There's nothing of the romantic reactionary about me, I'm afraid." He wrapped the rain-coat about her and took an umbrella.

"Don't you lock up your house when you go away?" asked Lydia.

"The poor man laughs in the presence of thieves," quoted Rankin.

They stood on the veranda now, looking out into the blue twilight. The rain drummed noisily on the roof and the soft swish of its descent into the grass rose to a clear, sibilant note. The wind had died down completely, and the raindrops fell in long, straight lines like an opaque, glistening wall, which shut them off from the rest of the world. Back of them, the fire lighted up the empty chair that Lydia had left. She glanced in, and, moved by one of her sudden impulses, ran back for a moment to cast a rapid glance about the quiet room.

When she returned to take Rankin's arm as he held the open umbrella, she looked up at him with shining eyes. "I have made friends with it--your living-room," she said.

As they made their way along the footpath, she went on, "When I get into the trolley car I shall think I have dreamed it--the little house in the clearing--so peaceful, so--just look at it now. It looks like a little house in a child's fairy-tale." They paused on the edge of the clearing and looked back at the pleasant glow shimmering through the windows, then plunged into the strip of forest that separated the clearing from the open farming country and the main road to Endbury.

Neither of them spoke during this walk. The rain pattered swiftly, varying its monotonous refrain as it struck the umbrella, the leaves, the little brook that ran beside them, or the stony path. Lydia clung to Rankin's arm, peering about her into the dim caves of twilight with a happy, secure excitement. After her confinement to the house for the last fortnight, merely to be out of doors was an intoxication for her, and ever since she had left her sister and begun her wanderings in the painted woods she had felt the heroine of an impalpable adventure. The silent flight through the dripping trees was a fitting end. Except for breaking in upon the music of the rain, she would have liked to sing aloud.

She thought, flittingly, how Marietta would laugh at her manufacturing anything romantic out of the commonplace facts of the insignificant episode, but even as she turned away from her sister's imagined mocking smile, she felt an odd certainty that to Rankin there was also a glamour about their doings. It was as though the occasional contact of their bodies as they moved along the narrow path were a wordless communication.

He said nothing, but as they emerged upon the long treeless road, stretching away over the flat country to where the lights of Endbury glowed tremulously through the rain, he looked at his companion with a quick intensity, as though it were the first time he had really seen her.

It was that man's look which makes a woman's heart beat faster, even if she is as inexperienced as Lydia. She was already tingling with an undefined emotion, and the shock of their meeting eyes made her face glow. It shone through the half-light as though a lamp had been lighted within.

They stood silently waiting for the car which flashed a headlight toward them far down the track. As it drew near, bounding over the rails, humming like a great insect, and bringing visibly nearer and nearer the end of their time together, Lydia was aware that Rankin was in the grasp of an emotion that threatened to become articulate. The steady advance of the car was forcing him to a speech against which he struggled in vain. Lydia began to quiver. She felt an expectancy of something lovely, moving, new to her, which grew tenser and tenser, as though her nerves were the strings of an instrument being pulled into tune for a melody. Standing there in the cold, rainy twilight, she had a moment of the exultation she had thought was to be so common in her Endbury career. She felt warmed through with the consciousness of being lovely, admired, secure, supremely fortunate, just as she had thought she would feel; but she had not been able to imagine the extraordinary happiness that this, or some unrecognized element of the moment, gave to her.

The car was almost upon them; the blinding glare of the headlight showed their faces with startling suddenness. She saw in Rankin's eyes a tenderness that went to her heart. She leaned to him from the steps of the car to which he swung her--she leaned to him with a sweet, unconscious eagerness. In the instant before the car moved forward, as he stood gazing up at her, he spoke at last.

The words hummed meaningless in Lydia's ears, and it was not until some time after, in the garish white brilliance of the

car, that she convinced herself that she had heard aright. Even then, though she still saw his face raised to hers, the raindrops glistening on his hair and beard, even though she still heard the fervor of his voice, she remained incredulous before the enigma of his totally unexpected words. He had said, with a solemn note of pity in his voice: "Ah, my poor child, I am so horribly, horribly sorry for you!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE SHADOW OF THE COMING EVENT

Judge Emery looked tired and old as he sat down heavily at his dinner-table opposite his pretty daughter. The discomfort and irregularity of the household for the last two weeks had worn on the nerves of a very busy man who needed all of his strength for his work. It seemed an evil fate of his, he reflected as he took his napkin out of its ring, that whenever he was particularly hard-pressed in his profession, domestic turmoil was sure to set in. He was now presiding over a suit between the city and the electric railway company, involving many intricate details of electrical engineering and accounting methods. Until that suit was settled, he felt that it was unreasonable for his family to expect him to give time or attention to anything else.

In the absence of other vital interests in his life, he had come to focus all his faculties on his profession. On the adroitness of clever attorneys he expended the capacity for admiration which, as his life was arranged, found no other outlet; and, belonging to the generation before golf and bridge and tennis had brought games within the range of serious-minded adults, he had the same intent curiosity about the outcome of a legal contest that another man might have felt in the outcome of a Newport tournament. His wife had long ago learned, so she said, that any attempt to catch his mental eye while an interesting trial was in progress was as unavailing as to try to call a street gamin away from a knot-hole in a fence around a baseball field.

She knew him and all his capabilities very well, his wife told herself, and so used was she to the crystallized form in which she had for so many years beheld him, that she dismissed, as typically chimerical "notions," the speculations of her doctor--also a lifelong friend of her husband's--as to what Judge Emery might have become if--the doctor spoke in his usual highly figurative and fantastic jargon--"he had not had to hurry so with that wheel in his cage." "When I first knew Nat Emery," he once said, "he was sitting up till all hours reading *Les Miserables*, and would knock you down if you didn't bow your head at the mention of Thackeray. He might have liked music, too. An American isn't inherently incapable of that, I suppose." At which he had turned on sixteen-year-old Lydia with, "Which would you rather have, Lyddy; a husband with a taste for Beethoven or one that'd make you five thousand a year?" Lydia had shudderingly made the answer of sixteen years, that she never intended to have a husband of any kind whatever, and Mrs. Emery had rebuked the doctor later for "putting ideas in girls' heads." It was an objection at which he had laughed long and loud.

Mrs. Emery liked her doctor in spite of not understanding him; but she loved her husband because she knew him through and through. In his turn, Judge Emery bestowed on his wife an esteem the warmth of which was not tempered by his occasional amusement at her--an amusement which Mrs. Emery was far from suspecting. He did heartily and unreservedly admire her competence; though he never did justice to her single-handed battle against the forces of ignorance and irresponsibility in the kitchen until an illness of hers showed that the combat must be continuous, though his wisdom in selecting an ambitious wife had shielded him, as a rule, from the uproar of the engagement.

This evening, as he looked across the white table-cloth at his daughter, he had a sudden qualm of doubt, not unusual in parents, as to the capacity of the younger generation to carry on the work begun by the older. Of course, he reassured himself, this had scarcely been a fair trial. The child had been plunged into the business the day after her return, with the added complication of her mother's illness; but, even making all allowances, he had been dismayed by the thorough-going domestic anarchy that had ensued. He was partly aware that what alarmed him most was Lydia's lack of zest in the battle, an unwillingness to recognize its inevitability and face it; a strange, apparently willful, blindness to the value of victory. Her father was disturbed by this failure to acquiesce in the normal, usual standard of values. He recalled with apprehension the revolutionary sayings and doings of his second son, which had been the more disconcerting because they flowed from the young reactionary in such a gay flood of high spirits. Harry had no more shared the reverent attitude of his family toward household aesthetics than toward social values. A house was a place to keep the weather from you, he had said laughingly. If you could have it pretty and well-ordered without too much bother, well and good; but might the Lord protect him from everlastingly making omelets to look at and not to eat.

Lydia, to be sure, had ventured no irreverent jokes, and, so far as her father could see, had never conceived them; but a few days before she had suggested seriously, "Why can't we shut up all of the house we don't really use, and not have to take care of those big parlors and the library when you and I are always in the dining-room or upstairs with Mother, now she's sick?"

Judge Emery had thought of the grade of society which keeps its "best room" darkened and closed, of the struggles with which his wife had dragged the family up out of that grade, and was appalled at Lydia's unconscious reversion to type. "Your mother would feel dreadfully to have you do that; you know she thinks it very bad form--very green."

Lydia had not insisted; it ran counter to every instinct in Lydia to insist on anything. She had succumbed at the first of his shocked tones of surprise; but the suggestion had shown him a glimpse of workings in her mind which made him uneasy.

However, to-night there were several cheering circumstances. The doctor had left word that, in all probability, Mrs. Emery would be quite herself in ten days--a shorter time than he had feared. Lydia was really charming in a rose-colored dress that matched the dewy flush in her cheeks; the roast looked cooked as he liked it, and he had heard some warm words that day about the brilliancy of young Paul Hollister's prospects. He took a drink of ice-water, tucked his napkin in the top of his vest--a compromise allowed him by his wife at family dinners, and smiled at his daughter. "Your mother tells me that you've had a letter from Paul, saying that he'll be back shortly," he said with a jocosely significant emphasis. "I suppose we shall hardly be able to get a glimpse of you after he's in town again."

At this point, beginning to carve the roast, he had a sinking premonition that it was going to be very tough, and though he heroically resisted the ejaculation of embittered protest that rose to his lips, this magnanimity cost him so dear that he did not think of Lydia again till after he had served her automatically, dashing the mashed potato on her plate with the gesture of an angry mason slapping down a trowelful of mortar. It seemed to him at the moment that the past three weeks had been one succession of tough roasts. He took another drink of ice-water before he gloomily began on his first mouthful. It was worse than he feared, and he was in no mood to be either very imaginative or very indulgent to a girl's whims when Lydia said, suddenly and stiffly, "I wish you wouldn't speak so about Paul. I don't know what makes everybody tease me so about him!"

Her father was chewing grimly. "I don't know why they shouldn't, I'm sure," he said. "Young folks can't expect everybody to keep their eyes shut and draw no conclusions. Of course I understand Paul's not saying anything definite till now, on account of your being so young."

Something of Marietta's unsparing presentation of facts was inherited from her father, though, under his wife's tutelage, he usually spared Lydia when he thought of it. At this time he was speaking almost absently, his attention divided between the exceptions to his rulings taken by the corporation counsel and the quality of his dinner; both disturbing to his quiet. He finally gave up the attempt at mastication and swallowed the morsel bodily, with a visible gulp. As he felt the consequent dull lump of discomfort, he allowed himself his first articulate protest. "Good Heavens! What meat!"

Lydia had grown quite pale. She pushed back her plate and looked at her father with horrified eyes. "Father! What a thing to say!" she finally cried out. "You make me ashamed to look him--to look anybody in the face. Why, I never dreamed of such a thing! I never--"

Judge Emery was very fond of his pretty daughter, and at this appeal from what he felt to be a very mild expression of justified discontent, he melted at once. "Now, never mind, Lydia, it won't kill me. Only as soon as your mother gets about again, for the Lord's sake have her take you to a butcher shop and learn to select meats."

Lydia looked at him blankly. She had the feeling that her father was so remote from her that she could hardly see him. She opened her lips to speak, but at that moment the maid--the latest acquisition from the employment agency, a slatternly Irish girl--went through the dining-room on her way to answer the door-bell, and her father's amused comment cut her short. "Lydia, you'll have your guests thinking they're at a lunch counter if you let that girl go on wearing that agglomeration of hair."

The maid reappeared, sidling into the room, half carrying, half dragging a narrow, tall green pasteboard box, higher than herself but still not long enough for its contents, which protruded in leafy confusion from one end. "It's for you," she said bluntly, depositing it beside Lydia and retreating into the kitchen.

Lydia looked at it in wonder, turning to crimson confusion when her father said: "From Paul, I suppose. Very nice, I'm sure. Ring the bell for dessert before you open it. Of course you're in a hurry to read the card." He smiled with a tender amusement at the girl, who met his eyes with a look of fright. She opened the box, from which arose a column of strong, spicy odor, almost like something visible, and naively read the card aloud: "To the little girl grown up at last--to the young lady I've waited so long to see."

She laid the card down beside her plate and kept her eyes upon it, hanging her head in silence. Her father began to consume his dessert rapidly. The cream in it was delicious, and he ate with appreciation. To him, as to many middle-

aged Americans, the two vital parts of a meal were the meat and the dessert. The added pleasures or comforting consolations of soup, salads, vegetables, entrees, made dishes, were not for him. He ate them, but with a robust indifference. "Meat's business," he was wont to say, "and dessert's fun. The rest of one's victuals is society and art and literature and such--things to leave to the women."

He now stopped his consumption of his dessert and recalled himself with an effort to his daughter's impalpable difficulties. She was murmuring, "But, Father--you must be mistaken-- Why, nobody so much as hinted at such a--"

"That's your mother's doings. She'd be furious now if she knew I'd spoken right out. But you don't want to be treated like a little girl all your life, do you?" He laughed at her speechless embarrassment with a kind obtuseness to the horror of youth at seeing its shy fastnesses of reserve laid open to indifferent feet. Divining, however, through his affection for her, that she was really more than pleasantly startled by his bluntness, he began to make everything smooth by saying: "There aren't many girls in Endbury who don't envy my little Lydia, I guess. Paul is considered--"

At this point Lydia rose hurriedly and actually ran away from the sound of his voice. She fled upstairs so rapidly that he heard the click of her heel on the top step before he could draw his breath. He laughed uneasily, finished his dessert in one or two huge mouthfuls, and followed her. He was recalled by the ringing of the telephone bell, and when he went upstairs again he was smiling broadly. With his lawyer's caution, he waited a moment outside his wife's room, where he heard Lydia's voice, to see if her mother had hit upon some happy inspiration to quiet the girl's exaggerated maidenly shyness. He had the tenderest indulgence to his daughter's confusion, but he was not without a humorous, middle-aged realization of the extremely transitory nature of this phase of youth. He had lived long enough to see so many blushing girls transformed into matter-of-fact matrons that the inevitable end of the business was already present to his mind. He was vastly relieved that Lydia had a mother to understand her fancies, and upon his wife, whom he would not have trusted to undertake the smallest business transaction without his advice, he transferred, with a sigh of content, the entire responsibility of wisely counseling their daughter. "Thank the Lord, that's not my job!" he had often said about some knotty point in the up-bringing of the children. Mrs. Emery had always answered that she could not be too thankful for a "husband who was not a meddler."

The Judge now listened at the door to the conversation between the two women with a grin of satisfaction.

"Why, my dear, what is there so terrible in having the handsomest and most promising young man in Endbury devoted to you? You don't need to marry him for years and years if you don't want to--or never, if you don't like him enough." She laughed a little, teasingly, "Perhaps it's all just our nonsense, and he never has thought of you in that way. Maybe when he comes to see you he'll tell you about a beautiful girl in Urbana or Cincinnati that he's engaged to--and *then* what would your silly father say?"

"Oh, if I could only think that," breathed Lydia, as though she had been reprieved from a death sentence. "Of course! Father was just joking. But he startled me so!"

"He was probably thinking of his horrid law business, darling. When a big trial is on he wouldn't know me from Eve. He says *anything* at such times."

Judge Emery laughed noiselessly, and quite without resentment at this wifely characterization.

Lydia went on: "It wasn't so much what he said, you know--as--oh, the way he took it for granted--"

"Well, don't think about it any more, dear; just be your sweet natural self when Paul comes to see you the first time--and don't let's talk any more now. Mother gets tired so easily."

Lydia's remorseful outcry over having fatigued her mother seemed a good occasion for Judge Emery's entrance into the room and for his announcement. He felt that she would make an effort to control any agitation she might feel, and indeed, beyond a startled gasp, she made no comment on his news. Mrs. Emery herself was more obviously stirred to emotion. "To-night? Why, I didn't think he'd be in town for several days yet."

"He only got in at five o'clock this afternoon, he said."

The two parents exchanged meaning glances over this chronology, and Mrs. Emery flushed and smiled. "Now, Lydia," she said, "it's a perfect shame I'm not well enough to be there when he comes. It would make it easier for you. But I wish you'd say honestly whether you'd rather have your father there or see Paul alone."

Judge Emery's face took on an aggrieved look of alarm. "Good gracious, my dear! What good would I be? You know I can't be tactful. Besides, I've got an appointment with Melton."

Lydia rose from where she knelt by the bed. Her chin was quivering. "Why, you make me feel so--so queer! Both of you!--As though it were anything--to see Paul--when I've known him always."

Her mother seized on the role opened to them by this speech, and said quickly: "Why, of course! Aren't we silly! I don't know what possesses us. When he comes you just run along and see him, and say your father and I are sorry not to be

there."

During the next half-hour she made every effort, heroically though obviously seconded by her husband, to keep the conversation in a light and casual vein, but when the door-bell rang, they all three heard it with a start. Mrs. Emery said, very carelessly, "There he is, dear. Run along and remember me to him." But she pulled Lydia down to her, straightened a bow on her waist with a twitch, loosened a lock of the girl's shining dark hair, and kissed her with a sudden yearning fervor.

After they were alone, Judge Emery laughed aloud. "You're just as bad as I am, Sarah. You don't *say* anything, but--"

"Oh, I know," his wife said; "I can't help it!" She deliberated unresignedly over the situation for a moment, and then, "It seems as though I couldn't have it so, to be sick just now, when I'm needed so much. This first month is so important! And Lydia's getting such a different idea of things from what I meant, having this awful time with servants, and all. I have a sort of feeling once in a while that she's getting notions!" She pronounced the word darkly.

"Notions?" Judge Emery asked. He had never learned to interpret his wife's obscurities when the mantle of intuitions fell on her.

"Oh, don't ask me what kind! I don't know. If I knew I could do something about it. But she speaks queerly once in a while, and the evening of the day she was out with Marietta in the Black Rock woods she was-- Do you know, I think it's not good for Lydia to be outdoors too much. It seems to go to her head so. She gets to looking like Harry--almost reckless, and like some little scampering wild animal."

Judge Emery rose and buttoned his coat about his spare figure. "Maybe she takes a back track, after some of my folks. You know there's one line in my mother's family that was always crazy about the woods. My grandfather on my mother's side used to go off just as regular as the month of May came around, and--"

Mrs. Emery interrupted him with the ruthless and justifiable impatience of people at the family history of their relations by marriage. "Oh, go along! And stop and speak to Paul on your way out. Just drop in as you pass the door. We don't want to really chaperone her. Nobody does that yet--but--the Hollisters are so formal about their girls--well, you stop in, anyhow. It's borne in on me that that'll look better, after all."

CHAPTER IX

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

In the midst of his conference with Dr. Melton, an hour later, it came upon Judge Emery with a clap that he had forgotten this behest of his wife's, plunged deep in legal speculations as he had been, the instant he turned from her door. He brought his hand down on the table.

"What's the matter?" asked the little doctor, peering up at him.

"Oh, nothing important--women's cobwebs. I'm afraid I'll have to go, though. We can take this up again to-morrow, can't we?"

"At your service," said the doctor; but he pulled with some exasperation at a big pile of pamphlets still to be examined.

"It's something about Lydia's receiving a call from Paul Hollister, and her mother wanting me to stop in as I left the house and say good-evening--sort of represent the family--do the proper thing. Don't it tickle you to see women who used to sleigh-ride from seven to eleven every evening in a little cutter just big enough for one and a half, begin to wonder if they hadn't better chaperone their girls when they have callers in the next room?"

He stirred up the pamphlets with a discontented look. "Confound it, I wish I could stay! Which one of those has the statistics about the accidents when the men aren't allowed one day in seven?"

"See here, Emery!" In spite of his evident wish to exhort, the doctor continued sitting as he spoke. He was so short that to rise could have given him no perceptible advantage over the tall lawyer. "See here; do you know that you have a most unusual girl for a daughter?"

"I have heard people say that I have a glimmering notion of her merits," said the other with a humorous gravity.

"Oh, I don't mean pretty, and appealing, and with a good complexion, and all that--and I don't mean you don't spoil her most outrageously. I mean she's got the oddest make-up for a modern American girl--she's simple."

"I don't see anything odd about her--or simple!" Her father resented the adjectives with some warmth.

Dr. Melton answered with his usual free-handed use of language: "Well, it's because, like everybody else old and spoiled and stodgy and settled, you've no eyes in your head when it comes to something important, like young people. Because they're all smooth and rosy you think they're all alike." He rushed on, delivering himself as always with restless vivacity of gesture, "I tell you youth is one of the most wastefully ignored forces in the world! Talk about our neglecting to get the good out of our water-power! The way we shut off the capacity of youth to see things as they are, before it gets purblind with our own cowardly unreason--why, it's as if we tried to make water run uphill instead of turning our mill-wheels with its natural energy."

Judge Emery had listened to a word or two of this harangue and then had looked for and found his hat and coat, with which he had invested himself, and now stood ready for the street, one hand on the knob of the door. "Well, good-night to you," he said pleasantly, as though the doctor were not speaking; "I'll try to see you to-morrow."

Dr. Melton jumped to his feet, laughing, ran across the room and caught at the other's arm. "Don't blame me. Much preaching of true gospel to deaf ears has made me yell all the time. You know you don't really hear me, any more than anyone else."

"There's no doubt about that, I don't!" acquiesced the Judge frankly.

"I will run on, though I know it never does any good. How'd I begin this time? What started me off? What was I saying?"

"You were saying that Lydia was queer and half-witted," said the Judge moderately.

"I said she was simple--and by that I mean she's so wise you'd better look out or she'll find you out. She's as dangerous as a bomb. She has a scent for essentials. She can tell 'em from all our flummery. I'm afraid of her, and I'm afraid *for* her! Remember the fate of the father in the *Erl-King*! He thought, I dare say, that he was doing a fine thing for his child, to hurry it along to a nice, warm, dry, safe place!"

Judge Emery broke in, impatient of this fantastic word-bandyng. "Oh, come, Melton, I can't stand here while you spin your paradoxes. I've got to get home before young Hollister leaves or my wife won't like it."

"I'll go with you, then," cried the little doctor, clapping on his hat. "You sha'n't escape me that way. I'm in full cry after the best figure of speech I've hit on in months."

"Good Lord!" The lawyer looked down laughingly at his friend as the two set off, a stork beside a sparrow. "You and your figures!"

"It came over me with a bang the other day that in Lydia we have in our midst that society-destroying child in *The Kaiser's New Clothes*."

"Eh?" said Lydia's father blankly.

"You remember the last scene in that inimitable tale? Where the Kaiser walks abroad with all the people shouting and hurrahing for the new clothes, and not daring to trust their own eyes, and suddenly a little child's voice is heard, 'But the Kaiser has nothing on!'"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said the Judge with a patient indifference.

"Well, you will know when you hear Lydia say that some day. She knows--she'll know! Perhaps you've done well to send her to that idiotic finishing school."

"Don't lay it to me!" cried the Judge, laughing; "I didn't send her--or not send her. If you were married you'd know that fathers never have anything to say about what their daughters do."

"More fools they!" rejoined the doctor pointedly. "But in this case maybe it's all right. She's as ignorant as a Hottentot, of course, but perhaps any real education might have spoiled her innate capacity to--"

"Oh, pshaw!" The Judge was vaguely uneasy. "You let Lydia alone. Talk your nonsense about something else. There's nothing queer about Lydia, thank heavens! She's just like all young ladies."

"That's a horrible thing to say about one's own daughter!" cried the doctor, falling immediately into the lightly mournful, satirical vein that was the alternative to his usual racing talk. "There won't be anything queer about her long, that's fact. In real life the child is never really allowed to complete that sentence. A hundred hands are clapped over its mouth, and it's hustled, and shaken, and frightened, and scolded, till it thinks there's something the matter with its eyesight. And Lydia's a sweet, gentle child, who'll want to say whatever pleases people she loves--that'll be another bandage over her eyes. And she's not dowered with an innate fondness for shrieking out contradictions at the top of her voice, and unless you've a real passion for that you get silenced early in life."

The lawyer laughed with the good-natured contempt of a large, silent man for a small, voluble one. "That's a tragedy

you can't know much about from experience, Melton. No cruel force ever silenced you."

He paused at the walk leading to his house. A big street light glowed and sputtered over their heads. "Come in, won't you, and see Lydia?"

"No; no cruel force has ever *silenced* me," the doctor mused, putting his hands slowly into his pockets, "but it has bound me hand and foot. I talk, and I talk, but do you ever see me doing anything different from the worst fools of us all?"

"Are you coming in?" The Judge spoke with his absent tolerance of his doctor's fancies.

"No, thank you, as the farmer said to the steeple-climber. I'm going home to my lonely office to give thanks to Providence that I'm not responsible for a daughter."

The Judge frowned. "Nonsense! Look at Marietta."

"I do," said the doctor.

"Well--?" The lawyer was challenging. In the long run the doctor rubbed him the wrong way.

"I hope you make a better job of bandaging Lydia's eyes than you did hers."

The Judge had turned toward the house. At this he stopped and made an irritated gesture. "Melton, you are enough to give a logical man brain fever. You're always proclaiming that parents have no real influence over their children's lives--that it's fate, or destiny, or temperament--and now--you blame me because Marietta's discontented over her husband's small income."

The doctor looked up quickly, his face twitching. "You think that's the cause of Marietta's discontent? By Heaven, I wish Lydia could go into a convent."

Suddenly his many-wrinkled little face set like a mask of tragedy. "Oh, Nat, you know what Lydia's always been to me--like my own--as precious--Oh, take care of her! take care of her! See, Lydia can't fight. She can't, even if she knew what was going on to fight against--" His voice broke. He looked up at his tall friend and shivered.

Judge Emery clapped him on the shoulder with a rough friendliness. "No wonder you do miracles in curing women, Marius. You must know their insides. You talk like a mother in a fit of the nerves over a sick child. In the Lord's name, what has Lydia to fight against? If there was ever a creature with a happy, successful life before her-- Besides, don't we all stand ready to do her fighting for her?"

Though the night was cool, the doctor took off his hat and wiped his forehead. He looked up once as though he were about to speak, but in the end he only put his hat back on his head, nodded, and went his way, his quick, light, uneven tread waking a faint echo in the empty street.

As the Judge let himself in at the front door, a murmur of voices from the brightly-lighted parlor struck gratefully on his ear. He was not too late. "How are you, Hollister?" he called as he pulled off his overcoat. "Glad to see you back. Let's hear all about the Urbana experience."

Hollister's dramatic interest in each engagement of his battle for success was infectious. Those who knew him, whether they liked him or not, waited for news of the results of his latest skirmish as they waited for the installments of an exciting serial story.

As the older man entered, the tall, quick-moving young fellow came over to the door and shook his hand with energy. The Judge reflected that nobody but Hollister could so convey the effect that he was being made kindly welcome in his own house; but he did not dislike this vigor of personality. He sat down on the chair which his young guest indicated as a suitable one, and rubbed his chin, smiling at his daughter. "Dr. Melton sent his love to you, but he wouldn't come in."

Paul looked brightly at Lydia. "I should hope not! My first evening with her! To share it with anybody! Except her father, of course!" He added the last as an afterthought, more with the air of putting the Judge at his ease than of excusing himself for an ungraceful slip of the tongue.

The Judge laughed, restraining an impulse to call out, "You're a wonder, young man!" and said instead, "Well, let's hear the news."

Lydia said nothing, but her aspect, always vividly expressive of her mood, struck her father as odd. As he glanced at her from time to time during the ready, spirited narrative of the young "captain in the army of electricity," as he had once called himself, Lydia's father felt a qualm of uneasiness. Her lips were very red and a little open, as though she were breathless from some exertion, and a deep flush stained her cheeks. She looked at Paul while he talked animatedly to her father, but when he addressed himself to her she looked down or away, meeting her father's eyes with a curious effect of not seeing him at all. The Judge, moved by the oblique, harassing intimations he had been forced to hear from

the doctor as to the possibility of his not understanding all that was in his daughter's mind, was oppressed by that most nightmarish of emotions for a man of clear-cut intellectual interests--an apprehension, like an imperceptible, clinging cobweb, not to be brushed away. He wished heartily that the next year were over and Lydia "safely married." Daughters were so much more of a responsibility than sons. They forced on one the reality of a world of intangible conditions which one could, somehow, comfortably ignore with sons. And yet, how about Harry? Perhaps if some one had not ignored with him--

"I should have been back ten days ago," Paul drew to the end of his story, "but I simply had to wait to oversee those tests myself. Since I've adopted that rule of personally checking the inspector's work, we've been able to report forty per cent. fewer complaints of newly installed dynamos to the general office. And you see in this case, from the accident, what might have happened."

"By the Lord!" cried the lawyer, moved in spite of his preoccupations by the story of danger the other had been relating, "I should think it would turn your hair white every time a dynamo's installed. How did you feel when the fly-wheel broke?"

"The fly-wheel isn't on the dynamo, of course," corrected Paul, "so I don't feel responsible for it in a business way, and that's everything. As for being frightened, why, it's all over so quickly. You don't have time to take in what's happening. You're there or you're not. And if you are, the best thing is to get busy with repairs," he added, with a simple, manly depreciation of his courage. "You mustn't think it often happens, you know; it's supposed never to."

He spoke of the personal side of the matter with a dry brevity which contrasted effectively with the unconscious eloquence with which he had previously brought before their eyes the tense excitement in the new power-house when the wheels first stir to life in incredibly rapid revolutions and the mysterious modern genii begins to rush through the wires. At no time did Lydia's suitor show to better advantage than in speaking of his profession. The alertness of his face and the prompt decision of his speech suited the subject. His mouth fell into lines of grimly fixed purpose which expressed even more than his words when he spoke of the rivalry in endurance, patience and daring in the army of young electrical engineers, all set, as he was, on crowding one another out of the rapidly narrowing road to preferment and the few great golden prizes of the profession.

This evening he was more than usually fervent. Judge Emery thought he detected in him traces of the same excitement that flamed from Lydia's cheeks. "I tell you, Judge, I was wrong when I spoke of the 'army' of electricity. In the army advancement comes only from somebody's death, and with us it's simply a question of who's got the most to give. He gets the most back--and that's all there is to it. The company's bound to have the man it can get the most work out of. If you can do two ordinary men's work, you get two men's pay. See? There's no limit to the application of that principle. Why, our field organizer on the Pacific Coast is only a little older than I, and, by Jove! the work they say he'll turn off is something marvelous! You wouldn't believe it. But you can train yourself to it, like everything else. To be able to concentrate--not to lose a detail--to put every ounce of your force into it--that's the thing."

He brought one hand down inside the other, and sat for a moment in silence as tense with stirring possibilities to the others as to himself. The Judge felt moved to a most unusual sensation, as if he were a loosened bowstring beside this twanging, taut intensity. He felt slightly dismayed to have his unspoken principles carried to this *n*th power. He had given the best of himself, all his thoughts, illusions, hopes, endeavors, to his ideal of success, but his ambition had never been concentrated enough to serve as a lens through which the rays of his efforts might focus themselves into the single beam of devastating heat on which Paul counted so certainly to burn away the obstacles between himself and success. Various protesting comments rose to his lips, which he kept back, disconcerted to find how much they resembled certain remarks of Dr. Melton's.

The young man stirred, looked at Lydia, and smiled brilliantly. "I mustn't keep this little sick-nurse up any later, I suppose," he said; but for a moment he made no movement to go. He and Lydia exchanged a gaze as long and silent as if they had been alone. It occurred to the Judge that they both looked dazzled. When Paul rose he drew a long breath and shook his head half humorously at his host. "You and I will have to look to our guns, during the next season, to hold our own, won't we? I've been making Lydia promise to reserve me three dances at every single ball this winter, and I think I'm heroic not to insist on more--but her first season--!"

Lydia said, with her pretty, light laugh, a little shaking now, "But suppose you're out of town, setting up some new dynamo or something and your three dances come along?"

Paul crossed the room to her, as if drawn irresistibly by the sound of her voice. He stood by her, looking down into her eyes (he was very tall), bending over her, smiling, pressing, confident, masterful. "You're to sit out those three dances and think of me, and think of me--of course! I shall be thinking of you."

Lydia's little tremulous air of archness dropped under this point-blank rejoinder. She flushed, and looked at her father. That unimaginative person started toward her as though she had called to him for help, and then, ashamed of his inexplicable impulse, turned away confusedly and disappeared into the hall.

Paul took this movement as a frank statement of the older man's desire to be, for the moment, rid of him. "Oh, I *am* going, Judge," he called after him, unabashed; "it is just a bit hard to tear myself away--I've been waiting so long for her to get back!" To Lydia he went on, "I've grown thin and pale waiting for you, while you--look at yourself, you heartless little witch!"

He pointed across to a tall mirror in which they were reflected against the rich background of his roses. For a moment both the beautiful young creatures looked each into his own eyes, mysterious with youth's total ignorance of its own meaning. Paul took Lydia's hand in his, and pointed again to their reflections as they stood side by side. He tried to speak, but for once his ready tongue was silent. Judge Emery came back to the door, a weary patience on his white, tired face.

The young man turned away with a sigh and a smile. "Yes, yes, Judge, I'm off. Good-night, Lydia. Don't forget the theater Wednesday night."

He crossed the room with a rapid, even step, shook hands with the Judge, and got himself out of the room with an easy briskness which the older man, mindful of his own rustic youth, was half-inclined to envy.

After he and Lydia were left alone he did not venture a word of comment, lest he hit on the wrong thing. He went silently about, putting out the lights, and locking the windows. Lydia stood where Paul had left her, looking at her bright image in the mirror. When the last bulb went out, the room was in a flickering twilight, the street arc-light blinking uncertainly into the windows. Judge Emery stood waiting for his daughter to move. He could scarcely see her form--her face not at all, but there flashed suddenly upon him the memory of her appealing look toward him earlier. It shook him as it had then. His heart yearned over her. He would have given anything he possessed for the habit of intimate talk with her. He put out his hands, but in the twilight she did not see the gesture. He felt shy, abashed, horribly ill at ease, torn by his tenderness, by his sense of remoteness. He said, uncertainly, "Lydia--Lydia dear--"

She started. "Oh, yes, of course. It's late." She passed, brushed lightly against him, as he stood trembling with the sense of her dearness to him. She began to ascend the stairs. He had felt from her the emanation of excitement, guessed that she was shivering like himself before a crisis--and he could find no word to say.

She had passed him as though he were a part of the furniture. He had never talked to her about--about things. He stood at the foot of the stairs in the darkness, listening to her light, mounting footfall. Once he opened his mouth to call to her, but the habit of a lifetime closed it.

"She will talk to her mother," he told himself; "her mother will know what to say." When he followed her up the stairs he was conscious chiefly that he was immeasurably tired. Melton, perhaps, had something on his side with his everlasting warnings about nervous breakdowns. He could not stand long strains as he used to do.

He fell asleep tracing out the thread of the argument presented that day by the counsel for the defense.

CHAPTER X

CASUS BELLI

Dr. Melton looked up in some surprise from his circle of lamplight as his goddaughter came swiftly into the room. "Your mother worse?" he queried sharply.

"No, no, dear Godfather. I just thought I'd come over and see you for a while. I had a little headache--Marietta's back from Cleveland to-day, and she and Flora Burgess are at the house--"

"You've said enough. I'm thankful that you have this refuge to fly to from such--"

"Oh, Flora's not so bad as you make her out, the queer, kind little old dowdy--only I didn't feel like talking 'parties,' and 'who's who,' to-night--and their being with Mother made it all right for me to leave her."

The doctor took off his eye-shade and showed his little wizened face rather paler than usual. "That's a combination that would kill *me*, and your mother not well yet--still, many folks, many tastes."

He looked at Lydia penetratingly. She had taken a chair before the soft-coal fire and was staring at it rather moodily. "Well, Lydia, my dear, and how does Endbury strike you now? Speaking of many tastes, what are yours going to be like, I wonder?"

"I wonder," she repeated absently.

"Well, at least you know whether the young man who called on you last night is to your taste?"

Lydia turned her face away and made a nervous gesture. "Oh, don't, Godfather!"

"Very well, I won't," he said cheerfully, turning to his books with the instinct of one who knows his womankind.

There was a long silence, broken only by the purring of the coal. Then Lydia gave a laugh and went to sit on the arm of his chair. "Of course that was what I came to see you about," she admitted, her sensitive lips quivering into a smile that was not light-hearted; "but now I'm here I find I haven't anything to say. Perhaps you'd better give me a pink pill and send me home to forget all about everything."

Dr. Melton took her fingers and held them closely in his thin, sinewy hands. "Oh, if I could--if I only could do something for you!" He searched her face anxiously. "What did young Hollister say that makes you so troubled?"

She sat down on the edge of his writing-table and reflected. "It wasn't anything he *said*," she admitted. "He was all right, I guess. Father had scared the life out of me before he came, by sort of taking it for granted--Oh, you know--the silly way people do--"

"Yes."

"Well, Paul was as nice as could be about that, so far as words go-- He didn't say a thing embarrassing or--or hard to answer, but he let me *see*--all the same! He kept saying what an immense help I'd be to an ambitious man. He said he didn't see why I shouldn't grow into the leader of Endbury society, like the Mrs. Hollister, his aunt, that he and his sister live with, you know."

"I suppose he's right," conceded the doctor, reluctantly.

"Well, while he was talking about it, it seemed all very well--you know the way he goes at things--how he makes you feel as though he were a locomotive going sixty miles an hour and you were inside the engine cab, holding on for dear life?"

Dr. Melton shook his head. "Paul has given me a great variety of sensations," he admitted, "but I can't say that he ever gave me quite this locomotive-cab illusion you speak of."

"Well, he has me, lots of times," persisted Lydia. "It's awfully exciting--you don't know where you're going, and you can't stop to think, everything tears past you so fast and your breath is so blown out of you. You feel like screaming. You forget everything else, you get so--so stirred up and excited. But after it's over there's always a time when things are flat. And this morning, and all day long, I've felt very--different about what he wants and all. I don't believe I'm very well, perhaps--or maybe--" she broke off, to say with emotion, "Oh, Godfather, wouldn't it be too awful if I should turn out to be without ambition." She pronounced the word with the reverence for its meaning that had been drilled into her all her life, and looked at Dr. Melton with troubled eyes.

He thrust his lips out with a grimace habitual to him in moments of feeling, and for an instant said nothing. When he spoke his voice broke on her name, as it had the night before when he had stood looking up at her windows. "Oh, Lydia!--Oh, my dear, I'm terribly afraid of your future!"

"I'm a little scared of it myself," she said tremulously, and hid her face on his shoulder.

She was the first to speak. "Wouldn't Marietta just scream with laughter at us?" she reminded him. "We *are* foolish, too! There's nothing in the world you could lay your finger on. There's nothing anyhow, I guess, but nerves. I wouldn't dare breathe it to anybody else, but you always know how I'm feeling, anyhow. It's as though--here I am, grown up, and there's nothing for me to do that's worth while--even if--even if--Paul--"

The doctor took a sudden resolution. "Why don't you talk to your father, Lydia? Why don't you ask him about--"

He was cut short by Lydia's gesture of utter wonder. "*Father?* Don't you know that there's a big trial on? He couldn't tell without figuring up, if you should ask him quick, whether I'm fourteen or nineteen--or nine! Mother wouldn't let me, anyhow, even if he could have any idea of what I was driving at. She never let us bother him the least bit when there was something big happening in his lawyering. I remember that time I had pneumonia and nearly died, when I was a little girl, that she told him I had just a cold; and he never knew any different for years afterward, when I happened to say something about it. She didn't want him worried when he needed all his wits for some important business."

The doctor looked at her with frowning intensity, and then down at his papers. He seemed on the point of some forcible utterance, which he restrained with many twitchings of his mouth. Finally he got up and went to a window, staring out silently.

"I think I'll go and look up dear Aunt Julia," said Lydia.

"Very well, my dear," said the doctor over his shoulder. "She's in her room, I think." In exactly the same mild tone, he added, "Damnation!"

"What did you say?" asked Lydia.

He turned toward her, and took up a book from the table. "I said nothing, dear Lydia--I've nothing to say, I find."

Lydia broke into a light, mocking laugh--the doctor's volubility was an old joke--and began to speak, when a woman's voice called, "Oh, Marius, here's Mr.---- why, Lydia, how did you get in without my seeing you?"

She entered the room as she spoke--a middle-aged woman, with large blue eyes and graying fair hair, who evidently did her duty by the prevailing styles in dress with a comfortable moderation of effort. Lydia's mother, as the sister of Mrs. Sandworth's long-dead husband, thought it necessary, from time to time, to endeavor to stir her sister-in-law up to a keener sense of what was due the world in the matter of personal appearance; but Mrs. Sandworth, born a Melton, had the irritating unconcern for social problems of that distinguished Kentucky family. She cared only to please her brother Marius, she said, and he never cared what she had on, but only what was in her mind--a remark that had once caused Judge Emery to say, in a fit of exasperation with her wandering wits, that if she ever had as little on as she had in her mind, he guessed Melton would sit up and take notice.

Lydia now rushed at her aunt, exclaiming, "Oh, Aunt Julia, how *good* you do look to me! The office door was open and I slipped in that way, without ringing the bell."

"It's four years old, and never been touched, not even the sleeves," said the other deprecatingly.

Her brother laughed. "Who did you say was here--Oh, it's you, Rankin; come in, come in."

The newcomer was half-way across the room before he saw Lydia. He stopped, with a look of extreme pleasure and surprise, which Lydia answered with a frank smile.

"Why, have you met my niece?" asked Mrs. Sandworth, looking from one to the other.

"Oh, yes; Mr. Rankin's my oldest new friend in Endbury. I met him the first day I was back."

"And when I set up the newel-post--"

"And I ran on to his house by accident the day Marietta and I were out with little Pete, when it rained and I borrowed his overcoat and umbrella--"

"And then I had to call to take them away, of course--"

They intoned their confessions like a gay antiphonal chant. A bright color had come up in Lydia's cheeks. She looked very sunny and good-humored, like a cheerful child, an expression which up to that year had been habitual to her. Dr. Melton looked at her without speaking.

"So, you see," she concluded, "not to speak of several other times--we're very well acquainted."

"Well, Marius! Did you ever!" Mrs. Sandworth appealed to her brother.

"Oh, I've known about it all along. Rankin and I have discussed Lydia as well as other weighty matters, a great many times."

Mrs. Sandworth's easily diverted mind sped off into another channel. "Yes, how you do discuss. I'm going to look right at the clock every minute from now on, so's to be sure to remind you of that engagement at Judge Emery's office at half-past nine. I know what happens when you and Mr. Rankin get to talking."

"I'll not stay long; Miss Emery has precedence."

"Oh, don't mind me," said Lydia.

"They won't--nor anything else," her aunt assured her.

Rankin laughed at this characterization. The doctor did not seem to hear. He was brooding, and drumming on the table. From this reverie he was startled by the younger man's next statement.

"I've got an apprentice," he announced.

"Eh?" queried the doctor with unexpected sharpness.

"The fifteen-year-old son of my neighbor, Luigi Carfarone, who works on the railroad. The boy's been bad--truant--street gamin--all that sort of thing, and his mother, who comes in to clean for me sometimes, has been awfully anxious about him. But it seems he has a passion for tools--maybe his ancestors were mediaeval craftsmen. Anyhow, he's been working for me lately, doing some of the simpler jobs, and really learning fast. And he's been so interested he's forgotten all his devilry. So, yesterday, didn't he and his father and his mother and about a dozen littler brothers and sisters all come in solemn procession, dressed in their best, to dedicate him to me and my profession, as they grandly call it."

"Oh, how perfectly lovely!" cried Lydia.

The doctor resumed his drumming morosely. "Of course you know the end of that."

"You mean he'll get tired of it, and take to robbing chicken-roosts again?"

"Not much! He'll like it, and stick to it, and bring others, and you'll extend operations and build shops, and in no time you'll go the way of all the world--a big factory, running night and day; you on the keen jump every minute; dust an inch thick over your books and music; nerves taut; head humming with business schemes to beat your competitors; forget your wife most of the time except to give her money; making profits hand over fist; suborning legislators to wink at your getting special railroad rates for your stuff; can't remember how many children you have; grand success; notable example of what can be done by attention to business; nervous prostration at forty-five; Bright's disease at fifty; leave a million."

Rankin burst into a great roar of boyish laughter at this prophetic flight. The doctor gnawed his lower lip, and looked at him without smiling. "I've got ten million blue devils on my back to-night," he said.

"So I see--so I see." Rankin was still laughing, but as he continued to look into his old friend's face his own grew grave by reflection. "You don't believe all that?"

"Oh, you won't mean to. It'll come gradually." He broke out suddenly, "Good Heavens, Rankin, give me a serious answer."

"Answer!" The cabinet-maker's bewilderment was immense. "Have you asked me anything?"

The doctor turned away to his desk with the pettish gesture of a woman whose inner thoughts are not divined.

"He makes me feel very thick-witted and dense," Rankin appealed to the two women.

Mrs. Sandworth exonerated him from blame. "Oh, nobody ever can make out what he's driving at. I never try." She took out a piece of crochet work. "Lydia, they're at it now. I know the voice Marius gets on. *Would* you make this in shell stitch? It's much newer, of course, but they say it don't wash so well." As Lydia's attention wavered, "Oh, there's not a particle of use in trying to make out what they're saying. They just go on and on."

Rankin was addressing himself to the doctor's back. "I don't, you know, see anything wicked in making a lot of chairs by machinery instead of a few by hand. I'm no handcraft faddist. I did that in the beginning only because I had to begin somehow to earn my living honestly without being too tied up to folks, and I couldn't think of any other way. But I think, now that you've put the idea into my head--I think it would be a good thing to gather the boys of the neighborhood around me--and, by gracious! the girls too! That's one of my convictions--that girls need very much the same treatment as boys. And if it should develop into a large business (which I doubt strongly), what's the harm? The motive lying back of it would be different from what I so fear and hate in big businesses. You can bet your last cent on one thing, and that is that the main idea would not be to make as much furniture as fast as possible, as cheap as possible, but to make it good, and to make only as much as would leave me and every last one of the folks that work for me time and strength to live--leisure to be good! Who said that, anyway? It's fine."

"*Hymn to Adversity*," supplied the doctor, who was better read in the poets than the younger generation. He added, skeptically, "Could you, though, do any such thing? Wouldn't it run *you*, once you got to going?"

"Well, if worst came to worst--" began Rankin, then changing front, he began again: "My great-aunt--"

The doctor fell back in his chair with a groan and a laugh.

"Yes; the same one you may have heard me mention before. She told me that all through her childhood her family was saving and pulling together to build a fine big house. They worked along for years until, when she was a young lady, they finally accomplished it; built a big three-story house that was the admiration of the countryside. Then they moved in. And it took the women-folks every minute of their time, and more, to keep it clean and in order; it cost as much to keep it up, heated, furnished, repaired, painted, and everything the way a fine house should be, as their entire living used to cost. The fine big grounds they had laid out to go with the mansion took so much time to--"

"You see. You see. That's just what I meant," broke in the doctor.

"Well, I'm a near relative of my great-aunt's. One day, when all the rest of the family was away, she set fire to the house and burned it to the ground, with everything in it."

"She didn't!" broke in Mrs. Sandworth, who had been coaxed to a fitful attention by the promise of a coherent story.

Rankin laughed. "Well, that was the way she told it to me, and I don't doubt she *would* have," he amended.

The doctor grunted, "Huh! But would *you*!" He went on, "You couldn't compete with your rivals, anyhow, if you didn't concentrate everything on making chairs. Don't you know the successful business man's best advertisement? 'All of my life-strength I've put into the product I offer you,' he says to the public, and it's true."

"Oh, well, if I couldn't do business there'd be an end of the matter, and none of your horrible prophecies would come

true."

"Your wife wouldn't let you."--Dr. Melton took up another line of attack--"she'd want a motor-car and 'nice' associates and a fashionable school for the children, and a home in the 'respectable' part of town."

Rankin's easy-going manner changed. He sat up and frowned. "There you step on one of my corns, Doctor"--he did not apologize for the rustic metaphor--"I don't believe a single, solitary identical word of that. It's my most hotly held conviction that women are so much like humans that you can't tell the difference with a microscope. I mean, if they're interested in petty, personal things it's because they're not given a fair chance at big, impersonal things. Everybody's jumping on the American woman because she knows more about bridge-whist than about her husband's business. *Why* does she? Because he's satisfied to have her--you can take my word for it! He likes her to be absorbed in clubs and bridge and idiotic little dabblings in near-culture and pseudo-art, just for the reason that a busy mother gives her baby a sticky feather to play with. It keeps the baby busy. It keeps his wife's attention off him. It's the American man just as much as the woman who's mortally afraid of a sure-enough marriage with sure-enough shared interests. He doesn't want to bother with children, or with the servant problem or the questions of family life, and he doesn't want his wife bothering him in his business any more than she wants him interfering with hers. That idea of the matter is common to them both."

"That's a fine, chivalric view of the situation," said the doctor sardonically. "Maybe if you'd practiced as long in as many American families as I have, you might have a less idealistic view of your female compatriots."

"I don't idealize 'em," cried Rankin. "Good Lord! Don't I say they're just like men? They amount to something if they're given something worth while to do--not otherwise."

"Don't you call bringing up children worth while?"

"You bet I do. So much so that I'd have the fathers take their full half of it. I'd have men do more inside the house and less outside, and the women the other way 'round."

The doctor recoiled at this. "Oh, you're a visionary. It couldn't be done."

"It couldn't be done in a minute," admitted Rankin.

The doctor mused. "It's an interesting thought. But it's not for our generation. A new idea is like a wedge. You have to introduce it by the thin edge. The only way to get it started is by beginning with the children. Adults are hopeless. There's never any use trying to change them."

"Oh, you can't fool children," said Rankin. "It's no use teaching them something you're not willing to make a try at yourself. They see through that quick enough! What you're really after, is what they see and learn to go after themselves. If anything's to be done, the adults must take the first step."

"But, as society is organized, the idea is preposterous."

"Society's been organized a whole lot of different ways in its time. Who tells me that it's bound to stay this way? I tell you right now, it hasn't got *me* bluffed, anyhow! My wife--if I ever have one--is going to be my sure-enough wife, and my children, *my* children. I won't *have* a business that they can't know about, or that doesn't leave me strength enough to share in all their lives. I can earn enough growing potatoes and doing odd jobs of carpentering for that!"

The doctor looked wonderingly at the other's kindling face. "Rankin," he asked irrelevantly, "aren't there *ever* moments when you despair of the world?"

The voice of the younger man had the fine tremor of sincerity as he answered, "Why, good heavens, *no*, Doctor! That's why I dare criticize it so."

The doctor looked with an intensity almost fierce into the other's confident eyes. He laid his thin, sinewy hand on the other's big brown fist, as though he would fain absorb conviction by contact. "But I'm sick with the slowness of the progress you talk of--believe in," he burst out finally. "It comes too late--the advance from our tragic materialism; too late for so many that could have profited by it most." He looked toward Lydia bending over her aunt's fancy work. Rankin followed the direction of his eyes.

"Yes; that's what I mean," said the doctor heavily, rising from his chair. "That and such thousands of others. Oh, for a Theseus to hunt down this Minotaur of false standards and wretched ideas of success! I see them, the precious youths and maidens, going in by thousands to his den of mean aspirations, and not a hand is raised to warn them. They must be silly and tragic because everyone else is!"

Rankin shook his head. "I think I'm proving that you don't have to go into the labyrinth--that you can live in health and happiness outside."

"There's rather more than that to be done, you'll admit," said the doctor with an uncompromising bitterness.

Rankin colored. "I don't pretend that it's much of anything--what I've done."

The doctor did not deny him. He thrust out his lips and rubbed his hand nervously over his face. Finally, "But you have done it, at least," he brought out, "and I've only talked. As another doctor has said: 'I've never taken a bribe; but there's a pale shade of bribery known as prosperity.'"

They fell into a silence, broken by Mrs. Sandworth's asking, "Lydia, have your folks got an old mythology book? I studied it at school, of course, but it has sort of passed out of my mind. Was it the Minotaur that sowed teeth and something else very odd came up that you wouldn't expect?"

Lydia did not smile. "I don't know whether we have the book or not, but Miss Slater told us the story of the Minotaur. There's a picture of Theseus and Ariadne in Europe somewhere--Munich, I think--or maybe Siena. It was where one of the girls had a sore throat, I remember, and we had to stay quite a while. Miss Slater told us about it then."

The doctor stood up. "Julia, it's nearly half-past now. Who remembered this time? I'm off, all of you. Rankin, see that Lydia gets home safely, will you?"

"Oh, I must go too--now, with you." The girl jumped up. "I didn't realize it was so late. They'll be wondering at home."

"Come along, then, both of you. I'll go with you to the corner where I take my car."

The chill of the night air sent them along at a brisk gait, Lydia swinging easily between them, her head on a level with Rankin's, the doctor's hat on a level with her ear. She said nothing, and the two talked across her, disjointed bits of an argument apparently under endless discussion between them.

The doctor flung down, with a militant despondency, "It'd be no use trying to do anything, even if you weren't so slothful and sedentary as you are! It moves in a vicious circle. Because material success is what the majority want, the majority'll go on wanting it. Hardy says somewhere that it's innate in human nature not to desire the undesired of others."

Rankin sang out a ringing "Aw, g'wan! It's innate in human nature to murder and steal whenever it pleases, and I guess even Hardy'd admit that those aren't the amusements of the majority quite so extensively as they used to be--what? First thing you know people'll begin to desire things because they're worth desiring and not because other folks have them--even so astonishing a flight as that!" he made a boyish gesture--"and what a grand time that'll be to live in, to be sure!"

They were waiting at the corner for the doctor's street car, which now came noisily down toward them. He watched it advance, and proffered as a valedictory, his gloom untempered to the last, "You're a wild man that lives in the woods. I've doctored everybody in the world for thirty years. Which knows human nature best?"

Rankin roared after him defiantly, waking the echoes and startling the occupants of the car, "I do! I do! I do!"

The car bore the doctor away, a perversely melancholy little figure, contemplating the young people blackly.

"Whatever do you suppose set him off so?" Rankin wondered aloud as they resumed their rapid, swinging walk through the cold air.

"I'm afraid I did," Lydia surmised. "I had a wretched fit of the blues, and I guess he must have caught them from me."

Rankin looked down at her keenly, his thoughts apparently quite altered by her phrase. "Ah, he worries a great deal about you," he murmured.

Lydia laughed nervously, and said nothing. They walked swiftly in silence. The stars were thick above them in the wind-swept autumn night. Lydia tilted her head to look up at them once or twice. She saw Rankin's face pale under the shadow of his broad-brimmed hat, his eyes meeting hers in an intent regard like a wordless speech. The fine, cold, austere wind swept them along like leaves, whipping their young pulses, chanting loudly in the leafless branches of the maples, and filling the dark spaces above with a great humming roar. They thrilled responsive to all this and to the mood of high seriousness each divined in the other.

Lydia's voice, breaking in upon the intimate silence, continued the talk, but it was with another note. The mute interval, filled with wind and darkness and the light of stars, had swung them up to a higher plane. She spoke with an artless sureness of comprehension--a certainty--they were close in spirit at that moment, and she was not frightened, not even conscious of it. "Why should the doctor worry? *What is the matter?* Marietta says the trouble with me is that I'm spoiled with having everything that I want."

"Have you everything you want?" Rankin's bluntness of interrogation was unmitigated.

Lydia looked up at him swiftly, keenly. In his grave face there was that which made her break out with an open quivering emotion she had not shown even to the doctor's loving heart. "It's a weight on my very soul--that there's nothing for me to look forward to--nothing, nothing that's worth growing up to do. I haven't been taught anything--but

I know I want to be something better than--perhaps I can't be--but I want to try! I want to try! That's not much to ask--just a chance to try--But I don't even know how to get that. I don't even dare to speak of--of--such things. People laugh and say it's Sunday-schooley fancies that'll disappear, that I'll forget as I get into living. But I don't want to forget. I'm afraid I shall. I want to keep trying. I don't know--"

They did not slacken their swift advance as they talked. They looked at each other seriously in the starlight.

Rankin had given an indrawn exclamation as she finished, and after an instant's pause he said, with a deep emotion, "Oh, perhaps--at least we both want to try--*Be Ariadne for me!* Help me to find the clue to what's wrong in our lives, and perhaps--" He looked down at her, shaken, drawing quick breaths. She answered his gaze silently, her face as shining white as his.

He went on: "You shall decide what Ariadne may be or may come to be--I will take whatever you choose to give--and bless you!"

She had a gesture of humility. "I haven't anything to give."

His accent was memorable as he cried, "You have yourself--you--you! But you are too gentle! It is hard for you--it will be too hard for you to do what you feel should be done. I could perhaps do the things if you would tell me--help you not to forget--not to let life make you forget what is worth doing and learning!"

She put back a mesh of her wind-blown hair to look at him intently, and to say again in wonder, "I'm not anything. What can you think I--what can you hope--"

They were standing now on the walk before her father's house. "I can hope--" his voice shook, "I can hope that you may make me into a man worthy to help you to be the best that's in you."

Lydia put out her hand impulsively. It did not tremble. She looked at him with radiant, steady eyes. He raised the slim, gloved fingers to his lips. "Whether to leave you, or to try to--Oh, I would give my life to know how best to serve you," he said huskily. He turned away, the sound of his steps ringing loud in the silent street.

Lydia went slowly up the walk and into the empty hall. She stood an instant, her hands clasped before her breast, her eyes closed, her face still and clear. Then she moved upstairs like one in a dream.

As she passed her mother's door she started violently, and for an instant had no breath to answer. Some one had called her name laughingly.

Finally, "Yes," she answered without stirring.

"Oh, come in, come in!" cried Marietta mockingly. "We know all about everything. We heard you come up the street, and saw you philandering on the front walk. And for all it's so dark, we made out that Paul kissed your hand when he went away."

There was a silence in the hall. Then Lydia appeared in the door. Mrs. Emery gave a scream. "Why, Lydia! what makes you look so queer?"

They turned startled, inquiring, daunting faces upon her. It was the baptism of fire to Lydia. The battle, inevitable for her, had begun. She faced it; she did not take refuge in the safe, silent lie which opened before her, but her courage was a piteous one. In her utter heartsick shrinking from the consequences of her answer she had a premonition of the weakness that was to make the combat so unequal. "It was not Paul," she said, pale in the doorway; "it was Daniel Rankin."

BOOK II

IN THE LOCOMOTIVE CAB

CHAPTER XI

WHAT IS BEST FOR LYDIA

The girls who were to be debutantes that season, the "crowd" or (more accurately to quote Madeleine Hollister's racy characterization) "the gang," stood before Hallam's drug store, chattering like a group of bright-colored paroquets. They had finished three or four ice-cream sodas apiece, and now, inimitably unconscious that they were on the street

corner, they were "getting up" a matinee party for the performance of the popular actress whom, at that time, it was the fashion for all girls of their age and condition to adore. They had worked themselves up to a state of hysteric excitement over the prospect.

A tall brown-eyed blonde, with the physical development of a woman and the facial expression of a child of twelve, cried out, "I feel as though I should swoon for joy to see that darling way she holds her hands when the leading man's making love to her--so sort of helpless--like this--"

"Oh, Madeleine, that's not a *bit* the way. It's so!"

The first speaker protested, "Well, I guess I ought to be able to do it. I've practiced for *hours* in front of the glass doing it."

"For mercy's sake that's nothing. So have I. Who hasn't?"

Madeleine referred the question to Lydia, "Lyd has seen her later than anybody. She saw her in London. Just think of going to the theater in London--as if it was anywhere. She says they're crazy about her over there."

"*Oh, wild!*" Lydia told them. "Her picture's in every single window!"

"Which one? Which one?" they clamored, hanging on her answer breathlessly.

"That fascinating one with the rose, where she's holding her head sideways and--" Oh, yes, they had that one, their exclamation cut her short, relieved that their collections were complete.

"Lyd met a woman on the steamer coming back whose sister-in-law has the same hairdresser," Madeleine went on.

They were electrified. "Oh, *honestly?* Is it her own?" They trembled visibly before solution of a problem which had puzzled them, as they would have said, "for eternities."

"Every hair," Lydia affirmed, "and naturally that color."

Their enthusiasm was prodigious, "How grand! How perfectly grand!"

They turned on Lydia with reproaches. "Here you've been back two months and we haven't got a bit of good out of you. Think of your having known that, all this--"

"Her mother's sick, you know," Madeleine Hollister explained.

"She hasn't been so sick but what Lydia could get out to go buggy-riding with your brother Paul ever since he got back this last time."

Lydia, as though she wished to lose herself, had been entering with a feverish intensity into the spirit of their lively chatter; but now, instead of responding with some prompt, defensive flippancy, she colored high and was silent. A clock above them struck five. "Oh, I must get on," she cried; "I'm down here, you know, to walk home with Father."

They laughed loudly, "Oh, yes, we know all about this sudden enthusiasm for Poppa's society. Where are you going to meet Paul?"

Lydia looked about at the crush of drays, trolley-cars, and delivery-wagons jamming the busy street, "Well, not here down-town," she replied, her tone one of satisfied security.

A confused and conscious stir among her companions and a burst of talk from them cut her short. They cried variously, according to their temperaments, "Oh, there he comes now!" "I think it's mean Lydia's gobbling him up from under our noses!" "I used to have a ride or two behind that gray while Lydia was away!" "My! Isn't he a good-looker!"

They had all turned like needles to the north, and stared as the spider-light wagon, glistening with varnish, bore down on them, looking singularly distinguished and costly among the dingy business-vehicles which made up the traffic of the crowded street. The young driver guided the high-stepping gray with a reckless, competent hand through the most incredibly narrow openings and sent his vehicle up against the flower-like group of girls, laughing as he drew rein, at the open, humorous outcry against him. A chorus of eager recrimination rose to his ears, "Now, Mr. Hollister, this is the first time Lydia's been out with our crowd since she came home!" "You might let her alone!" "Go away, Paul, you greedy thing!" "I haven't asked Lydia a single thing about her European trip!"

"Well, maybe you think," he cried, springing out to the sidewalk, "that I've been spending the last year traveling around Europe with Lydia! I haven't heard any more than you have." He threw aside the lap-robe of supple broadcloth, and offered his hand to Lydia. A flash of resentment at the cool silence of this invitation sprang up in the girl's eyes. There was in her face a despairing effort at mutiny. Her hands nervously opened and shut the clasp of the furs at her throat. She tried to look unconscious, to look like the other girls, to laugh, not to know his meaning, to turn away.

The young man plunged straight through these pitiful cobwebs. "Why, come on, Lydia," he cried with a good-humored pointedness, "I've been all over town looking for you." She backed away, looking over her shoulder, as if for a lane of

escape, flushing, paling. "Oh, no, no thank you, Paul. Not *this* afternoon!" she cried imploringly, with a soft fury of protest, "I'm on my way to Father's office. I want to walk home with him. I want to see him. I thought it would be nice to walk home with him. I see so little of him! I thought it would be nice to walk home with him." She was repeating herself, stammering and uncertain, but achieving nevertheless a steady retreat from the confident figure standing by the wagon.

This retreat was cut short by his next speech. "Oh, I've just come from your father. I went to his office, thinking you might be there. He said to tell you and your mother that he won't be home to dinner to-night at all. He's got some citations on hand he has to verify."

Lydia had stopped her actual recoil at his first words and now stood still, but she still tugged at the invisible chain which held her. She was panting a little. She shook her head. "Well--anyhow--I want to see him!" she insisted with a transparently aimless obstinacy like a frightened child's. "I want to see my father." Paul laughed easily, "Well, you'd better choose some other time if you want to get anything out of him. He had turned everybody out and was just settling to work with a pile of law-books before him. You know how your father looks under those circumstances!" He held the picture up to her, relentlessly smiling.

Lydia's lips quivered, but she said nothing.

Paul went on soothingly, "I've only come to take you straight home, anyhow. Your mother wants you. She said she had one of those fainting turns again. She said to be sure to bring you."

At the mention of her mother's name, Lydia turned quite pale. She began to walk slowly back towards the wagon. There was angry, helpless misery in her dark eyes, but there was no longer any resistance. "Oh, if Mother needs me--" she murmured. She took the offered hand, stepped into the wagon and even went through some fitful pretense of responding to the chorus of facetious good-bys which rose from the group they were leaving.

She said little or nothing in answer to the young man's kind, cheerful talk, as they drove along one main thoroughfare after another, conspicuous by the brilliant, prosperous beauty of their well-fed youth and their handsome garb, pointed out by people on the sidewalks, constantly nodding in response to greetings from acquaintances. Lydia flushed deeply at the first of these salutations, a flush which grew deeper and deeper as these features of their processional advance repeated themselves. She put her hand to her throat from time to time as though it ached and when the red rubber-tired wheels turned noiselessly in on the asphalt of her home street, she threw the lap-robe brusquely back from her knees as though for an instant escape.

The young man's pleasant chat stopped. "Look here, Lydia," he said in another tone, one that forced her eyes to meet his, "look here, don't you forget one thing!" His voice was deep with the sincerest sympathy, his eyes full of emotion, "Don't you forget, little Lydia, that nobody's sorrier for you than I am! And I don't want anything that--" he cried out in sudden passion--"Good Lord, I'd be cut to bits before I'd even *want* anything that wasn't best for you!" He looked away and mastered himself again to quiet friendliness, "You know that, *don't you*, Lydia? You know that all I want is for you to have the most successful life anyone can?"

He leaned to her imploring in his turn.

She drew a quick breath, and moved her head from side to side restlessly. Then drawn by the steady insistence of his eyes, she said, as if touched by his patient, determined kindness, "Oh, yes, yes, Paul, I realize how awfully good you're being to me! I wish I could--but--yes, of course I see how good you are to me!"

He laid his hand an instant over hers, withdrawing it before she herself could make the action. "It makes me happy to have you know I want to be," he said simply, "now that's all. You needn't be afraid. I shan't bother you."

They were in front of the Emery house now. He did not try to detain her longer. He helped her down, only repeating as she gave him her gloved hand an instant, "That's what I'm for--to be good to you."

The wagon drove off, the young man refraining from so much as a backward glance.

The girl turned to the house and stood a moment, opening and shutting her hands. When she moved, it was to walk so rapidly as almost to run up the walk, up the steps, into the hall and into her mother's presence, where, still on the crest of the wave of her resolution, she cried, "Mother, did you really send Paul for me again. Did you *really*?"

"Why, yes, dear," said Mrs. Emery, surprised, sitting up on the sofa with an obvious effort; "did somebody say I didn't?"

"I hoped you didn't!" cried Lydia bitterly; "it was--horrid! I was out with all the girls in front of Hallam's--everybody was so--they all laughed so when--they looked at me so!"

Mrs. Emery spoke with dignity, "Naturally I couldn't know where he would find you."

"But, Mother, you *did* know that every afternoon for two weeks you've--it's been managed so that I've been out with

Paul."

Mrs. Emery ignored this and went on plaintively, "I didn't see that it was so unreasonable for an invalid to send whoever she could find after her only daughter because she was feeling worse."

Lydia's frenzy carried her at once straight to the exaggeration which is the sure forerunner of defeat in the sort of a conflict which was engaging her. "Are you feeling any worse?" she cried in a despairing incredulity which was instantly marked as inhumanly unfilial by the scared revulsion on her face as well as Mrs. Emery's pale glare of horror. "Oh, I didn't mean that!" she cried, running to her mother; "I'm sorry, Mother! I'm sorry!"

The tears began running down Mrs. Emery's cheeks, "I don't know my little Lydia any more," she said weakly, dropping her head back on the pillow.

"I don't know myself!" cried Lydia, sobbing violently, "I'm so unhappy!"

Mrs. Emery took her in her arms with a forgiveness which dropped like a noose over Lydia's neck, "There, there, darling! Mother knows you didn't mean it! But you must remember, Lydia dearest, if you're unhappy these days, so is your poor mother."

"I'm making you so!" sobbed Lydia, "I know it! something like this happens every day! It's why you don't get well faster! I'm making you unhappy!"

"It doesn't make any difference about me!" Mrs. Emery heroically assured her, "I don't want you to be influenced by thinking about my feelings, Lydia. Above everything in the world, I don't want you to feel the *slightest* pressure from me--or any one of the family. Oh, darling, all I want--all any of us want, is what is best for our little Lydia!"

CHAPTER XII

A SOP TO THE WOLVES

Six o'clock had struck when Mrs. Sandworth came wearily back from her Christmas shopping. It was only the middle of November, but each year she began her preparations for that day of rejoicing earlier and earlier, in a vain attempt to avoid some of the embittering desolation of confusion and fatigue which for her, as for all her acquaintances, marked the December festival. She let herself down heavily from the trolley-car which had brought her from the business part of Endbury back to what was known as the "residential section," a name bestowed on it to the exclusion of several other much larger divisions of town devoted exclusively to the small brick buildings blackened by coal smoke in which ordinary people lived.

As she walked slowly up the street, her arms were full of bundles, her heart full of an ardent prayer that she might find her brother either out or in a peaceable mood. She loved and admired Dr. Melton more than anyone else in the world, but there were moments when the sum total of her conviction about him was an admission that his was not a reposeful personality. For the last fortnight, this peculiarity had been accentuated till Mrs. Sandworth's loyalty had cracked at every seam in order not to find him intolerable to live with. Moreover, her own kind heart and intense partiality for peace in all things had suffered acutely from the same suspense that had wrought the doctor to his wretched fever of anxiety. It had been a time of torment for everybody--everybody was agreed on that; and Mrs. Sandworth had felt that life in the same house with Lydia's godfather had given her more than her share of misery.

On this dark November evening she was so tired that every inch of her soft plumpness ached. She had not prospered in her shopping. Things had not matched. She let herself into the front door with a sigh of relief at finding the hall empty. She looked cautiously into the doctor's study and drew a long breath, peeped into the parlor and, almost smiling, went on cheerfully upstairs to her room. From afar, she saw the welcoming flicker of the coal fire in her grate, and felt a glow of surprised gratitude to the latest transient from the employment agency who was now occupying her kitchen. She did not often get one that was thoughtful about keeping up fires when nobody was at home. It would be delicious to get off her corset and shoes, let down her hair--there he was, bolt upright before the fire, his back to the door. She took in the significance of his tense attitude and prepared herself for the worst, sinking into a chair, letting her bundles slide at various tangents from her rounded surface, and surveying her brother with the utmost resignation. "Well, what is it now?" she asked.

He had not heard her enter, and now flashed around, casting in her face like a hard-thrown missile, "Lydia's engaged."

All Mrs. Sandworth's lassitude vanished. She flung herself on him in a wild outcry of inquiry--"Which one? Which

one?"

He answered her angrily, "Which do you suppose? Doesn't a steam-roller make some impression on a rose?"

"Oh!" she cried, enlightened; and then, with widespread solemnity, "Well, think--of--that!"

"Not if I can help it," groaned the doctor.

"But that's not fair," his sister protested a moment later as she took in the rest of his speech.

"Heaven knows it's not," he agreed bitterly.

She stared. "I mean that Paul hasn't been nearly so steam-rollery as usual."

The doctor rubbed his face furiously, as though to brush off a disagreeable clinging web. "He hasn't had to be. There have been plenty of other forces to do his rolling for him."

"If you mean her father--you know he's kept his hands off *religiously*."

"He has that, damn him!" The doctor raged about the room.

A silent prayer for patience wrote itself on Mrs. Sandworth's face. "You're just as inconsistent as you can be!" she cried.

"I'm more than that," he sighed, sitting down suddenly on a chair in the corner of the room; "I'm heartsick." He shivered, thrust his hands into his pockets and surveyed his shoes gloomily.

One of Mrs. Sandworth's cheerful capacities was for continuing tranquilly the minute processes of everyday life through every disturbance in the region of the emotions. You *had* to, she said, to get them done--anybody that lived with the doctor. She now took advantage of his silence to count over her packages, remove her wraps, loosen a couple of hooks at her waist and fluff up the roll of graying hair over her forehead. The doctor looked at her.

She answered him reasonably, "It wouldn't help Lydia any if I took it off and threw it in the fire, would it? It's my best one, too; the other's at the hairdresser's, getting curled."

"It's not," the doctor broke out--"it's not, Heaven be my judge! that *I* want to settle it. But I did want Lydia to settle it herself."

"She has, at last," Mrs. Sandworth reminded him, in a little surprise at his forgetting so important a fact.

"She has *not*!" roared the doctor.

His literal-minded sister looked aggrieved bewilderment. She felt a bitterness at having been stirred without due cause. "Marius, you're unkind. What did you tell me she had for--when I'm so tired it seems as if I could lie down and die if I--"

Dr. Melton knew his sister. He made a rapid plunge through the obscurity of her brain into her heart's warm clarity, and, "Oh, Julia, if you had seen her!" he cried.

She leaned toward him, responsive to the emotion in his voice. "Tell me about it, poor Marius," she said, yearning maternally over his pain.

"I can't--if you had seen her--"

"But how did you hear? Did she tell you? When did--"

"I was there at five, and her mother met me at the door. She took me upstairs, a finger on her lip, and there she and Marietta said they guessed this afternoon would settle things. A week ago, she said, she'd had an up-and-down talk with that dreadful carpenter and as good as forbade him the house--"

Mrs. Sandworth had a gesture of intuition. "Oh, if they've managed to shut Lydia off from seeing him--"

The doctor nodded. "That's what her mother counted on. She said she thought it a sign that Lydia was just infatuated with Rankin--her being so different after she'd seen him--so defiant--so unlike Lydia! But now she hadn't seen him for a week, and her mother and Marietta had been 'talking to her'--*Julia!*--and then Paul had come to see her every evening, and had been just right--firm and yet not exacting, and ever so gentle and kind--and this afternoon when he came Lydia cried and didn't want to go down, but her mother said she mustn't be childish, and Marietta had just taken her right down to the library and left her there with Paul, and there she was now." The doctor started up and beat his thin, corded hand on the mantel. He could not speak. His sister got up and laid a tender hand on his shoulder. "Poor Marius!" she said again.

He drew a long breath. "I did not fly at their throats--I turned and ran like mad down the stairs and into the library. It was Rankin I wanted to kill for letting his pride come in--for leaving her there alone with those--I was ready to snatch Lydia up bodily and carry her off to--" He stopped short and laughed harshly. "I reach to Lydia's shoulder," he commented on his own speech. "That's me. To see what's to be done and--"

"What *was* to be done?" asked Mrs. Sandworth patiently. She was quite used to understanding but half of what her brother said and had acquired a quiet art of untangling by tireless questionings the thread of narrative from the maze of his comments and ejaculations.

"There was nothing to be done. I was too late."

"You didn't burst in on them while Paul was kissing her or anything, did you?"

"Paul wasn't there."

"Not there! Why, Marius, you're worse than usual. Didn't you tell me her mother said--"

"He had been there--one look at Lydia showed that. She sat there alone in the dim light, her face as white--and when I came in she said, without looking to see who it was, 'I'm engaged to Paul.' She said it to her mother, who was right after me, of course, and then to Marietta."

"Well--!" breathed Mrs. Sandworth as he paused; "so that was all there was to it?"

"Oh, no; they did the proper thing. They kissed her, and cried, and congratulated everybody, and her mother said, with an eye on me: 'Darling, you're *not* doing this just because you know it'll make us so very happy, *are* you?' Lydia said, 'Oh, no; she supposed not,' and started to go upstairs. But when Marietta said she'd go and telephone to Flora Burgess to announce it, Lydia came down like a flash. It was *not* to be announced she told them; she'd *die* if they told anybody! Paul had promised solemnly not to tell anybody. Her mother said, of course she knew how Lydia felt about it. It *was* a handicap for a girl in her first season. Lydia was half-way up the stairs again, but at that she looked down at her mother--*God!* Julia, if a child of mine had ever looked at me like that--"

Mrs. Sandworth patted him vaguely. "Oh, people always look white and queer in the twilight, you know--even quite *florid* complexions."

The doctor made a rush to the door.

"But dinner must be ready to put on the table," she called after him.

"Put it on, then," he cried, and disappeared.

A plain statement was manna to Mrs. Sandworth. She had finished her soup, and was beginning on her hamburg steak when the doctor came soberly in, took his place, and began to eat in silence. She took up the conversation where they had left it.

"So it's all over," she commented, watching his plate to see that he did not forget to salt his meat and help himself to gravy.

"Nothing's ever over in a human life," he contradicted her. "Why do you suppose she doesn't want it announced?"

"You don't suppose she means to break it off later?"

"I haven't any idea *what* she means, any more than she has, poor child! But it's plain that this is only to gain time--a sop to the wolves."

"Wolves!" cried poor Mrs. Sandworth.

"Well, tigers and hyenas, perhaps," he added moderately.

"They're crazy about Lydia, that whole Emery family," she protested.

"They are that," he agreed sardonically. "But I don't mean only her family. I mean unclean prowling standards of what's what, as well as--"

"They'd lie down and let her walk over them! You know they would--"

"If they thought she was going in the right direction."

Mrs. Sandworth gave him up, and drifted off into speculation. "I wonder what she could have found in that man to think of! A girl brought up as she's been!"

"Perhaps she was only snatching a little sensible talk where she could get it."

"But they *didn't* talk sensibly. Marietta said Lydia tried, one of the times when they were going over it with her, Lydia tried to tell her mother some of the things they said that night when he took her home from here. Marietta said they were 'too sickish!' 'Flat Sunday-school cant about wanting to be good,' and all that sort of thing."

"That certainly wouldn't have tempted *Marietta* from the path of virtue and sharp attention to a good match," murmured the doctor. "Nobody can claim that there's anything very seductive to the average young lady in Rankin's fanaticism."

"Oh, you admit he's a fanatic!" Mrs. Sandworth seized on a valuable piece of driftwood which the doctor's tempest had thrown at her feet.

"Everybody who's worth his salt is a fanatic."

"Not Paul. Everybody says he's so sane and levelheaded."

"There isn't a hotter one in creation!"

"Than *Paul*?"

"Than Paul."

"Oh, Marius!" she reproached him for levity.

"He's a fanatic for success."

"Oh, I don't call *that*--"

"Nor nobody else in Endbury--but it is, all the same. And the only wonder is that Lydia should have been attracted by Rankin's heretical brand and not by Paul's orthodox variety. It shows she's rare."

"Good gracious, Marius! You talk as though it were a question of ideas or convictions."

"That's a horrible conception," he admitted gravely.

"It's which one she's in love with!" Mrs. Sandworth emitted this with solemnity.

The doctor stood up to go. "She's not in love with either," he pronounced. "She's never been allowed the faintest sniff at reality or life or experience--how can she be in love?"

"Well, they're in love with her," she triumphed for her sex.

"I don't know anything about Paul's inner workings, and as for Rankin, I don't know whether he's in love with her or not. He's sorry for her--he's touched by her--"

Mrs. Sandworth felt the ground slip from beneath her feet. "Good gracious me! If he's not in love with her, nor she with him, what are you making all this fuss about?"

The doctor thrust out his lips. "I'm only protesting in my usual feeble, inadequate manner, after the harm's all done, at idiots and egotists laying their dirty hands on a sacred thing--the right of youth to its own life--"

"Well, if you call that a feeble protest--!" she called after him.

He reappeared, hat in hand. "It's nothing to what I'd like to say. I will add that Daniel Rankin's a man in a million."

Mrs. Sandworth responded, rather neatly for her, that she should hope so indeed, and added, "But, Marius, she couldn't have married him--really! Mercy! What had he to offer her--compared with Paul? Everybody has always said what a *suitable* marriage--"

Dr. Melton crammed his hat on his head fiercely and said nothing.

"But it's so," she insisted.

"He hasn't anything to offer to Marietta, perhaps."

"Marietta's *married*!" Mrs. Sandworth kept herself anchored fast to the facts of any case under discussion.

"*Is she?*" queried the doctor with a sincerity of interrogation which his sister found distracting.

"Oh, Marius!" she reproached him again; and then helplessly, "How did we get on to Marietta, anyhow? I thought we were talking of Lydia's engagement."

"I was," he assured her.

"And I was going to ask you really seriously, just straight out, what you are so down on the Emerys for? What have they done that's so bad?"

"They've brought her up so that now in her time of need she hasn't a weapon to resist them."

"Oh, Ma--" began Mrs. Sandworth despairingly.

"Well, then, I will tell you--I'll explain in words of one syllable. Mind you, I don't undertake to settle the question--Heaven forbid! It may be all right for Marietta Mortimer to kill herself body and soul by inches to keep what bores her to death to have--a social position in Endbury's two-for-a-cent society, but, for the Lord's sake, why do they make such a howling and yelling just at the time when Lydia's got the tragically important question to decide as to whether that's what *she* wants? It's like expecting her to do a problem in calculus in the midst of an earthquake."

Mrs. Sandworth had a mortal antipathy to figures of speech, acquired of much painful experience with her brother's conversation. She sank back in her chair and waved him off. "Calculus!" she cried, outraged; "earthquakes! And I'm sure you're as unfair as can be! You can't say her father's obscured any question. You *know* he's not a dictatorial father. His principle is not to interfere at all with his children."

"Yes; that's his principle all right. His specialties are in other lines, and they have been for a long time. His wife has seen to that."

Mrs. Sandworth had one of her lucid divinations of the inner meaning of a situation. "Oh, the poor Emerys! Poor Lydia! Oh, Marius, aren't you glad we haven't any children!"

"Every child that's not getting a fair chance at what it ought to have, should be our child," he said.

He went up to her and kissed her gently. "Good-night," he said.

"Where are you going?"

"To the Black Rock woods."

"Tell him--" she was inspired--"tell him to try to see Lydia again."

"I was going to do that. But she won't be allowed to. It's pretty late now. She ought to have seen him a great many years ago--from the time he was born."

"But she's ever so much younger than he," cried Mrs. Sandworth after him, informingly.

CHAPTER XIII

LYDIA DECIDES IN PERFECT FREEDOM

The maid had announced to Mrs. Emery, finishing an unusually careful morning toilet, that Miss Burgess, society reporter of the *Endbury Chronicle*, was below. Before the mistress of the house could finish adjusting her well-matched gray pompadour, a second arrival was heralded, "The gentleman from the greenhouse, to see about Miss Lydia's party decorations." And as the handsome matron came down the stairs a third comer was introduced into the hall--Mme. Boyle herself, the best dressmaker in town, who had come in person to see about the refitting of the debutante's Paris dresses, the debutante having found the change back to the climate of Endbury so trying that her figure had grown quite noticeably thinner.

"It was the one thing necessary to make Mademwaselle's toumoor exactly perfect," Mme. Boyle told Mrs. Emery. Out of a sense of what was due her loyal Endbury customers, Mme. Boyle assumed a guileless coloring of Frenchness, which was evidently a symbol, and no more intended for a pretense of reality than the honestly false brown front that surmounted her competent, kindly Celtic face.

Mrs. Emery stopped a moment by the newel-post to direct Madame to Lydia's room and to offer up a devout thanksgiving to the kindly Providence that constantly smoothed the path before her. "Oh, Madame, just think if it had been a season when hips were in style!" As she continued her progress to what she was beginning to contemplate calling her drawing-room, she glowed with a sense of well-being which buoyed her up like wings. In common with many other estimable people, she could not but value more highly what she had had to struggle to retain, and the exciting vicissitudes of the last fortnight had left her with a sweet taste of victory in her mouth.

She greeted Miss Burgess with the careful cordiality due to an ally of many years' standing, and with a manner perceptibly but indefinably different from that which she would have bestowed on a social equal. Mrs. Emery had labored to acquire exactly that tone in her dealings with the society reporter, and her achievement of it was a fact which brought an equal satisfaction to both women. Miss Burgess' mother was an Englishwoman, an ex-housekeeper, who had transmitted to her daughter a sense, rare as yet in America, of the beauty and dignity of class distinctions. In her turn Miss Burgess herself, the hard-working, good-natured woman of fifty who for twenty years had reported the doings of those citizens of Endbury whom she considered the "gentry," had toiled with the utmost disinterestedness to build up a feeling, or, as she called it, a "tone," which, among other things, should exclude her from equality. When she began she was, perhaps, the only person in town who had an unerring instinct for social differences; but, like a kindly, experienced actor of a minor role in theatricals, she had silently given so many professional tips to the amateur principals in the play, and had acted her own part with such unflagging consistency and good-will, that she had often now the satisfaction of seeing one of her pupils move through her role with a most edifying effect of having been born

to it.

Long ago she had taken the Emerys to her warm heart and she had rejoiced in all their upward progress with the sweet unenvious joy of an ugly woman in a pretty, much-loved sister's successes. Lydia was to her, as to Mrs. Emery, a bright symbol of what she would fain have been herself. Miss Burgess' feeling for her somewhat resembled that devotion which, she had read, was felt by faithful old servants of great English families for the young ladies of the house. The pathetic completeness of her own insignificance of aspect had spared her any uneasy ambitions for personal advancement, and it is probable that the vigor of her character and her pleasure in industry were such that she had been happier in her daily column and weekly five-column *Society Notes* than if she had been as successful a society matron as Mrs. Emery herself.

She lived the life of a creator, working at an art she had invented, in a workroom of her own contriving, loyally drawing the shutters to shade an unfortunate occurrence in one of the best families, setting forth a partial success with its best profile to the public, and flooding with light real achievements like Mrs. Hollister's rose party (*the* Mrs. Hollister--Paul's aunt, and Madeleine's). All that she wrote was read by nearly every woman in Endbury. She was a person of importance, and a very busy and happy old maid.

Mrs. Emery had a great taste for Miss Burgess' conversation, admiring greatly her whole-hearted devotion to Endbury's social welfare. She had once said of her to Dr. Melton, "There is what *I* call a public-spirited woman." He had answered, "I envy Flora Burgess with the fierce embittered envy I feel for a cow"--an ambiguous compliment which Mrs. Emery had resented on behalf of her old ally.

Now, as Mrs. Emery added to her greeting, "You'll excuse me just a moment, won't you, I must settle some things with my decorator," Miss Burgess felt a rich content in her hostess' choice of words. There *were* people in Endbury society who would have called him, as had the perplexed maid, "the gentleman from the greenhouse." Later, asked for advice, she had walked about the lower floor of the house with Mrs. Emery and the florist, saturated with satisfaction in the process of deciding where the palms should be put that were to conceal the "orchestra" of four instruments, and with what flowers the mantels should be "banked."

After the man had gone, they settled to a consideration of various important matters which was interrupted by an impassioned call of Madame Boyle from the stairs, "Could she bring Madderwaselle down to show this *perfect* fit?"--and they glided into a rapt admiration of the unwrinkled surface of peach-colored satin which clad Lydia's slender and flexibly erect back. When she turned about so that Madame could show them the truly exquise effect of the trimming at the throat, her face showed pearly shadows instead of its usual flower-like glow. As Madame left the room for a moment, Miss Burgess said, with a kind, respectful facetiousness, "I see that even fairy princesses find the emotions of getting engaged a little trying."

Lydia started, and flushed painfully. "Oh, Mother--" she began.

Her mother cut her short. "My *dear!* Miss Burgess!" she pointed out, as who should deplore keeping a secret from the family priest, "You know she never breathes a word that people don't want known. And she had to be told so she can know how to *put* things all this winter."

"I'm sure it's the most wonderfully *suitable* marriage," pronounced Miss Burgess.

A ring at the door-bell was instantly followed by the bursting open of the door and the impetuous onslaught of a girl, a tall, handsome, brown-eyed blonde about Lydia's age, who, wasting no time in greetings to the older women, flung herself on Lydia's neck with a wild outcry of jubilation. "My dear! Isn't it dandy! Perfectly *dandy!* Paul met me at the train last night and when he told me I nearly swooned for joy! Of all the tickled sisters-in-law! I wanted to come right over here last night, but Paul said it was a secret, and wouldn't let me." A momentary failure of lung-power forced her to a pause in which she perceived Lydia's attire. She recoiled with a dramatic rush. "Oh, you've got one of them *on!* Lydia, how insanely swell you do look! Why, Mrs. Emery"--she turned to Lydia's mother with a light-hearted unconsciousness that she had not addressed her before--"she doesn't look *real*, does she!"

There was an instant's pause as the three women gazed ecstatically at Lydia, who had again turned her back and was leaning her forehead against the window. Then the girl sprang at her again. "Well, my goodness, Lydia! I just love you to pieces, of course, but if we were of the same complexion I should certainly put poison in your candy. As it is, me so blonde and you so dark--I tell you what--what we won't do this winter--" She ran up to her again, putting her arms around her neck from behind and whispering in her ear.

Miss Burgess turned to her hostess with her sweet, motherly smile. "Aren't girls the *dearest* things?" she whispered. "I love to see them so young, and full of their own little affairs. I think it's dreadful nowadays how so many of them are allowed to get serious-minded."

Madeleine was saying to Lydia, "You sly little thing--to land Paul before the season even began! Where are you going to get your lingerie? Oh, *isn't* it fun? If I go abroad I'll smuggle it back for you. You haven't got your ring yet, I don't

suppose? Make him make it a ruby. That's ever so much sweller than that everlasting old diamond. He's something to land, too, Paul is, if I do say it--not, of course, that we've either of us got any money, but," she looked about the handsomely furnished house, "you'll have lots, and Paul'll soon be making it hand over fist--and I'll be marrying it!" She ended with a triumphant pirouette her vision of the future, and encountered Madame Boyle, entering with a white and gold evening wrap which sent her into another paroxysm of admiration. The dressmaker had just begun to say that she thought another line of gold braid around the neck would--when Mrs. Emery, looking out of the window, declared the caterer to be approaching and that she *must* have aid from her subordinates before he should enter. "I do *not* want to have that old red lemonade and sweet crackers everybody has, and slabs of ice-cream floating around on your plate. Think quick, all of you! What kind of crackers can we have?"

"Animal crackers," suggested Madeleine, with the accent of a remark intended to be humorous, drawing Lydia into a corner. "Now, don't make Lydia work. She's *It* right now, and everything's to be done for her. Madame, come over here with that cloak and let's see about the--and Oh, you and Lydia, for the love of Heaven tell me what I'm to do about this fashion for no hips, and me with a figure of eight! Lydia, the fit of that thing is *sublime!*"

"Maddenwaselle, don't you see how a little more gold right here--"

"Here, Lydia," called her mother, "it wasn't the caterer after all; it's flowers for you. Take it over there to the young lady in pink," she directed the boy.

Madeleine seized on the box, and tore it open with one of her vigorous, competent gestures. "*Orchids!*" she shouted in a single volcanic burst of appreciation. "I never had orchids sent me in my life! Paul must have telegraphed for them. You can't buy them in Endbury. And here's a note that says it's to be answered at once, while the boy waits--Oh, my! Oh, my!"

"Lydia, dear, here's the caterer, after all. Will you just please say one thing. Would you rather have the coffee or the water-ices served upstairs--Oh, here's your Aunt Julia--Julia Sandworth, I never needed advice more."

Mrs. Sandworth's appearance was the chord which resolved into one burst of sound all the various motives emitted by the different temperaments in the room. Every one appealed to her at once.

"Just a touch of gold braid on the collar, next the face, don't you--"

"Why not a real supper at midnight, with creamed oysters and things, as they do in the East?"

"Do *you* see anything out of the way in publishing the details of Miss Lydia's dress the day before? It gives people a chance to know what to look for."



"NO, NO; I CAN'T--SEE HIM--I CAN'T SEE HIM ANY MORE--"

"How can we avoid that awful jam-up there is on the stairs when people begin to--"

Mrs. Sandworth made her way to the corner where Lydia stood, presenting a faultlessly fitted back to the world so that Madame Boyle might, with a fat, moist forefinger, indicate the spot where a "soupçon" of gold was needed.

"Please, ma'am, the gentleman said I was to wait for an answer," said the messenger boy beside her.

"And she hasn't *read* it, yet!" Madeleine was horrified to remember this fact.

"Turn around, Lydia," said Mrs. Sandworth.

Lydia's white lids fluttered. The eyes they revealed were lustrous and quite blank. Madeleine darted away, crying, "I'm going to get pen and paper for you to write your note right now."

"Lydia," said Mrs. Sandworth, in a low tone, "Daniel Rankin wants to speak with you again. Your godfather is waiting here in the hall to know if you'll see him. He didn't want to *force* an interview on you if you didn't want it. He wants to see you but he wanted you to decide in perfect *freedom*--"

The tragic, troubled, helpless face that Lydia showed at this speech was a commentary on the last word. She looked around the room, her eyebrows drawn into a knot, one hand at her throat, but she did not answer. Her aunt thought she had not understood. "Just collect your thoughts, Lydia--"

The girl beat one slim fist inside the other with a sudden nervous movement. "But that's what I can't do, Aunt Julia. You know how easily I get rattled--I don't know what I'm--I *can't* collect my thoughts."

As the older woman opened her lips to speak again she cut her short with a broken whispered appeal. "No, no; I can't--see him--? I can't stand any more--tell him I guess I'll be all right--it's settled now--Mother's told all these--I like Paul. I *do* like him! Mother's told everybody here--no, no--I can't, Aunt Julia! I *can't*!"

Mrs. Sandworth, her eyes full of tears, opened her arms impulsively, but Lydia drew back. "Oh, let me alone!" she wailed. "I'm so tired!"

Madame Boyle caught this through the clatter of voices. "Why, poor Maddenwaselle!" she cried, her kindly, harassed, fatigued face melting. "Sit down. Sit down. I can show the ladies about this collar just as well that way--if they'll ever look."

Mrs. Sandworth had disappeared.

Madeleine, coming with the pen and ink, was laughing as she told them, "I didn't know Dr. Melton was in the house. I ran into him pacing up and down in the hall like a little bear, and just now I saw him--isn't he too comical! He must have heard our chatter--I saw him running down the walk as fast as he could go it, his fingers in his ears as if he were trying to get away from a dynamite bomb before it went bang."

"He hasn't much patience with many necessary details of life," said Mrs. Emery with dignity. She turned her criticism of her doctor into a compliment to her brother's widow by adding, "Whatever he would do without Julia to look after him, I'm sure none of us can imagine."

"He is a very original character," said Miss Burgess, discriminatingly.

Madeleine dismissed the subject with a compendious, "He's the most killingly, screamingly funny little man that ever lived!"

"Now, *ladies*," implored Madame Boyle, "one more row--not solid--just a soupcon--"

CHAPTER XIV

MID-SEASON NERVES

"If I should wait and read my paper here instead of on the cars, do you suppose Lydia would be up before I left?" asked the Judge as he put his napkin in the ring and pushed away from the breakfast table.

Mrs. Emery looked up, smiling, from a letter, "Of course such a great favorite as Miss Emery," she read aloud, "will be hard to secure, but both the Governor and I feel that our party wouldn't be complete without her. We're expecting a number of other Endbury young people.' And do you know who writes that?" she asked triumphantly of her husband.

"How should I?" answered the Judge reasonably.

"Mrs. Ex-Governor Mallory, to be sure. It's their annual St. Valentine's day house-party at their old family estate in Union County."

The Judge got up, laughing. "Old family estate," he mocked.

"They are one of the oldest and best families in this State," cried his wife.

"The Governor's an old blackguard," said her husband tolerantly.

"The Mallorys--the Hollisters--Lydia is certainly," began Mrs. Emery, complacently.

Lydia's father laughed again. "Oh, with you and Flora Burgess as manager and press agent--! You haven't answered my question about whether if I waited and--"

"No, she wouldn't," said Mrs. Emery decisively. "After dancing so late nights, I want her to sleep every minute she's not wanted somewhere. I have the responsibility of looking after her health, you know. I hope she'll sleep now till just time to get up and dress for Marietta's lunch-party at one o'clock."

The father of the family frowned. "Is Marietta giving another lunch-party for Lydia? They can't afford to do so much. Marietta's--"

"This is a great chance for Marietta--poor girl! she hasn't many such chances--Lydia's carrying everything before her so, I mean."

"How does Marietta get into the game?" asked her father obtusely.

Mrs. Emery hesitated a scarcely perceptible instant, a hesitation apparently illuminating to her husband. He laughed again, the tolerant, indifferent laugh he had for his women-folks' goings-on. "She thinks she can go up as the tail to Lydia's kite, does she? She'd better not be too sure. If I don't miss my guess, Paul'll have a word or two to say about carrying extra weight. Gosh! Marietta's a fool some ways for a woman that has her brains."

He stated this opinion with a detached, impersonal irresponsibility, and began to prepare himself for the plunge into the damp cold of the Endbury January. His wife preserved a dignified silence, and in the middle of a sentence of his later talk, which had again turned on his grievance about never seeing Lydia, she got up, went into the hall, and began to use the telephone for her morning shopping. Her conversation gave the impression that she was ordering veal cutlets, maidenhair ferns, wax floor-polish, chiffon ruching, and closed carriages, from one and the same invisible interlocutor, who seemed impartially unable to supply any of these needs without rather testy exhortation. Mrs. Emery was one of the women who are always well served by "tradespeople," as she now called them, "and a good reason why," she was wont to explain with self-gratulatory grimness.

The Judge waited, one hand on the door-knob, squaring his jaw over his muffler, and listening with a darkening face to the interminable succession of purchases. After a time he released the door-knob, loosened his muffler, and sat down heavily, his eyes fixed on his wife's back.

After an interval, Mrs. Emery paused in the act of ringing up another number, looked over her shoulder, saw him there and inquired uneasily, "What are you waiting for? You'll catch cold with all your things on. Isn't Dr. Melton always telling you to be careful?"

She felt a vague resentment at his being there "after hours," as she might have put it, so definitely had long usage accustomed her to a sense of solitary proprietorship of the house except at certain fixed and not very frequent periods. She almost felt that he was eavesdropping while she "ran her own business." There was also his remark about Marietta and kites, unatoned for as yet. She had not forgotten that she "owed him one," as Madeleine Hollister light-heartedly phrased the connubial balanced relationship which had come under her irreverent and keen observation. A cumulative sharpness from all these causes was in her voice as she remarked, "Didn't I tell you that Lydia--"

Judge Emery's voice in answer was as sharp as her own. "Look-y here, Susan, I bet you've ordered fifty dollars' worth of stuff since you stood there."

"Well, what if I have?" She was up in arms in an instant against his breaking a long-standing treaty between them--a treaty not tacit, but frequently and definitely stated.

They regulated their relations on a sound business basis, they were wont to say of themselves, the natural one, the right one. The husband earned the money, the wife saw that it was spent to the best advantage, and neither needed to bother his head or dissipate his energies about the other's end of the matter. They had found it meant less friction, they said; fewer occasions for differences of opinion. Once, when they had been urging this system upon their son George, then about to marry, Dr. Melton had made the suggestion that there would be still fewer differences of opinion if married people agreed never to see each other after the ceremony in the church. There would be no friction at all with that system, he added. It was one of his preposterous speeches which had become a family joke with the Emerys.

"Well, what if I have?" Mrs. Emery advanced defiantly upon her husband, with this remark repeated.

Judge Emery shared a well-known domestic peculiarity with other estimable and otherwise courageous men. He retreated precipitately before the energy of his wife's counter-attack, only saying sulkily, to conceal from himself the fact of his retreat, "Well, we're not millionaires, you know."

"Did I ever think we were?" she said, smiling inwardly at his change of front. "If you stand right up to men, they'll give in," she often counseled other matrons. She began to look up another number in the telephone book.

"If you order fifty dollars' worth every morning, besides--"

"Three-four-four--Weston," remarked his wife to the telephone. To her husband she said conclusively, "I thought we were agreed to make Lydia's first season everything it ought to be. And isn't she being worth it? There hasn't a girl come out in Endbury in *years* that's been so popular, or had so much--" She jerked her head around to the telephone-- "Three-four-four--Weston? Is this Mr. Schmidt? I want Mr. Schmidt himself. Tell him Mrs. Emery--"

The Judge broke in, with the air of launching the most startling of arguments, "Well, my salary won't stand it; that's sure! If this keeps up I'll have to resign from the bench and go into practice again."

His wife looked at him without surprise. "Well, I've often thought that might be a very good thing." She added, with good-humored impatience, "Oh, go along, Nathaniel. You know it's just one of your bilious attacks, and you will catch cold sitting there with all your--Mr. Schmidt, I want to complain about the man who dished up the ice-cream at my last reception. I am going to give another one next week, and I want a different--"

"I won't be back to lunch," said her husband. The door slammed.

As he turned into the front walk it opened after him, and his wife called after him, "I'm going to give a dinner party for Lydia's girl friends here this evening, so you'd better get your dinner down-town or at the Meltons'. I'll telephone Julia that--"

The Judge stopped, disappointment, almost dismay, on his face. "I'm going to keep track from now on," he called angrily, "of just how often I catch a glimpse of Lydia. I bet it won't be five minutes a week."

Mrs. Emery evidently did not catch what he said, and as evidently considered it of no consequence that she did not. She nodded indifferently and, drawing in her head, shut the door.

At the end of the next week the Judge announced that he had put down every time he and Lydia had been in a room together, and it amounted to just forty-five minutes, all told. Lydia, a dazzling vision in white and gold, had come downstairs on her way to a dance, and because Paul, who was to be her escort, was a little late, she told her father that now was his time for a "visit." This question of "visiting" had grown to be quite a joke. Judge Emery clutched eagerly at anything in the nature of an understanding or common interest between them.

"Oh, I don't know you well enough to visit with you," he now said laughingly, "but I'll look at you long enough so I'll recognize you the next time I meet you on the street-car."

Lydia sat down on his knee, lightly, so as not to crumple her gauzy draperies, and looked at her father with the whimsical expression that became her face so well. "I'm paying you back," she said gayly. "I remember when I was a little girl I used to wonder why you came all the way out here to eat your meals. It seemed so much easier for you to get them near your office. Honest, I did."

"Ah, that was when I was still struggling to get my toes into a crack in the wall and climb up. I didn't have time for you then. And you're very ungrateful to bring it up against me, for all I was doing was to wear my nose clear off on the grindstone so's to be able to buy you such pretty trash as this." He stroked the girl's shimmering draperies, not thinking of what he was saying, smiling at her, delighted with her beauty, with her nearness to him, with this brief snatch of intimate talk.

"Ungrateful--yourself! What am I doing but wearing my nose off on the grindstone--Dr. Melton threatens nervous prostration every day--so's to show off your pretty trash to the best advantage. *I* haven't any time to bother with *you* now!" she mocked him laughingly, her hands on his shoulders.

"Well, that sounds like a bargain," he admitted, leaning back in his chair; "I suppose I've got to be satisfied if you are. *Are* you satisfied?" he asked with a sudden seriousness. "How do you like Paul, now you know him better?"

Lydia flushed, and looked away in a tremulous confusion. "Why, when I'm with him I can't think of another thing in the world," she confessed in a low, ardent tone.

"Ah, well, then that's all right," said the Judge comfortably.

There was a pause, during which Lydia looked at the fire dreamily, and he looked at Lydia. The girl's face grew more and more absent and brooding.

The door-bell rang. "There he is, I suppose," said her father.

"But isn't it a pity we couldn't make connections?" she asked musingly. "Maybe I'd have liked you better with your nose on, better even than pretty trash."

"Eh?" said Judge Emery. His blankness was so acute that he slipped for an instant back into a rusticity he had long ago left behind him. "What say, Lydia?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, Paul; I didn't hear you come in," called the girl, jumping up and beginning to put on her wraps.

The young man darted into the room to help her, saying over his shoulder: "Much obliged to you, Judge, for your good word to Egdon, March and Company. I got the contract for the equipment of their new factory to-day."

The Judge screwed himself round in his chair till he could see Paul bending at Lydia's feet, putting on her high overshoes. "That's quite a contract, isn't it?" he asked, highly pleased.

"The biggest I ever got my teeth into," said Paul, straightening up. "I'm ashamed to have Lydia know anything about it, though. I didn't bring a hack to take her to the dance."

"Oh, I never thought you would," cried Lydia, standing up and stamping her feet down in her overshoes--an action that added emphasis to her protest. "I'd rather walk, it's such a little way. I like it better when I'm not costing people money."

"You're not like most of your sex," said Paul. "Down in Mexico, when I was there on the Brighton job, I heard a Spanish proverb: 'If a pretty woman smiles, some purse is shedding tears.'"

The two men exchanged laughing glances of understanding. Lydia frowned. "That is hateful--and horrid--and a *lie*!" she cried energetically, finding that they paid no attention to her protest.

"I didn't invent it," Paul exonerated himself lightly.

"But you laughed at it--you think it's so--you--" She was trembling in a sudden resentment at once inexplicable and amusing to the other two.

"Highty-tighty! you little spitfire!" cried her father, laughing. "I see *your* finish, my boy!"

"Good gracious, Lydia, how you do fly at a man! I take it back. I take it back." Paul looked admiringly at his pretty sweetheart's flashing eyes and crimson cheeks as he spoke.

She turned away and picked up her cloak without speaking.

"To tell the truth," said Paul, going on with the conversation as though it had not been interrupted, and addressing his father-in-law-to-be, "every penny I can rake and scrape is going into the house. Lydia's such a sensible little thing I knew she'd think it better to have something permanent than an ocean of orchids and candy now. Besides, such a belle as she is gets them from everybody else."

Mrs. Emery often pointed out to Lydia's inexperience that it was rare to see a man so magnanimously free from jealousy as her fiance.

"The architect and I were going over it to-day," the young electrician went on, "and I decided, seeing this new contract means such a lot, that I would have the panels in the hall carved, after all--of course if you agree," he turned to Lydia, but went on without waiting for an answer. "The effect will be much handsomer--will go with the rest of the house better."

"They'd be lots harder to dust," said Lydia dubiously, putting a spangled web of gold over her hair. The contrast between her aspect and the dingy suggestions of her speech made both men laugh tenderly. "When Titania takes to being practical--" laughed Paul.

Lydia went on seriously. "Honestly, Paul, I'm afraid the house is getting too handsome, anyhow--everything in it. It's too expensive, I'm--"

"Nothing's too good for you." Paul said this with conviction. "And besides, it's an asset. The mortgage won't be so very large. And if we're in it, we'll just have to live up to it. It'll be a stimulus."

"I hope it doesn't stimulate us into our graves," said Lydia, as she kissed her father good-night.

"Well, your families aren't paupers on either side," said Paul.

A casual remark like this was the nearest approach he ever made to admitting that he expected Lydia to inherit money. He would have been shocked at the idea of allowing any question of money to influence his marriage, and would not have lifted a hand to learn the state of his future father-in-law's finances. Still, it was evident to the most disinterested eye that there were plenty of funds behind the Emery's ample, comfortable mode of life, and on this point his eyes were keen, for all their delicacy.

As the young people paused at the door, Judge Emery took a note-book out of his pocket and elaborately made a note. "Fifty-five minutes in eight days, Lydia," he called.

At the end of a fortnight he proclaimed aloud that the record was too discouraging to keep any longer; he was losing ground instead of gaining. He had followed Mrs. Emery to her room one afternoon to make this complaint, and now moved about uneasily, trying to bestow his large, square figure where he would not be in the way of his wife, who was hurrying nervously about to pack Lydia's traveling bag. She looked very tired and pale, and spoke as though near a nervous outbreak of some sort. Didn't he know that Lydia had to start for the Mallory Valentine house-party this afternoon, she asked with an asperity not directed at the Judge's complaint, for she considered that negligible, but at Lydia for being late. She often became so absorbed and fascinated by her own managerial capacity that she was vastly put out by lapses on the part of the object of it. She did not spare herself when it was a question of Lydia's career. Without a thought of fatigue or her own personal tastes, she devoted herself with a fanatic zeal to furthering her daughter's interests. It sometimes seemed very hard to bear that Lydia herself was so much less zealous in the matter.

When the girl came in now, flushed and guiltily breathless, Dr. Melton trotted at her heels, calling out excuses for her tardiness. "It's my fault. I met her scurrying away from a card-party, and she was exactly on time. But I walked along with her and detained her."

"It was the sunset," said Lydia, hurrying to change her hat and wraps. "It was so fine that when Godfather called my attention to it, I just *stood!* I forgot everything! There may have been sunsets before this winter, but it seems as though I hadn't had time to see one before--over the ironworks, you know, where that hideous black smoke is all day, and the sun turned it into such loveliness--"

"You've missed your trolley-car," said her mother succinctly.

"Oh, I'm *sorry!*" cried Lydia, in a remorse evidently directed more toward displeasing her mother than the other

consequences of her delay, for she asked in a moment, very meekly, "Will it make so very much difference if I don't go till the next one?"

"You'll miss the Governor. He was coming down to meet those on this car. You'll have to go all alone. All the rest of the party were on this one."

"Oh, I don't care about that," cried Lydia. "If that's all--I'd ever so much rather go alone. I'm never alone a single minute, and it'll rest me. The crowd would have been so noisy and carried on so--they always do."

Her mother's aggrieved disappointment did not disappear. She said nothing, bringing Lydia's traveling wraps to her silently, and emanating disapproval until Lydia drooped and looked piteously at her godfather.

Dr. Melton cried out at this, "Look here, Susan Emery, you're like the carpenter that was so proud of his good planing that he planed his boards all away to shavings."

Mrs. Emery looked at him with a lack of comprehension of his meaning equaled only by her evident indifference to it.

"I mean--I thought what you were going in for was giving Lydia a good time this winter. You're running her as though she were a transcontinental railway system."

"You can't accomplish anything without system in this world," said Mrs. Emery. She added, "Perhaps Lydia will find, when she comes to ordering her own life, that she will miss her old mother's forethought and care."

Lydia flung herself remorsefully on her mother's neck. "I'm so *sorry*, Mother dear," she almost sobbed. Dr. Melton's professional eye took in the fact that everyone in the room was high-strung and tense. "The middle-of-the-social-season symptom," he called it to himself. "I'm so sorry, Mother," Lydia went on. "I will be more careful next time. You are *so* good to--to--"

"Good Heavens!" said Dr. Melton. "All the child did was to give herself a moment's time to look at a fine spectacle, after spending all a precious afternoon on such a tragically idiotic pursuit as cards."

"Oh, *sunsets!*" Mrs. Emery disposed of them with a word. "Come, Lydia."

"I'll go with her, and carry her bag," said the doctor.

"You made such a good job of getting her here on time," said Mrs. Emery, unappeased.

The Judge offered to go, as a means of one of his rare visits with Lydia, but his wife declared with emphasis that she didn't care who went or didn't go so long as she herself saw that Lydia did not take to star-gazing again. It ended by all four proceeding down the street together.

"You're sure you remember everything, Lydia?" asked her mother.

"Let me see," said the girl, laughing nervously. "Do I? The Governor's wife is his second, so I'm to waste no time admiring the first set of children. They're Methodists, so I'm to keep quiet about our being Episcopalians--"

"I guess we're not Episcopalians enough to hurt," commented her father, who had never taken the conversion of his women-folks very seriously.

"And it's my pink crepe for dinner and tan-colored suit if they have afternoon tea. And Mrs. Mallory is to be asked to visit us, but not her daughter, because of her impossible husband, and I'm to play my prettiest to the Governor, because he's always needing dynamos and such in the works, and Paul--"

The big car came booming around the corner, and she stopped her category of recommendations. The doctor rushed in with a last one as they stepped hurriedly toward the rear platform: "And don't forget that your host is the most unmitigated old rascal that ever stood in with two political machines at once."

The Judge swung her up on the platform, the doctor gave her valise to the conductor, her mother waved her hand, and she was off.

The two men turned away. Not so Mrs. Emery. She was staring after the car in a fierce endeavor to focus her gaze on the interior. "Who was that man that jumped up so surprised to speak to Lydia?"

"I didn't notice anybody," said the Judge.

Dr. Melton spoke quickly. "Lydia's getting in a very nervous state, my friends; I want you to know that. This confounded life is too much for her."

"She doesn't kill herself getting up in the morning," complained her father. "It is a month now since I've seen her at breakfast."

"I don't *let* her get up," said Mrs. Emery. "I guess if you'd been up till two every morning dancing split dances because you were *the* belle of the season, you'd sleep late! Besides," she went on, "she'll be all right as soon as her engagement

is announced. The excitement of that'll brace her up."

"Good Lord! It's not more excitement she needs," began Dr. Melton; but they had reached the house, and Mrs. Emery, obviously preoccupied, pulled her husband quickly in, dismissing the doctor with a nod.

She drew the Judge hurriedly into the hall, and, "It was that Rankin!" she cried, the slam of the door underscoring her words, "and I believe Marius Melton knew he was going on that car and made Lydia late on purpose."

Judge Emery was in the state in which of late the end of the day's work found him--overwhelmingly fatigued. He had not an ounce of superfluous energy to answer his wife's tocsin. "Well, what if it was?" he said.

"They'll be an hour and a half together--alone--more alone than anywhere except on a desert island. Alone--an hour and a half!"

"Oh, Susan! If Paul can't in three months make more headway than Rankin can tear down in an hour and a half--"

She raged at him, revolted at the calmness with which he was unbuttoning his overcoat and unwinding his muffler, "You don't understand--*anything*! I'm not afraid she'll elope with him--Paul's got her too solid for that--Rankin probably won't say anything of *that* kind! But he'll put notions in her head again--she's so impressionable. And she says queer things now, once in a while, if she's left alone a minute. She needs managing. She's not like that levelheaded, sensible Madeleine Hollister. Lydia has to be guided, and you don't see anything--you leave it all to me."

She was almost crying with nervous exhaustion. That Lydia's course ran smooth through a thousand complications was not accomplished without an incalculable expenditure of nervous force on her mother's part. Dr. Melton had several times of late predicted that he would have his old patient back under his care again. Judge Emery, remembering this prophecy, was now moved by his wife's pale agitation to a heart-sickening mixture of apprehension for her and of recollection of his own extreme discomfort whenever she was sick. He tried to soothe her. "But, Susan, there's nothing we can do about it," he said reasoningly, hanging up his overcoat, blandly ignorant that her irritation came largely from his failure to fall in with her conception of the moment as a tragic one.

"You could *care* something about it," she said bitterly, standing with all her wraps on. The telephone bell rang. She motioned him back. "No; I might as well go first as last. It'll be something I'd have to see about, anyway."

As he hesitated in the middle of the hall, longing to betake himself to a deep easy chair and a moment's relaxation, and not daring to do so, he was startled by an electric change in his wife's voice. "You're at Hardville, you say? Oh, Flora Burgess, I could go down on my knees in thanksgiving. I want you to run right out as fast as you can and get on the next Interurban car from Endbury. Lydia's on it--" she cast caution from her desperately--"and I've just heard that there's somebody I don't want her to talk to--you know--*carpenters*--run--fly--never mind what they say! Make them talk to you, too!"

She turned back to her husband, transfigured with triumph. "I guess that'll put a spoke in *his* wheel!" she cried. "Flora Burgess's at Hardville, and that's only half an hour from here. I guess they can't get very far in half an hour."

The Judge considered the matter with pursed lips. "I wish it hadn't happened," he mused, as unresponsive to his wife's relief as he had been to her anxiety. "At first, I mean--last autumn--at all."

His wife caught him up with a good humor gay with relief. "Oh, give you time, Nat, and you come round to seeing what's under your nose. I was wishing it hadn't happened long before I knew it had. I breathed it in the air before we ever knew she'd so much as seen him."

"Melton says he thinks the fellow has a future before him--"

"Oh, Marius Melton! How many of his swans have stuffed feather pillows!"

The Judge demurred. "I often wish I could think he *was*--but Melton's no fool." He added, uneasily, "He's been pestering me again about taking a long rest--says I'm really out of condition."

"Perhaps a change of work would do you good--to be in active practice again. You could be your own master more--take more vacations, maybe."

The Judge surveyed her with a whimsical smile. "I'd make a lot more money in practice," he admitted.

If she heard this comment she made no sign, but went on, "You do work too constantly, too. I've always said so! If you'd be willing to take a little more relaxation--go out more--"

Judge Emery shuddered. "Endbury tea-parties--!"

His wife, half-way up the stairs, laughed down at him. "Tea-parties! There hasn't been a tea-party given in Endbury since we were wearing pull-backs."

The laugh was so good-natured that the Judge hoped for a favorable opening and ventured to say irrelevantly, as

though reverting automatically to a subject always in his mind, "But, honest, Susie, can't we shave expenses down some? This winter is costing--"

She turned on him, not resentfully this time, but with a solemn appeal. "Why, Nat! Lydia's season! The last winter we'll have her with us, no doubt! I'd go on bread and water afterward to give her what she wants now--wouldn't *you*? What are we old folks good for but to do our best by our children?"

The Judge looked up at her, baffled, inarticulate. "Oh, of course," he agreed helplessly, "we want to do the best by our children."

CHAPTER XV

A HALF-HOUR'S LIBERTY

Inside the big Interurban car Lydia and Rankin were talking with a freedom that enormously surprised Lydia. The man had started up with an exclamation of pleasure, had taken her bag, found a vacant seat, put her next the window and sat down by her before Lydia, quite breathless with the shock of seeing him, could do more than notice how vigorous he looked, his tall, spare figure alert and erect, his ruddy hair and close-clipped beard contrasting vividly with his dark-blue flannel shirt and soft black hat. He was on a business trip, evidently, for on his knees he held a tool-box with large ungloved hands, roughened and red.

With his usual sweeping disregard of conventional approaches, he plunged boldly into the matter with which their thoughts were at once occupied. "So this was why Dr. Melton insisted I should take this car. Well, I'm grateful to him! It gives me a chance to relieve my mind of a weight of remorse I've been carrying around."

Lydia looked at him, relieved and surprised at the hearty spontaneity of this opening.

He misunderstood her expression. "You don't mind, do you, my speaking to you about last fall--my saying I am so very sorry I made you all the trouble Dr. Melton tells me I did? I'm really very sorry!"

Nothing could have more completely disarmed Lydia's acquired fear of him as the bogey-man of her mother's exhortations. It is true that she was, as she put it to herself, somewhat taken down by the contrast between her secret thought of him as a wounded, rejected suitor, and this clear-eyed, self-possessed, friendly reality before her; but, after a momentary feeling of pique, coming from a sense of the romantic, superficially grafted on her natural good feeling, she was filled with an immense relief. Lydia was no man-eater. In spite of traditional wisdom, she, like a considerable number of her contemporaries, was as far removed from this stage of feminine development as from a Stone-age appetite for raw meat. She now drew a long breath of the most honest satisfaction that she had done him no harm, and smiled at Rankin. He waited for her to speak, and she finally said: "It's awfully good of you to put it that way! I've been afraid you must have been angry with me and hurt that I--so you didn't mind at all!"

Rankin smiled at little ruefully at her swift conclusion. "I believe in telling the truth, even to young ladies, and I can not say I didn't mind at all--or that I don't now. But I am convinced that you were right in dropping me--out of the realm of acquaintances." His assumption was, Lydia saw with gratitude, that they were talking simply about a possible acquaintanceship between them. "It's evidently true--what I told you the very first time I saw you. We don't belong in the same world."

As he said this, he looked at her with an expression Lydia thought severe. She protested, "What makes you so sure?"

"Because to live in my world--even to step into it from time to time--requires the courage to believe in it."

"And you think I didn't?" asked Lydia. It was an inestimable comfort to her to have brought into the light the problem that had so long lain in the back of her head, a confused mass of dark conjecture.

"Did you?" he asked steadily. "You ought to know."

There was silence, while Lydia turned her head away and looked at the brown, flat winter landscape jerking itself past the windows as the car began to develop speed in the first long, open space between settlements. She was trying to remember something distinct about the nightmare of misery that had followed her admission of the identity of the man who had kissed her hand that starry night in October, but from the black chaos of her recollection she brought out only, "Oh, you don't realize how things are with a girl--how many million little ways she's bound and tied down, just from everybody in the family loving her as--"

"Oh, yes, I do; I prove I do by saying that you were probably right in yielding so absolutely to that overwhelming influence. If you hadn't the strength to break through it decisively even once, you certainly couldn't have gotten any satisfaction out of doing things contrary to it. So it's all right, you see."

Lydia's drooping face did not show that she derived the satisfaction from this view of her limitations that her companion seemed to expect. "You mean I'm a poor-spirited, weak thing, who'd better never try to take a step of my own," she said with a sorry smile.

"I don't mean anything unkind," he told her gently. "I've succeeded in convincing myself that your action of last autumn was the result of a deep-rooted instinct for self-preservation--and that's certainly most justifiable. It meant I'd expected too harsh a strength from you--" he went on with a whimsical smile, which even the steadiness of his eyes did not keep from sadness--"as though I'd hoped you could lift a thousand-pound weight, like the strong woman in the side-show."

She responded to his attempt at lightness with as plain an undercurrent of seriousness as his own. "Why do you live so that people have to lift thousand-pound weights before they dare so much as say good-morning to you?"

"Because I don't dare live any other way," he answered.

"It's hard on other people," Lydia ventured, but retreated hastily before the first expression of upbraiding she had seen in his eyes. He had so suddenly turned grave with the thought that it had been harder on him than on anyone else that she cried out hurriedly, "But you didn't help a bit--you left it all to me--"

She stopped, her face burning in uncertainty of the meaning of her words.

Rankin's answer came with the swiftness of one who has meditated long on a question. "I'm glad you've given me a chance to say what--I've wished you might know. I thought it over and over at the time--and since--and I'm sure it would not have been honorable--or delicate--or right, *not* to leave it all to you. That much was yours to decide--whether you would take the first step. It would have been a crime to have hurried or urged you beyond what lay in your heart to do--or to have overborne you against some deep-lying, innate instinct."

Lydia's voice was shaking in self-pity as she cried out, "Oh, if you knew what the others--nobody *else* was afraid to hurry or urge me to--"

She stopped and looked away, her heart beating rapidly with a flood of recollections. Rankin's lips opened, but he shut them firmly, as though he did not trust himself to speak. His large red hands closed savagely on the handle of his toolbox. There was a silence between them.

The car began to move more slowly, and the conductor, standing up from the seat where he had been dozing, remarked in a conversational tone to a woman with two children near him, "Gardenton--this is the cross-roads to Gardenton." Later, as the car stood still under the singing vibration of the trolley-wire overhead, he added in the general direction of Lydia and Rankin, now the only passengers, "Next stop is Wardsboro!" His voice came to them with a singular clearness in the quiet of the momentary stop. They were in the midst of a mournful expanse of bare ploughed fields, frozen and brown. The motorman released his brake, letting the brass arm swing noisily about, the conductor sat down again, and as the car began to move forward again he closed his eyes. He looked very tired and, now that an almost instant sleep had relaxed his features, pathetically young.

"How pale he is," said Lydia, wishing to break the silence with a harmless remark. "He looks tired to death."

"He probably is just that," said Rankin, wincing. "It's sickening, the way they work. Seven days a week, most of them, you know."

"No; I didn't know," cried Lydia, shocked. "Why, that's awful. When do they see their families?"

"They don't. One of them, whose house isn't far from mine, told me that he hadn't seen his children, except asleep, for three weeks."

"But something ought to be done about it!" The girl's deep-lying instinct for instant reparation rose up hotly.

"Are they so much worse off than most American business men?" queried Rankin. "Do any of them feel they can take the time to see much more than the outside of their children; and isn't seeing them asleep about as--"

Lydia cut him short quickly. "You're always blaming them for that," she cried. "You ought to pity them. They can't help it. It's better for the children to have bread and butter, isn't it--"

Rankin shook his head. "I can't be fooled with that sort of talk--I've lived with too many kinds of people. At least half the time it isn't a question of bread and butter. It's a question of giving the children bread and butter and sugar rather than bread and butter and father. Of course, I'm a fanatic on the subject. I'd rather leave off even the butter than the father--let alone the sugar."

"But here's this very motorman you know about--what could he do?"

"They're not forced by the company to work seven days a week--only they're not given pay enough to let them take even one day off without feeling it. This very motorman I was talking with got to telling me why he was working so extra hard just then. His oldest daughter is going to graduate from the high school and he wants to give her a fine graduating dress, as good as anybody's, and a graduating 'present.' It seems that's the style now for graduating girls. He said he and his wife wanted her always to remember that day as a bright spot, and not as a time when she was humiliated by being different from other girls."

"Well, my goodness! you're not criticizing them for that, are you? I think it was just as sweet and lovely of them as can be to realize how a girl feels."

Rankin looked at her, smiled slightly, and said nothing. His silence made Lydia thoughtful. After a time, "I see what you mean, of course," she said slowly, "that it would be *better* for her, perhaps--but if he *loves* her, her father *wants* to do things for her."

Rankin's roar of exasperation at this speech was so evidently directed at an old enemy of an argument that Lydia was only for an instant startled by it. "I *don't* say he can do too much for her," he cried. "He can't! Nobody can do too much for anybody else if it's the right thing."

"And what in the world do you think *would* be the right thing in this case?" Lydia put the question as a poser.

"Why, of course, to pamper her vanity; to feed her moral cowardice; to make her more afraid than ever of senseless public opinion; to deprive her of a fine exercise for her spiritual force; to shut her off from a sense of her material situation in life until the knowledge of it will come as a tragedy to her; to let her grow up without any knowledge of her father's point of view--"

"There, there! That's enough!" said Lydia.

"I didn't need to be so violent about it, that's a fact," apologized Rankin.

"But you're talking of people the way they ought to be," objected Lydia, apparently drawing again from a stock of inculcated arguments. "Do you really, honestly, suppose that that girl would rather have an opportunity to do something for her parents and--and--and all that, than have a fine dress that would cost a lot and make the other girls envious?"

"Oh, Lydia!" cried her companion, not noticing the betrayal of a mental habit in the slipping out of her name. "You're just in a state of saturated solution of Dr. Melton. Don't you believe a word he says about folks. They're lots better than he thinks. The only reason anybody has for raging at them for being a bad lot is because they are such a good lot! They are so chuck-full of good possibilities! There's so much more good in them than bad. You think that, don't you? You *must*! There's nothing to go on, if you don't."

As Lydia began to answer she felt herself, as once or twice before when with Rankin, suddenly an immeasurable distance from her usual ways of mental life. She looked about her upon a horizon very ample and quite strange, without being able to trace the rapid steps that had carried her away from the close-walled room full of knickknacks and trifles, where she usually lived. She drew a deep breath of surprise and changed her answer to an honest "I don't believe I know whether I believe you or not. I don't think I ever thought of it before."

"What *do* you think about?" The question was evidently too sincere an interrogation to resent.

The girl made several beginnings at an answer, stopped, looked out of the window, looked down at her shoe-tip, and finally burst into her little clear trill of amusement. "I don't," she said, looking full at Rankin, her eyes shining. "You've caught me! I can't remember a single time in my day when I think about anything but hurrying to get dressed in time to be at the next party promptly. Maybe some folks can think when they're hurrying to get dressed, but I can't."

Rankin was very little moved to hilarity by this statement, but he was too young to resist the contagion of Lydia's mirth, and laughed back at her, wondering at the mobility of her ever-changing face.

"If you don't think, what do you *do*?" he interrogated with mock relentlessness.

"Nothing," said Lydia recklessly, still laughing.

"What do you feel?" he went on in the same tone, but Lydia's face changed quickly.

"Oh--lots!" she said uncertainly, and was silent.

The car began to pass some poor, small houses, and in a moment came to a standstill in the midst of a straggling village. The young conductor still slept on, his head fallen so far on his shoulder that his breathing was difficult. The motorman, getting no signal to go on, looked back through the window, putting his face close to the glass to see, for it had grown dusky outside and the electric lights were not yet turned on. After a look at the sleeping man he glanced

apprehensively at the two passengers, and then, apparently reassured that they were not "company detectives," he pushed open the door. "This is Wardsboro'," he told them as he went down the aisle, "and the next stop is Hardville."

He was a strong, burly man, and easily lifted the slight, boyish form of the conductor to a more comfortable position, propping him up in a corner of the seat. The young man did not waken, but his face relaxed into peaceful lines of unconsciousness as his head fell back, and his breathing became long and regular, like a sleeping child's. As the big motorman went back to his post, he explained a little sheepishly to the two, who had watched his operation in attentive silence, "It's against the rules, I know, but there ain't anybody but you two here, and he don't look as though he'd really got his growth yet. I got a boy ain't sixteen that looks as old as he does, and ruggeded at that. I reckon the long hours are too much for him."

"Do you know him?" asked Rankin.

The motorman turned his red, weather-beaten face to them from the doorway where he stood, pulling on his clumsy gloves. "Who, me?" he asked. "No; I never seen him till to-day. He's a new hand, I reckon." He drew the door after him with a rattling slam, rang the bell for himself, and started the car forward.

In the warm, vibrating solitude of the car, the two young people looked at each other in a silent transport. Lydia's dark eyes were glistening, and she checked Rankin, about to speak, with a quick, broken "No; don't say a word! You'd spoil it!"

There was between them one of the long, vital silences, full of certainty of a common emotion, which had once or twice before marked a significant change in their relation. Finally, "That's something I shall never forget," said Lydia.

Rankin looked at her in silence, and then, quickly, away.

"It's like an answer to what I was saying--a refutation of what Dr. Melton thinks--about people--"

As Rankin still made no answer, she exclaimed in a ravished surprise, "Why, I never saw anything so lovely--that made me so happy! I feel warm all over!"

Indeed, her face shone through the dusk upon her companion, who could now no longer constrain himself to look away from her. He said, his voice vibrant with a deep note which instantly carried Lydia back to the other time when she had heard it, under the stars of last October, "It's only an instrument exquisitely in tune which can so respond--" He broke off, closed his lips, and, turning away from her, gazed sightlessly out at the dim, flat horizon, now the only outline visible in the twilight.

Lydia said nothing, either then or when, after a long pause, he said that he would leave the car at the next station.

"It has been very pleasant to see you again," he said, bending over his tool-box, "and you mustn't lay it up against me that I haven't congratulated you on your engagement. Of course you know how I wish you all happiness."

"Thank you," said Lydia.

Ahead of the car, some lights suddenly winking above the horizon announced the approach of Hardville. Rankin stood up, slipped on his rough overcoat, and sat down again. He drew a long breath, and began evenly: "I know you won't misunderstand me if I try to say one more thing. I probably won't see you again for years, and it would be a great joy to me to be sure that you know how hearty is my good-will to you. I'm afraid you can't think of me without pain, because I was the cause of such discomfort to you, but I know you are too generous to blame me for what was an involuntary hurt. Of course I ought to have known how your guardians would feel about your knowing me--"

"Oh, *why* should you be so that all that happened!" cried Lydia suddenly. "If it was too hard for me, why couldn't you have made it easier--thought differently--acted like other people. *Would* you--if I hadn't--if we had gone on knowing each other?"

Rankin turned very white. "No," he said; "I couldn't."

"It seems to me," said Lydia hurriedly, "that, without being willing to concede anything to their ideas, you ask a great deal of your friends."

"Yes," said Rankin, "I do. It's a hard struggle I'm in with myself and the world--oh, evidently much too hard for you even to look at from a distance." His voice broke. "The best thing I can do for you is to stay away--" He rose, and stepped into the aisle. "But you are so kind--you will let me serve you in any other way, if I can--ever. If I can ever do something that's hard for you to do--you must know that I stand as ready as even Dr. Melton to do it for you if I can."

Indeed, for the moment, as Lydia looked up into his kind, strong face, his impersonal tenderness made him seem almost such an old, tried friend as her godfather; almost as unlikely to expect any intimate personal return from her.

"You must remember," he went on, "the great joy it gave us both to-day even to see an act of kindness. Give me an opportunity to do one for you if I ever can."

It already seemed to Lydia as though he had gone away from her, as though this were but a beneficent memory of him lingering by her side. She hardly noticed when he left her alone in the car.

The conductor started up, wakened by the silence, and announced wildly, "Wardsboro', Wardsboro'!"

"No, it ain't; it's the first stop in Hardville," contradicted the motorman, sticking his head in through the door. "Turn on them lights!"

As the glass bulbs leaped to a dazzling glare, Lydia blinked and looked away out of the window. A moment later an arm laid about her neck made her bound up in amazement and confront a small, middle-aged woman, with a hat too young for her tired, sallow face, with a note-book in her hand and an apologetic expression of affection in her light blue eyes. "I'm sorry I startled you, Miss Lydia," she said. "I keep forgetting you're not still a little girl I can pick up and hug."

"Oh, you!" breathed the girl, sitting down again. "I didn't think there was anybody in the car with me, you see."

"Have you come all the way from Endbury alone, then?" asked Miss Burgess, looking about her suspiciously.

"No, I have not," said Lydia uncompromisingly. "Mr. Rankin, the cabinet-maker, has been with me till just now."

Miss Burgess sat down hastily in the vacant seat by Lydia. "And he's coming back?" she inquired.

"No; he got off at Hardville. This *is* Hardville, isn't it?"

"Yes. I happened to be out reporting a big church bazaar here." She settled back comfortably. "What a nice chance for a cozy little visit I shall have with you. These long trips on the Interurban are fine for talking. Unless I shall tire you? Did Mr. Rankin talk much? What does he talk *about*, anyhow? He's always so rude to me that I've never heard him say a word except about his work."

Lydia considered for a moment. "We talked about the street-car conductors having such long hours to work," she said, "and later about whether people have more bad in them than good."

"Oh!" said Miss Burgess.

Lydia smiled faintly, the ghost of her whimsical little look of mockery. "We decided that they have more good," she said.

Miss Burgess cast about her for a suitable comment. At last, "Really!" she said.

CHAPTER XVI

ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED

All over the half-finished house the workmen began to lay down their tools. Paul Hollister's face broke into a good-humored smile as a moment later he caught the faraway five-o'clock whistles calling from the city. He was in a very happy mood these days and the best aspect of the phenomena of the world was what impressed him most. As the workmen disappeared down the driveway to the main road, running to catch the next trolley-car to Endbury, he looked after them with little of the usual exasperation of the house-builder whose work they were slighting, but with an agreeable sense of their extreme inferiority to him in the matter of fixity of purpose. He felt that they symbolized the weakness of most of humanity, and promised himself with a comfortable confidence an easy and lifelong victory over such feeble adversaries. Of late, business had been going even better than ever.

The days had begun to grow appreciably longer with the approach of spring, and there had been several noons of an almost summer-like mildness, but now, in spite of the fact that the sun was still shining, the first chill of the late March evening dropped suddenly upon the bare-raftered structure whose open windows and door-spaces offered no barrier to the damp breeze. Hollister stirred from his pleasant reverie and began to walk briskly about, inspecting the amount of work accomplished since his last visit. He kept very close track of the industry of his workmen and the competence of his contractor, and Lydia's father admired greatly the way in which his future son-in-law did not allow himself to be "done" by those past masters of the art. It argued well for the future, Judge Emery thought, and he called Lydia's attention to the trait with approval.

Before the wide aperture which was to be the front door, the owner of the house stopped and looked eagerly out toward the road. It was near the time when Lydia had promised to be there, and he meant to see her and run to meet her when she first turned in upon the ground that was to be her home. It was the first time that Lydia had happened to visit

the new house alone. Either her mother or Hollister's sister had accompanied her on the two or three other occasions, but to-day she telephoned that Mrs. Emery had been really out-and-out forbidden by Dr. Melton to get out of bed for two or three days, and as for Madeleine--at this point Madeleine had snatched the receiver from Lydia's hand and had informed her brother that Madeleine was going to be busy with *her* young man and couldn't get off to chaperone people that had been as long engaged as he and Lydia.

That was part of the bright color of the world to Paul--his sister's recent engagement to their uncle's partner in the iron works, a very prosperous, young-old bachelor of fifty-odd, whose intense preoccupation with business had never been pierced by any consciousness of the other sex until Madeleine had, as she proclaimed in her own vernacular, "taken a club to him." It was a very brilliant match for her, and justified her own prophecy concerning herself that she was not to be satisfied with any old-fashioned, smooth-running course for true love. "It must shoot the chutes, or nothing," she was accustomed to say, in her cheerful, high-spirited manner.

Paul thought, with self-approval, that, for orphans of the poorer branch of the Hollister family, he and Madeleine had not done badly with their lives thus far.

He looked again impatiently toward the entrance to the grounds. A trolley-car had just rattled by on the main road. If Lydia was on it, she would appear at that turning under the trees. No; evidently she had not been on that one. The harsh jar of the trolley's progress died away in the distance and no Lydia appeared. He had fifteen minutes to wait for the next one.

He drew out a note-book and began jotting down some ideas about the disposition of the five acres surrounding the house. He was ambitious to have the appearance of a country estate and avoid the "suburban" look which would be so fatally easy to acquire in the suburban place. He decided that he would not as yet fence in his land. The house was the last one of a group of handsome residences that had lately sprung up in the vicinity of the new Country Club, and to the south was still open country, so that without a fence, he reflected, he could have himself, and convey tacitly to others, the illusion of owning the wide sweep of meadow and field which stretched away a mile or more to a group of beech trees.

He jumped down lightly from the porch, as yet but sketchily outlined in joists and rafters, and stood in a litter of shavings, bits of board and piles of yellow earth, with a kindling eye. He had that happy prophetic vision of the home-builder which overlooks all present deficiencies and in an instant, with a confident magic, erects all that the slow years are to build. He saw a handsome, well-kept house, correctly colonial in style, grounds artfully laid out to increase the impression of space, a hospitable, smoothly run interior, artistic, homelike, admired.

A meadow-lark near him began to tinkle out its pretty silver notes. The sun set slowly below the smoky horizon; a dewy peace fell about the deserted place. Paul had his visions of other than material elements in his future and Lydia's. Such a dream came to him there, standing in the dusk before the germ of his home to be. He saw himself an alert man of forty-five, a good citizen, always on the side of civic honor; a good captain of industry, quick to see and reward merit; a good husband who loved and cherished his wife as on the day he married her, and protected her from all the asperities of reality; a good father--he had almost an actual vision of the children who would carry on his work in life--girls of Lydia's beauty and sweetness, boys with his energy and uprightness--and there was Lydia, too, the Lydia of twenty years from now--in the full bloom of physical allurements still, a gracious hostess, a public-spirited matron, lending the luster of his name to all worthy charities indorsed by the best people, laying down with a firm good taste dictates as to the worthy social development of the town. Before this vision there rose up in him the ardent impulse to immediate effort which is the sign manual of the man of action. He stirred and flung his arm out.

"It's all up to me," he said aloud. "I can do it if I go after it hard enough. I've got to make good for Lydia's sake and mine. She must have the best I can get--the very best I know how to get for her."

A sound behind him made him catch his breath. He was trembling as he turned about and saw Lydia coming swiftly up the driveway. "Good Heavens, how I love her!" he thought as he ran down to meet her.

He was trembling when he took her in his arms, folding her in that close embrace of surprised rapture at finding everything real, and no dream, which is the unique joy of betrothal. He would not let her speak for a moment, pressing his lips upon hers. When he released her, she cried in a whisper, "Oh, it's wonderful how when you're close to me everything else just isn't in the world!"

"That's being in love, Lydia," Paul told her with a grave thankfulness.

"I don't mean," she went on, with her ever-present effort to express honestly her meaning, "I don't mean just--just being really close--having your arms around me, though that always makes me forget things, too--but being--*feeling* close, you know--inside. Not having any inner corner where we're not together--the way we are now--the way I knew we should be when I saw you running down to meet me. I always know the minute I see you whether it's going to be this way." She added, a little wistfully, "Sometimes, you know, it isn't."

Paul lifted her up to the porch and led her across into the hallway. Here he took her in his arms again and said with a shaken accent: "Dearest Lydia, dearest! I wish it were always the way you want it--"

Lydia dropped her head back on his shoulder and looked at him earnestly. In the half-light, white and clear from the freshly plastered walls, her face was like alabaster. "Dear Paul, isn't that what getting married means--to learn how to be really, really close to each other all the time. There isn't anything else worth getting married for, is there? *Is there?*"

Her lover looked down into her eyes, into her sweet, earnest face, and could not speak. Finally, his hand at his throat, "Oh, Lydia, you're too good for me!" he said huskily. "You're too good for any man!"

"No, no, no!" she protested with a soft energy. "I'm weak, as weak as water. You must give me a lot of your strength or I'll go under."

"God knows I'll give you anything I have."

"Then, never let things come between us--never, never, never! I'm all right as long as I'm close to you. If we just keep that, nothing else can matter."

They were silent, standing with clasped hands in the passage-way that was to be the thoroughfare of their common life. It was a moment that was to come back many times to Lydia's memory during later innumerable, hurried daily farewells. The thought of the significance of the place came to her mind now. She said softly, "This must be a foretaste of what we're to have under this roof. How good it seems not to be in a hurry to--"

With a start Paul came to himself from his unusual forgetfulness of his surroundings. "We *ought* to be in a hurry now, dearest. Dr. Melton keeps me stirred up all the time to take care of you, and I'm sure I'm not doing that to let you stand here in this cold evening air. Come, let me show you--the closet under the stairs, you know, and the place for the refrigerator."

Lydia yielded to his care for her with her sweet passivity, echoed his opinion about the details, and ran beside him down the driveway, to catch the next car to Endbury, with a singular light grace for a tall woman encumbered with long skirts.

In spite of their haste, they missed the car and were obliged to wait for a quarter of an hour beside the tracks. They talked cheerfully on indifferent topics, the sense of intimate comradeship gilding all they said. In their hearts was fresh the memory of the scene in the new house. They looked at each other and smiled happily in the intervals of their talk.

Paul was recapitulating to Lydia the advantages of the location of their house. "We are in the vanguard of a new movement in American life," he said, "the movement away from the cities. Madeleine tells me that she and Lowder are planning a house at the other end of this street, and you can be sure they know what they are about."

Lydia did not dissent from this opinion of her future sister-in-law, but she interrupted Paul a moment later, to say fondly, "Oh, but I'm glad that you aren't fifty-five and bald and with lots of money!"

Paul laughed. "Madeleine'll get on all right. She knows what she's about. It's a pair of them."

"Well, I am church-thankful that that is not what *we* are about!" exclaimed Lydia.

Her lover voiced the extreme content with his lot which had been his obsession that day. "We have *everything*, darling. We shall have all that Madeleine and old Lowder have and we have now all this heavenly happiness that they'll never know--or miss," he added, giving them their due.

"I didn't mean that," protested Lydia. "It seems to me that being like them and being like us are two contradictory things. You *can't* be both and have the things that go with both. And what I'm so thankful for is that we're us and not them."

Paul laughed. "You just see if there's anything so contradictory. Trust me. You just see if you don't beat Madeleine on her own ground yet."

"I don't *want*--" began Lydia; but Paul had gone back to his first theme and was expanding it for her benefit. "Yes; we're getting the English idea. In twenty years from now you'll find the social center of every moderate-sized American city shifted to some such place as this."

Lydia craned her neck down the tracks impatiently. "I hope we don't miss a trolley car every day of those twenty years," she said, laughing.

"We'll have an automobile," he said. Then, reflecting that this was a somewhat exaggerated prophecy, he went on, with the honesty he meant always to show Lydia (so far as should be wise), "No; I'm afraid we sha'n't, either--not for some time. It'll take several years to finish paying altogether for the house, and we'll have to pull hard to keep up our end for a time. But we're young, so much won't be expected of us--and if we just dig in for a few years now while we're fresh, we can lie back and--"

"Well, *gracious!*" said Lydia, "who wants an automobile, anyhow! Only I wish the trolley didn't take so long. It's going to take the best part of an hour, you know; the ten or twelve minutes to get here from the house, the two or three minutes to wait, the thirty minutes on the car, the ten minutes to your office--and then all that turned inside out when you come back in the evening."

"Oh, I'll be able to do a lot of business figuring in that time. It won't be wasted."

They fell into happy picture-making of their future. Lydia wanted to have chickens and a garden, she said. She'd always wanted to be a farmer's wife--an idea that caused Paul much laughter. They revised the plans for the furnishing of the hall--the china closet could stand against the west wall of the dining-room; why had they not thought of that before? The little room upstairs was to be a sewing-room "Although I hate sewing," cried Lydia, "and nowadays, when ready-mades are so cheap and good--"

"Nobody expected you to make yourself tailored street dresses," said Paul; "but don't I all the time hear Madeleine and my aunt saying how the 'last *chic* of a costume, the little indefinable touches that give a toilet distinction,' they have to fuss up themselves out of bits of lace and ribbon and fur and truck?" He was quoting, evidently, with an amused emphasis.

Lydia leaned to him, her eyes wide in a mock solemnity. "Paul, I have a horrible confession to make to you. I *loathe* the 'last *chic*, the little indefinable touches that give a toilet,' and so forth! It makes me sick to spend my time on them. What difference does it make to real folks if their toilets *aren't* 'and so forth!'"

She looked so deliciously whimsical with her down-drawn face of rebellious contrition that Paul was enchanted. "And this I learn when it's too late for me to draw back!" he cried in horror. "Woman! woman! this tardy confession"

"Oh, there are lots of other confessions. Just wait."

"Out with them!"

"I don't know *anything*."

"That's something," admitted Paul.

"And you must teach me."

"Oh, this docile little 1840 wife! Don't you know the suffragists will get you if you talk meek like that? What do you want to know? Volts, and dynamos, and induction coils?"

"Everything," said Lydia comprehensively, "that you know. Books, politics, music--"

"Lord! what a hash! What makes you think I know anything about such things?"

"Why, you went through Cornell. You must know about books. And you're a man, you must know about politics; and as for music, we'll learn about that together. Aunt Julia and Godfather are going to give us a piano-player--though I know they can't afford it, the dears!"

"People *are* good to us." Paul's flush of gratitude for his good fortune continued.

"You like music, don't you?" asked Lydia.

"I guess so; I don't know much about it. Some crazy German post-grads at Cornell used to make up a string quartette among themselves and play some things I liked to hear--I guess it was pretty good music, too. They were sharks on it, I know. Yes; now I think of it, I used to like it fine. Maybe if I heard more--"

"Oh, the evenings together!" breathed Lydia. "Doesn't it take your breath away to think of them? We'll read together--"

Paul saw the picture. "Yes; there're lots of books I've always meant to get around to."

They were silent, musing.

Then Paul laughed aloud. Lydia started and looked at him inquiringly.

"Oh, I was just thinking how old married folks would laugh to hear us infants planning our little castles in Spain. You know how they always smile at such ideas, and say every couple starts out with them and after about six months gets down to concentrating on keeping up the furnace fire and making sure the biscuits are good."

Lydia laid her hand eagerly on his arm. "But don't let's, Paul! Please, *please* don't let us! Just because everybody else does is no reason why we *have* to. You're always saying folks can make things go their way if they try hard enough--you're so clever and--"

"Oh, I'm a wonder, I know! You needn't tell me how smart I am."

"But, Paul, I'm in earnest--I mean it--"

The car had arrived by this time and he swung her up to the platform. Like other moderns they were so accustomed to spend a large part of their time in being transported from place to place that they were quite at home in the noisy public conveyance, and after a pause to pay fares, remove wraps, and nod to an acquaintance or two, they went on with their conversation as though they were alone. People looked approvingly at the comely, well-dressed young couple, so naively absorbed in each other, and speculated as to whether they were just married or just about to be.

After they were deposited at the corner nearest the Emery house, the change to the silent street, up which they walked slowly, reluctant to separate, took them back to their first mood of this loveliest of all their hours together--the sweet intimacy of their first meeting in the new house.

Lydia felt herself so wholly in sympathy with Paul that she was moved to touch upon something that had never been mentioned between them. "Paul, dear," she said, her certainty that he would understand, surrounding her with an atmosphere of spiritual harmony which she recognized was the thing in all the world which mattered most to her, "Paul dear, I never told you--there's nothing to tell, really--but when I went to the Mallory's house-party in February I rode from here to Hardville with Mr. Rankin and had a long talk with him. You don't mind, do you?"

Her lover drew her hand within his arm and gave it an affectionate pressure. "You may not know things, Lydia, as you say, but you are the *niciest* girl! the straightest! I knew that at the time--Miss Burgess told me. But I'm glad you've given me a chance to say how sorry I was for you last autumn when everybody was pestering you so about him. I knew how you felt--better than you did, I'll bet I did! I wasn't a bit afraid. I knew you could never care for anybody but me. Why, you're *mine*, Lydia, I'm yours, and that's all there is to it. You know it as well as I do."

"*I know it when I'm with you,*" she told him with a bravely honest, unspoken reservation.

He laughed his appreciation of her insistent sincerity. "Well, when you're married won't you be with me all the time? So that's fixed! And as for meeting somebody by accident on the street-cars--why, you foolish darling, you're not marrying a Turk, or an octopus--but an American."

Lydia was silent, but her look was enough to fill the pause richly. She was savoring to the full the joy of close community of spirit which had been so rare in her pleasant life of material comfort, and she was saying a humble prayer that she might be good enough to be worthy of it, that she might be wise enough to make it the daily and hourly atmosphere of her life with Paul.

"What are you thinking about, darling?" asked the other.

"I was thinking how lovely it's going to be to be really married and come to know each other well. We don't know each other at all yet, *really*, you know."

Paul was brought up short, as so often with Lydia, by an odd, disconcerted feeling, half pleasure, half shock, from the discovery in her of pages that he had not read, germs of ideas that had not come from him. "Why, darling Lydia, what do you mean? We know each other through and through!" he now protested. It gave a tang of the unexpected to her uniform sweetness, this always having a corner still to turn which kept her out of his sight. Paul was used to seeing most women achieve this effect of uncertainty by the use of coquetry, and in the free-and-easy give and take between young America of both sexes, he had learned with a somewhat cynical shrewdness to discount it. He entered into the game, but, in his own phrase, he always knew what he was about. Lydia, on the contrary, often penetrated his armor by one of these shafts, barbed by her complete unconsciousness of any intent. He felt now, with a momentary anguish, that he could never be sure of her belonging quite to him until they were married, and cried out upon her idea almost angrily, "I don't know what you mean! We know each other now."

"Oh, no, we don't," she insisted. "There are lots of queer fancies in me that you'll only find out by living with me--and, Oh, Paul! the fine, noble things I *feel* in you! But I can see the whole of them only by seeing you day by day. And then there are lots of things that aren't in us, really, yet, but only planted. They'll grow--we'll grow--Paul, to-day is an epoch. We've passed a new milestone."

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"The way we've felt--the way we've talked--of real things--out there in our own--" She laughed a little, a serene murmur of drollery which came to her when she was at peace. "We've been engaged since November, but we only got engaged to be married to-day--just as our wedding's to be in June, but goodness knows when our marriage will be."

Paul smiled at her tenderly. "If I'd known the date was so uncertain as that I shouldn't have dared to go so far in my house-building."

"Oh, it's all right so far," she reassured him, smiling; "but we must pitch in and finish it. Why, that's just it, Paul--" she was struck with the aptness of her illustration--"that's just it. We've got the rafters and joists up now; maybe before we're married, if we're good, we can get the roof on so it won't rain on us; but all the finishing, all that makes it good to live in, has got to be done after the wedding."

He did not know exactly what she was talking about, but he made up for vagueness by fervor. "After we are married," he cried, "I'll move mountains and turn stones to gold."

"But the first thing to do is to lay floors for us to walk on," Lydia told him.

For answer, he drew her into his arms and closed her mouth with a kiss.

CHAPTER XVII

CARD-DEALING AND PATENT CANDLES

Spring had come with its usual hotly advancing rush upon the low-lying, sheltered southerly city. There had been a few days of magical warmth, full of spring madness, when every growing thing had expanded leaves with furious haste, when the noise of children playing in the street sounded loud through newly-opened windows, when, even on city streets, every breath of the sweet, lively air was an intoxicating potion. Then, with a bound, the heat was there. Evenings and nights were still cool, but noons were as oppressive as in July. The scarcely expanded leaves hung limp in a summer heat.

All during that eventful winter, Mrs. Emery had frequently remarked to her sister-in-law that Lydia's social career progressed positively with such brilliancy that it was like "something you read about." Mrs. Sandworth invariably added the qualifying clause, "But in a very nice book, you know, with only nice people in it, where everything comes out nicely at the end." Her confidence in literature as a respectable source of pleasure was not so guileless as Mrs. Emery's. It had been cruelly shaken by dipping into some of the Russian novels of the doctor's.

Not infrequently the two ladies felt, with a happy importance, that they were the authors of the book and that the agreeable episodes and dramatic incidents which had kept the flow of the narrative so sparkling were the product of their own creative genius. When April came on, and Lydia agreed to the announcement of her engagement, they felt the need of some remarkable way of signaling that important event and of closing her season with a burst of glory. For her season had to end! Dr. Melton said positively that if Lydia had another month of the life she had been leading he would not be responsible for the consequences. "She has a fine constitution, inherited from her farmer grandparents," he said, smiling to see Mrs. Emery wince at this uncompromising statement of Lydia's ancestry, "but her nervous organization is too fine for her own good. And I warn you right now that if you get her nerves once really jangled, I shall take to the woods. You can just give the case to another doctor. It would be too much for *me*."

The girl herself insisted that she felt perfectly well and able to stand more than when she first began going out. She affirmed this with some impatience, her eyes very bright, her cheeks flushed, whenever her godfather protested against a new undertaking. "When you get going, you *can't* stop," she told him, shaking off his detaining hand. Mrs. Emery told the doctor that he'd forgotten the time when he was young or he'd remember that all girls who'd been popular at all--let alone a girl like Lydia--looked thin and worn by the end of the season; but during the last week of April, when the first hot days had arrived, a small incident surprised her into thinking that perhaps the doctor had some right on his side.

Not that there was in itself anything so very alarming about a nervous explosion from a girl so high-strung and susceptible as Lydia. The startling thing was that this explosion proceeded, so far as her mother could see, from nothing at all, from the idlest of chance remarks by Mrs. Sandworth, as always, whitely innocent of the smallest intention to wound.

She and Mrs. Emery were much given to watching Lydia dress for the innumerable engagements that took her away from the house. They made a pretext of helping her, but in truth they were carried away by the delight in another's beauty which is more common among women than is generally imagined. They took the profoundest interest in the selection of the toilet she should wear, and regarded with a charmed surprise the particular aspect of Lydia's slim comeliness which it brought out. They could not decide whether they liked her best in clinging, picture costumes, big hats, plumes, trailing draperies, and the like, or dashing, jaunty effects. Once in the winter, after she had left them on her way to an evening skating party and they had seen her from the window join Hollister and add her skates to those glittering on his shoulder, Mrs. Sandworth promulgated one of her unexpected apothegms: "Do you know what we are, Susan Emery? We're a couple of old children playing with a doll." Mrs. Emery protested with an instant, reproving self-justification: "*You* may be--you're not her mother; but I understand Lydia through and through."

Mrs. Emery felt that if Lydia had overheard that remark of her aunt's her excitement and resentment might have been

natural; but the one which led to the distressing little scene in late April was as neutral as an ordinary morning salutation. The two were watching Lydia dress for a luncheon which Mrs. Hollister--*the* Mrs. Hollister--was giving in her honor. It was about noon of a warm day, and the air that came in at the open windows was thrillingly alive with troubling, disquieting suggestions of the new life of spring. Lydia, however, showed none of the languor which the sudden heat had brought to the two elder women. She was a little late, and her hurry had sent a high color to her cheeks, the curves of which were refined to the most exquisite subtlety by the loss of flesh so deplored by Dr. Melton. She was used, by this time, to dressing in a hurry, but her fingers trembled a little, and she tried three times before she could coil her dark silky hair smoothly. She was frowning a little with the fixity of her concentration as she turned to snatch up her long gloves and she did not hear Mrs. Sandworth's question until it had been repeated,

"I said, Lydia, is it to be bridge this afternoon?"

"I don't know," said Lydia with the full stop of absent indifference.

"Didn't Mrs. Hollister say?"

"Maybe she did. I didn't notice." The girl was tugging at her glove.

"Well, anyhow," said her mother, "since everybody's giving you card-parties, I should think you'd want to practice up and learn how to deal better. It's queer," she went on to Mrs. Sandworth, "Lydia's so deft about so many things, that she should deal cards so badly."

"Oh, goodness! As if there was nothing better to do than that!" cried Lydia, beginning on the other glove.

"Well, what *have* you to do that's better?" asked her aunt in some astonishment. "Lydia, my dear, your collar is pinned the least bit crooked. Here, just let me--"

Lydia had stopped short, her glove dangling from her wrist. "Why, what a horrible thing to say!" She brought this out with a tragic emphasis, immensely disconcerting to her two elders.

"Horrible!" protested Mrs. Sandworth.

"Yes, horrible," insisted the girl. She had turned very pale. "The very way you say it and don't think anything about it, *makes* it horrible."

Mrs. Sandworth began to doubt her own senses. "Why, what did I say?" she appealed to Mrs. Emery in bewildered interrogation, but before the latter could answer Lydia broke out: "If I really believed that, why, I'd--I'd--" She hesitated, obviously between tragic consequences, and then, to the great dismay of her companions, began to cry, still standing in the middle of the floor, her glove dangling from her slim, white wrist.

"Don't Lydia! Oh, don't, dear! You'll make yourself look like a fright for the luncheon." Mrs. Emery ran to her daughter with a solicitude in which there was considerable irritation. "You're perfectly exhausting, taking everything that deadly serious way. Don't be so *morbid*! You know your Aunt Julia didn't mean anything. She never does!"

Lydia pulled away and threw herself on the bed, still sobbing, and protesting that she could not go to the luncheon; and in the end Mrs. Emery was obliged to make the profoundest apologies over the telephone to a justly indignant hostess.

In the meantime Lydia was undressed and put to bed by Mrs. Sandworth, who dared not open her mouth. The girl still drew long, sobbing breaths, but before her aunt left the room she lay quiet, her eyes closed. The other was struck by the way her pallor brought out the thinness of her lovely face. She hovered helplessly for a moment over the bed. "Is there anything I can do for you, dearie?" she asked humbly.

Lydia shook her head. "Just let me be quiet," she murmured.

At this, Mrs. Sandworth retreated to the door, from which she ventured a last "Lydia darling, you know I'm sorry if I said anything to hurt--"

Lydia raised herself on her elbow and looked at her solemnly. "It wasn't what you *said*; it was what it *meant*!" she said tragically.

With this cryptic utterance in her ears, Mrs. Sandworth fled downstairs, to find her sister-in-law turning away from the telephone with a frown. "Mrs. Hollister was very much provoked about it, and I don't blame her. It's hard to make her understand we couldn't have given her a *little* warning. And--that's the most provoking part--I didn't dare say Lydia is really sick, when, as like as not, she'll be receiving company this evening."

"You wouldn't want her sick, just so it would be easier to explain, would you?" asked Mrs. Sandworth with her eternal disconcerting innocence.

Mrs. Emery relieved her mind by snapping at her sister-in-law with the violence allowed to an intimate of many years' standing, "Good gracious, Julia! you're as bad as Lydia! Turning everything people say into something quite different--"

"

Mrs. Sandworth interrupted hastily, "Susan, tell me, for mercy's sake, what did I say? The last thing I remember passing my lips was about her collar's being a little crooked,--and just now she told me, as though it was the crack of Doom, that it wasn't what I said, but what it meant, that was so awful. What in the world does she mean?"

Mrs. Emery sank into a seat with a gesture of utter impatience. "Mean? Mean nothing! Didn't you ever know an engaged girl before?"

"Well, I'm sure when I was engaged I never--"

"Oh, yes, you did; you *must* have. They all do. It's nerves."

But a moment later she contradicted her own assurance with a sigh of unresignation. "Oh, dear! why can't Lydia be just bright and wholesome and fun-loving and *natural* like Madeleine Hollister!" She added darkly, "I just feel in my bones that this has something to do with that Rankin and his morbid ideas."

Mrs. Sandworth was startled. "Good gracious! You don't suppose she--"

"No; of course I don't! I never thought of such a thing. You ought to see her when she is with Paul. She's just *fascinated* by him! But you know as well as I do that ideas go right on underneath all that!" Her tone implied a disapproval of their tenacity of life. "And yet, Lydia's really nothing unusual! Before they get married and into social life, and settled down and too busy to think, most girls have a queer spell. Only most of them take it out on religion. Oh, why couldn't she have met that nice young rector--if she had to meet somebody to put ideas into her head--instead of an anarchist."

"Well, it's certainly all past now," Mrs. Sandworth reassured her.

"Yes; hasn't it been a lovely winter! Everybody's been so good to Lydia. Everything's succeeded so! But I suppose Dr. Melton's right. We ought to call her season over, except for the announcement party--and the wedding, of course--and oh, dear! There are so many things I'd planned to do I can't possibly get in now. It seems strange a child of mine should be so queer and have such notions."

However, after the two had talked over the plans for a great evening garden-party in the Emery "grounds" and Mrs. Emery's creative eye had seen the affair in a vista of brilliant pictures, she felt more composed. She went up quietly to Lydia's door and looked in.

The girl was lying on her back, her wide, dark eyes fixed on the ceiling. Something in the expression of her face gave her mother a throb of pain. She yearned over the foolish, unbalanced young thing, and her heart failed her, in that universal mother's fear for her child of the roughnesses of life, through which she herself has passed safely and which have given savor to her existence. In her incapacity to conceive other roughnesses than those she could feel herself, she was, it is probable, much like the rest of humankind. She advanced to the bed, her tenderest mother-look on her face, and cut Lydia off from speech with gentle wisdom. "No, no, dear; don't try to talk. You're all tired out and nervous and don't know--"

Lydia had begun excitedly: "I've been feeling it for a long time, but when Aunt Julia said right out that I didn't know how to do anything better than--that I was only good to--"

Her mother laid a firm, gentle hand over the quivering mouth, and said in a soothing murmur, "Hush, hush! darling. It wasn't anything your poor foolish Aunt Julia said. It isn't anything, anyhow, but being up too much and having too much excitement. People get to thinking all kinds of queer things when they're tired. Mother knows. Mother knows best."

She had prepared a glass of bromide, and now, lifting Lydia as though she were still the child she felt her to be, she held it to her lips. "Here, Mother's poor, tired little girl--take this and go to sleep; that's all you need. Just trust Mother now."

Lydia took the draught obediently, but she sighed deeply, and fixed her mother with eyes that were unrelentingly serious.

When Mrs. Emery looked in after half an hour, she saw that Lydia was still awake, but later she fell asleep, and slept heavily until late in the afternoon.

On her appearance at the dinner-table, still languid and heavy-eyed, she was met with gentle, amused triumph. "There, you dear. Didn't I tell you what you needed was sleep. There never was a girl who didn't think a sick headache meant there was something wrong with her soul or something."

Judge Emery laughed good-naturedly, as he sliced the roast beef, and said, with admiration for his wife, "It's a good thing my high-strung little girl has such a levelheaded mother to look after her. Mother knows all about nerves and things. She's had 'em--all kinds--and come out on top. Look at her now."

Lydia took him at his word, and bestowed on her mother a long look. She said nothing, and after a moment dropped her eyes listlessly again to her plate. It was this occasion which Mrs. Emery chose to present to the Judge her plans for the expensive garden-party, so that in the animated and, at times, slightly embittered discussion that followed, Lydia's silence was overlooked.

For the next few days she stayed quietly indoors, refusing and canceling engagements. Mrs. Emery said it was "only decent to do that much after playing Mrs. Hollister such a trick," and Lydia did not seem averse. She sewed a little, fitfully, tried to play on the piano and turned away disheartened at the results of the long neglect--there had been no time in the season for practice--and wandered about the library, taking out first one book then another, reading a little and then sitting with brooding eyes, staring unseeingly at the page. Once her mother, finding her thus, inquired with some sharpness what book she was reading to set her off like that. "It's a book by Maeterlinck," said Lydia, "that Godfather gave me ever so long ago, and I've never had time to read it."

"Do you like it? What's it about?" asked her mother, suspiciously.

"I can't understand it," said Lydia, "when I'm reading it. But when I look away and think, I can, a little bit. I love it. It makes me feel like crying. It's all about our inner life."

"My dear Lydia, you put your hat right on and go over to have a little visit with Marietta. What you need is a little fresh air and some sensible talk. I've been too busy with my invitation list to visit with you as I ought. Marietta'll be real glad to see you. Here's your hat. Now, you run right along, and stop at Hallam's on the way and get yourself an ice-cream soda. It's hot, and that'll do you good."

As Lydia was disappearing docilely out of the door, her mother stopped before going back to her desk and the list of guests for the garden-party, which had been torturing her with perplexity, to say, "Oh, Lydia, don't forget to ask Marietta to order the perforated candles."

"Perforated--!" said Lydia blankly, pausing at the door.

"Yes; don't you remember, the last time Mrs. Hollister called here she told us all about them."

"No, I don't remember," said Lydia, with no shade of apology in her tone.

"Why, my dear! You're getting so absent-minded! Do you mean to say you didn't take in anything of what she was talking about? It's a new kind, that has holes running through it so the melted wax runs down the inside! Why, we were talking about them the whole time she was here that last call."

Lydia opened the door, observing vaguely, "Oh, yes; I do seem to remember something. It was a very dull visit, anyhow."

Mrs. Emery returned to her list, pursing up her lips and wagging her head. "You'll have to learn, dearie, that it's little details like that that make the difference between success and failure."

"We have electric light and gas," said Lydia.

Mrs. Emery looked up in astonishment and a little vexation. She, too, had nerves these days. "Why, Lydia, what's the matter with you? You know nobody uses those for table decoration."

"*We* could," said Lydia.

"Why, my dear child, I never knew before there was a contrary streak in you, like your father. What in the world possesses you all of a sudden to object to candles?"

"It's not candles--it's the idea of--Oh, all the fuss and bother, when everybody's so tired, and the weather's so hot, and it's going to cost too much anyhow."

"Well, what would you have us fuss and bother about, if not over having everything nice when we entertain?" Mrs. Emery's air of enforced patience was strained.

Lydia surveyed her from the hall in silence. "That's just it--that's just it," she said finally, and went away.

Mrs. Emery laid down her pen to laugh to herself over the queer ways of children. "They begin to have notions with their first teeth, and I suppose they don't get over them till *their* first baby begins to teethe."

When Lydia arrived at her sister's house, she found that competent housekeeper engaged in mending the lace curtains of her parlor. She had about her a battery of little ingenious devices to which she called Lydia's attention with pride. "I've taught myself lace-mending just by main strength and awkwardness," she observed, fitting a hoop over a torn place, "and it's not because I have any natural knack, either. If there's anything I hate to do, it's to sew. But these curtains do go to pieces so. I wash them myself, to be careful, but they are so fine. Still," she cast a calculating eye on the work before her, "I'll be through by the end of this week, anyhow--if that new Swede will only stay in the kitchen that long!"

She bent her head over her work again, holding it up to the light from time to time and straining her eyes to catch the exact thread with her almost impalpably fine needle. Lydia sat and fanned herself, looking flushed and tired from the walk in the heat, and listening in silence to Mrs. Mortimer's account of the various happenings of her household: "And didn't I find that good-for-nothing negro wench had been having that man--and goodness knows how many others--right here in the house. I told Ralph I never would have another nigger--but I shall. You can't get anything else half the time. I tell you, Lydia, the servant problem is getting to be something perfectly terrible--it's--"

Lydia broke in to say, "Why don't you buy new ones?"

Mrs. Mortimer paused with uplifted needle to inquire wildly, "New *what*?"

"New curtains, instead of spending a whole week in hot weather mending those."

"Good gracious, child! Will you ever learn anything about the cost of living! I think it's awful, the way Father and Mother have let you grow up! Why, it would take half a month's salary to reproduce these curtains. I got them at a great bargain--but even then I couldn't afford them. Ralph was furious."

"You could buy muslin curtains that would be just as pretty," suggested Lydia.

"Why, those curtains are the only things with the least distinction in my whole parlor! They *save* the room."

"From what?"

"From showing that there's almost nothing in it that cost anything, to be sure! With them at the window, it would never enter people's heads to think that I upholstered the furniture myself, or that the pictures are--"

"Why shouldn't they think so, if you did?" Lydia proffered this suggestion with an air of fatigued listlessness, which, her sister thought, showed that she made it "simply to be contrary." Acting on this theory, she answered it with a dignified silence.

There was a pause. Lydia tilted her head back against the chair, and looked out of the window at the new green leaves of the piazza vine. Mrs. Mortimer's thin, white, rather large hands drew the shining little needle back and forth with a steady, hurrying industry. It came into her mind that their respective attitudes were symbolical of their lives, and she thought, glancing at Lydia's drooping depression, that it would be better for her if she were obliged to work more. "Work," of course, meant to Marietta those forms of activity which filled her own life. "I never have any time for notions," she thought, the desperate, hurrying, straining routine of her days rising before her and moving her, as always, to rebellion and yet to a martyr's pride.

Lydia stirred from her listless pose and came over to her sister, sitting down on a stool at her feet. "Marietta, dear, please let me talk to you. I'm so miserable these days--and Mother won't let me say a word to her. She says it's spring fever, and being engaged, and the end of the season, and everything. Please, *please* be serious, and let me tell you about it, and see if you can't help me."

Her tone was so broken and imploring that Mrs. Mortimer was startled. She was, moreover, flattered that Lydia should come to her for advice rather than to her parents. She put her arm around her sister's shoulders, and said gently, "Why, yes, dear; of course; anything--"

"Then stop sewing and listen to me--"

"But I can sew and listen, too."

"Oh, Etta, *please*! That's just the kind of thing that gets me so wild. Just a little while!"

The harassed housekeeper cast an anxious eye on the clock, but loyally stifled the sigh with which she laid her work aside. Lydia apologized for interrupting her. "But I do want you to really think of what I am saying. Everybody's always so busy thinking about *things*! Oh, Etta, I'm just as unhappy as I can be--and so scared when I think about--about the future."

Mrs. Mortimer's face softened wonderfully. She stroked Lydia's dark hair. "Why, poor dear little sister! Yes, yes, darling, I know all about it. I felt just so myself the month before I was married, and Mother couldn't help me a bit. Either she had forgotten all about it, or else she never had the feeling. I just had to struggle along through without anybody to help me or to say a word. Oh, I'm so glad I can help my little sister. *Don't* be afraid, dear! There's nothing so terrible about it; nothing to be scared of. Why, once you get used to it you find it doesn't make a bit of difference to you. Everything's just the same as before."

Lydia lifted a wrinkled brow of perplexity to this soothing view of matrimony. "I don't know what you're talking about, Etta!" she cried in a bewilderment that seemed to strike her as tragic.

"Why--why, being married! Wasn't that what you meant?"

"Oh, no! *No!* Nothing so definite as that! I couldn't be afraid of Paul--why should I be? I'm just frightened of--"

everything--what everybody expects me to do, and to go on doing all my life, and never have any time but to just hurry faster and faster, so there'll be more things to hurry about, and never talk about anything but *things!*" She began to tremble and look white, and stopped with a desperate effort to control herself, though she burst out at the sight of Mrs. Mortimer's face of despairing bewilderment, "Oh, don't tell me you don't see at all what I mean. I can't say it! But you *must* understand! Can't we somehow all stop--*now!* And start over again! You get muslin curtains and not mend your lace ones, and Mother stop fussing about whom to invite to that party--that's going to cost more than he can afford, Father says--it makes me *sick* to be costing him so much. And not fuss about having clothes just so--and Paul have our house built little and plain, so it won't be so much work to take care of it and keep it clean. I would so much rather look after it myself than to have him kill himself making money so I can hire maids that you *can't*--you say yourself you can't--and never having any time to see him. Perhaps if we did, other people might, and we'd all have more time to like things that make us nicer to like--"

At this perturbing jumble of suggestions, Mrs. Mortimer's head whirled. She took hold of the arms of her chair as if to steady herself, but, conscientiously afraid of discouraging the girl's confidence, she nodded gravely at her, as if she were considering the matter. Lydia sprang up, her eyes shining. "Oh, you dear! You *do* see what I mean! You see how dreadful it is to look forward to just that--being so desperately troubled over things that don't really matter--and--and perhaps having children, and bringing them up to the same thing--when there must be so many things that do matter!"

To each of these impassioned statements her sister had returned an automatic nod. "I see what you mean," she now put in, a statement which was the outward expression of a thought running, "Mercy! Dr. Melton's right! She's perfectly wild with nerves! We must get her married as soon as ever we can!"

Lydia went over to the window, and stood looking out as she talked, now with an excited haste, now with a dragging note of fatigue in her voice. Her need of sympathy was so great that she did a violence to the reticence she had always kept, even with herself. She wondered aloud if it were not perhaps Daniel Rankin and his queer ideas that lay at the bottom of her trouble. She added, whirling about from the window, "For mercy's sake! don't go and think I am in love with him, or anything! I haven't so much as thought of him all winter! I see, now that Mother's pointed it out to me, how domineering he really was to me last autumn. I'm just crazy about Paul, too! When I'm with him he takes my breath away! But maybe--maybe I can't forget Mr. Rankin's *ideas!* You know he talked to me so much when I was first back--and if somebody would just argue me out of them, the way he did into them! I don't believe I'd ever have thought it queer to live the way we do, just to have more things and get ahead of other people--if he hadn't put the idea into my head. But nobody else will even *talk* about it! They laugh when I try to."

She came over closer to the matron, and said imploringly, her voice trembling, "I don't *want* to be queer, Marietta! What makes me? I don't like to have queer ideas, different from other people's--but every once in a while it all comes over me with a rush--what's the *good* of all we do?"

Poor Lydia propounded this question as though it were the first time in the world's history that it had passed the lips of humanity. Her curious, puzzled distress rose up in a choking flood to her throat, and she stopped, looking desperately at her sister.

Mrs. Mortimer nodded again, calmly, drew a long breath, and seemed about to speak. Lydia gazed at her, her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright with unshed tears--all one eager expectancy. The older woman's eyes wandered suddenly for an instant. She darted forward, clapped her hands together once, and then in rapid succession three or four times. Then rolling triumphantly something between her thumb and forefinger, she turned to Lydia. The little operation had not taken the third of a moment, but the change in the girl's face was so great that Mrs. Mortimer was moved to hasty, half-shamefaced, half-defiant apology. "I *was* listening to you, Lydia! I *was* listening! But it's just the time of year when they lay their eggs, and I have to fight them. Last year my best furs and Ralph's dress suit were perfectly *riddled!* You know we can't afford new."

Lydia rose in silence and began pinning on her hat. Her sister, for all her vexation over the ending of the interview, could hardly repress a smile of superior wisdom at the other's face of tragedy. "Don't go, Lyddie, don't go!" She tried to put her arms around the flighty young thing. "Oh, dear Lydia, cultivate your sense of humor! That's all that's the matter with you. There's nothing else! Look here, dear, there *are* moths as well as souls in the world. People have to be on the lookout for them--for everything, don't you see?"

"They look out for *moths*, all right," said Lydia in a low tone. She submitted, except for this one speech, in a passive silence to her sister's combination of petting and exhortation, moving quietly toward the door, and stepping evenly forward down the walk.

She had gone down to the street, leaving Mrs. Mortimer still calling remorseful apologies, practical suggestions, and laughing comments on her "tragedy way of taking the world." At the gate, she paused, and then came back, her face like a mask under the shadow of her hat.

Marietta stood waiting for her with a quizzical expression. Under her appearance of lightly estimating Lydia's

depression as superficial, she had been sensible of a not unfamiliar qualm of doubt as to her own manner of life, an uneasy heaving of a subconscious self not always possible to ignore; but, as was her resolute custom, she forced to the front that perception of the ridiculous which she had urged on her sister. She bit her lips, to conceal a smile at Lydia's mournful emphasis as she went on: "I forgot to tell you, Marietta, what I was sent over for. You're to be sure to order the perforated candles. It's the kind that has holes down the middle, so the wax doesn't look mussy on the outside, and it's very, very important to have the right kind of candles."

Mrs. Mortimer, willfully amused, looked with an obstinate smile into her sister's troubled eyes as Lydia hesitated, waiting, in spite of herself, for the understanding word.

"You're a darling, Lyddie," said the elder woman, kissing her again; "but you are certainly *too* absurd!"

BOOK III

A SUITABLE MARRIAGE

CHAPTER XVIII

TWO SIDES TO THE QUESTION

Lydia's unmarried life had given her but few abstract ideas for the regulation of conduct, and fewer still ideals of self-discipline, but chief among the small assortment that she took away from her mother's house had been the high morality of keeping one's husband unworried by one's domestic difficulties. "Domestic difficulties" meant, apparently, anything disagreeable that happened to one. Not only her mother, but all the matrons of her acquaintance had concentrated on the extreme desirability of this wifely virtue. "It pays! It pays!" Mrs. Emery had often thus chanted the praises of this quality in her daughter's presence. "I've noticed ever so many times that men who have to worry about domestic machinery and their children don't get on so well. Their minds are distracted. Their thoughts *can't* be, in the nature of things, all on their business." She was wont to go on, to whatever mother she was addressing, "We know, my dear Mrs. Blank, don't we, how perfectly distracting the problems are in bringing up children--to say nothing of servants. How much energy would men have for their own affairs if they had to struggle as we do, I'd like to know! Besides, if one person's got to be bothered with such things, she might as well do it all and be done with it. It's easier, besides, to have only one head. Men that interfere about things in the house are an abomination. You can't keep from quarreling with them--angels couldn't."

She had once voiced this universally recognized maxim before Dr. Melton, who had cut in briskly with a warm seconding of her theory. "Yes, indeed; in the course of my practice I have often thought, as you do, that it would be easier all around if husbands didn't board with their wives at all."

Mrs. Emery had stared almost as blankly as Mrs. Sandworth herself might have done. "I never said such a crazy thing," she protested.

"Didn't you? Perhaps I don't catch your idea then. It seemed to be that every point of contact was sure to be an occasion for friction between husband and wife, and so, of course, the fewer they were--"

"Oh, bother take you, Marius Melton!" Mrs. Emery had quite lost patience with him. "I was just saying something that's so old, and has been said so often, that it's a bromide, actually. And that is that it's a poor wife who greets her tired husband in the evening with a long string of tales about how the children have been naughty and the cook--"

"Oh, yes, yes; now I see. Of course. The happiest ideal of American life, a peaceful exterior presented to the husband at all costs, and the real state of things kept from him because it might interfere with his capacity to pull off a big deal the next day."

Mrs. Emery had boggled suspiciously at this version of her statement, but finding, on the whole, that it represented fairly enough her idea, had given a qualified assent in the shape of silence and a turning of the subject.

Lydia had not happened to hear that conversation, but she heard innumerable ones like it without Dr. Melton's footnotes. On her wedding day, therefore, she conceived it an essential feature of her duty toward Paul to keep entirely to herself all of the dismaying difficulties of housekeeping and keeping up a social position in America. She knew, as a matter of course, that they would be dismaying. The talk of all her married friends was full of the tragedies of domestic life. It had occurred to her once or twice that it was an odd, almost a pathetic, convention that they tried to maintain

about their social existence--a picture of their lives as running smoothly with self-adjusting machinery of long-established servants and old social traditions; when their every word tragically proclaimed the exhausting and never-ending personal effort that was required to give even the most temporary appearance of that kind. "We all know what a fearful time everybody has trying to give course dinners--why need we pretend we don't?" she had thought on several painful occasions; but this, like many of her fancies, was a fleeting one. There had been as little time since her wedding day as before it for leisurely speculation. The business of being *the* bride of a season had been quite as exciting and absorbing as being *the* debutante.

The first of February, six months after her marriage, found her as thin and restlessly active as she had been on that date a year before. It was at that time that she had the first intimation of a great change in her life, and since the one or two obscure and futile revolts of her girlhood, nothing had moved her to more rebellious unresignation than the fact that her life left her no time to take in the significance of what was coming to her.

"Oh, my dear! Isn't it too good!" said her mother, clasping her for a moment as they stood, after removing their wraps, in the dressing-room of a common acquaintance. "Aren't you the lucky, lucky thing!"

"I don't know. I don't know a thing about it," Lydia returned unexpectedly, though her face had turned a deep rose, and she had smiled tremulously. "Ever since Dr. Melton told me it was probably so, I've been trying to get a moment's time to think it over, but you--"

"It's something to *feel*, not to think about!" cried her mother. "You don't need time to feel."

"But I'd like to think about everything!" cried Lydia, as they moved down the stairs. "I get things wrong just feeling about them. But I'm not quick to think, and I never have any time--they're always so many other things to do and to think about--the dinner, getting Paul off in time in the morning, how badly the washwoman does up the table linen--"

"Oh, Lydia! Why will you be so contrary? Everybody says *laundress* now!"

--And however Paul and I can pay back all the social debts we've incurred this winter. Everybody's invited us. It makes me wild to think of how we owe everybody."

"Oh, you can give two or three big receptions this spring and clear millions off the list. And then a dinner party or two for the more exclusives. You won't need to be out of things till June--with the fashion for loose-fitting evening gowns; you're so slender. And you'll be out again long before Christmas. It's very fortunate having it come at this time of year."

Lydia looked rather dazed at this brisk and matter-of-fact disposing of the matter, and seemed about to make a comment, but the bell rang for card-playing to begin and Mrs. Emery hurried to her table.

Lydia had meant to ask her mother's sympathy about another matter that for the time was occupying her own thoughts, but there was no other opportunity for further speech between them during the card party--Mrs. Emery devoting herself with her usual competent energy to playing a good game. She played much better bridge than did either of her daughters. She liked cards, liked to excel and always found easy to accomplish what seemed to her worth doing. Marietta also felt that to avoid being "queer" and "different" one had to play a good hand, but, as she herself confessed, it made her "sick" to give up to it the necessary time and thought. As for Lydia, she got rid of her cards as fast as possible, as if with the deluded hope that when they were all played, she might find time for something else. On the afternoon in question her game was more unscientific than usual. Criticism was deterred from articulate expression by the common feeling in regard to her, assiduously fostered by Flora Burgess' continuous references to her in *Society Notes* as the coming social ruler of Endbury's smart set. There was as yet, to be sure, no visible indication whatever of such a capacity on Lydia's part, but the printed word--particularly Miss Burgess' printed word--was not to be doubted. Madeleine Hollister, however (now soon to be Madeleine Lowdor), was no respecter of personages, past or future. At the appearance of an especially unexpected and disappointing card from her sister-in-law's hand, she pounced upon her with: "Lydia, what *are* you thinking about?"

"My washwoman's grandson," burst out Lydia, laying down her cards with a careless negligence, so that everyone could see the contents of her hand. "Oh, Madeleine! I'm so worried about her, and I wish you'd--"

She got no further. Madeleine's shriek of good-natured laughter cut her short like a blow in the face. The other ladies were laughing, too.

"Oh, Lydia! You are the most original, unexpected piece in the world!" cried her sister-in-law. "You'll be the death of me!" She appealed to the other players at their table: "Did you ever hear anything come out funnier?"

To the players at the next tables, who were looking with vague, reflected smiles at this burst of merriment, she called: "Oh, it's too killing! Lydia Hollister just played a trump on a trick her partner had already taken, and when I asked what in the world she was thinking about--meaning, of course--"

Lydia sat silent, looking at her useless cards during the rest of the narration of her comic speech. She was reflecting rather sadly that she had been very foolish to think, even in a thoughtless impulse, of telling Madeleine the story she

had so impetuously begun. After a time it came to her, as a commentary of the little incident, that neither could she get anything from Marietta in the matter. At the end of the party, she and her mother walked together to the street-cars, but she still said nothing of what was in her mind. She would not admit to herself that her mother would receive it as she felt sure Marietta and Madeleine would, but--she dared not risk putting her to the test. It was a period in Lydia's life when she was constantly in fear of tests applied to the people she loved and longed to admire.

During the half-hour's noisy journey out to Bellevue--the unhackneyed name that had been selected for the new and fashionable suburb she inhabited--she had eliminated from this crisis in her mind, one by one, all the people in her circle. Dr. Melton was out of town. Otherwise she would have gone to him at once. Mrs. Sandworth without her brother was a cipher with no figure before it. Her father?--she realized suddenly that it was the first time she had ever thought of going to her father with a perplexity. No; she knew too little about his view of things. She had never talked with him of anything but the happenings of the day. Flora Burgess--devoted Flora? Lydia smiled ruefully as she thought of the attitude Flora Burgess would be sure to take.

It finally came to the point where there was no one left but Paul; and Paul ought not to be worried with domestic questions lest his capacity for business be impaired. She had a deep inculcated sense of the necessity and duty of "doing her share," as the phrase had gone in the various exhortations addressed to her before her marriage. The next few years would be critical ones in Paul's career, and the road must be straight and clear before his feet--the road that led to Success. No one had voiced a doubt that this road was not coincident with all other desirable ones; no one had suggested that the same years would be critical in other directions and would be certain to be terribly and irrevocably determinative of his future relation to his wife.

Lydia, ardently and naively anxious to find something "worth doing," therefore had settled on this one definite duty. She had wrestled in a determined silence with the many incompetent and degenerate negroes, with the few impertinent Americans, with the drunken Irish and insolent Swedes, who had filed in and out of her kitchen ever since her marriage. Suburban life was a new thing in Endbury, and "help" could see no advantages in it. She had strained every nerve to make them appear to Paul, as well as to the rest of the world, the opposite of what they were; and to do herself, furtively, when Paul was not there, those of their tasks they refused or neglected. Every effort was concentrated, as in her mother's and sister's households, on keeping a maid presentable to open the door and to wait on the table, rather than to perform the heavier parts of the daily round. Those Lydia could do herself, or she could hire an unpresentable older scrubwoman to do them. She often thought that if she could but employ scrubwomen all the time, the problem would be half solved. But the achievement of each day was, according to Endbury standards, to keep or get somebody into the kitchen who could serve a course dinner, even if the mistress of the house was obliged to prepare it.

She had never dreamed of feeling herself aggrieved, or even surprised, by this curious reverse side to her outward brilliant life. All her married friends went through the same experience. Madeleine, it is true, announced that she was going to make Lowdor import two Japanese servants a year, and dismiss them when they began to get American ideas; but Madeleine was quite openly marrying Lowdor for the sake of this and similar advantages. Lydia felt that her own problems were only the usual lot of her kind, and though she was nearly always sick at heart over them, she did not feel justified in complaining--least of all to Paul.

But this present trouble--this was not just a question of help. For the last month they had been floating in the most unexpected lull of the domestic whirlwind. The intelligence office had sent out Ellen--Ellen, the deft-handed cook, the silent, self-effacing, competent servant of every housekeeper's dreams. Her good luck seemed incredible. Ellen was perfection, was middle-aged and settled, never went out in the evenings, kept her kitchen spotlessly clean, trained the rattle-headed second girls who came and went, to be good waitresses and made pastry that moved Paul, usually little preoccupied about his food provided there was plenty of meat, to lyric raptures. The difference she made in Lydia's life was inconceivable. It was as though some burdensome law of nature had been miraculously suspended for her benefit. She gauged her past discomfort by her present comfort.

And yet--

From the first Lydia had had an uneasy feeling in the presence of her new servant, a haunting impression when her back was turned to Ellen that if she could turn quickly enough, she would see her cook with some sinister aspect quite other than the decent, respectful mask she presented to her mistress. The second girl of the present was a fresh-faced, lively young country lass, whom Ellen herself had secured, and whose rosy child's face had been at first innocence itself; but now sometimes Lydia overheard them laughing together, a laughter which gave her the oddest inward revulsion, and when she came into the kitchen quickly she often found them looking at books which were quickly whisked out of sight.

And then, a day or so before, old Mrs. O'Hern, her washwoman, had come directly to her with that revolting revelation of Ellen's influence on her grandson, little Patsy. At the recollection of the old woman's face of embittered anguish, Lydia shuddered. Oh, if she could only tell Paul! He was so loving and caressing to her--perhaps he would not mind

being bothered this once--she did not know what to think of such things--she did not know what to do, which way to turn. She was startled beyond measure at having real moral responsibility put on her.

Perhaps Paul could think of something to do.

He was waiting for her when she entered the house, having come in from an out-of-town trip on an earlier train than he had expected to catch. He dropped his newspaper and sprang up from his chair to put his arms about her and gloat over her beauty. "You're getting prettier every day of your life, Lydia," he told her, ruffling her soft hair, and kissing her very energetically a great many times. "But pale! I must get some color into your cheeks, Melton says--how's this for a way?"

He seemed to Lydia very boyish and gay and vital. She caught at him eagerly--he had been away from home three days--and clung to him. "Oh, Paul! How much good it does me to have you here, close! You are *so* much nicer than a room of women playing the same game of cards they began last September!"

Paul shouted with laughter--his pleasant, hearty mirth. "I'm appreciated at my full worth," he cried.

"Oh, how I loathe cards!" cried Lydia, taking off her hat.

"It's better than the talk you'd get from most of the people there, I bet," conjectured Paul, taking up his newspaper again. "Cards are a blessing *that* way, compared with conversation."

"Oh, dear, I suppose so!" Lydia stopped a moment in the doorway. "But doesn't it seem a pity that you never see anybody but people who'd bore you to death if you didn't stop their mouth with cards?"

"That's the way of the world," remarked Paul comfortably, returning to the news of the day.

The little friendly chat gave Lydia courage for her plan of asking her husband's advice about her perplexity, but, mindful of traditional wisdom, she decided, as she thriftily changed her silk "party dress" for a house-gown of soft wool, that she would wait until the mollifying influence of dinner had time to assert itself. She wondered fearfully, with a quick throb of her heart, how he would receive her confidence. When she called him to the table she looked searchingly into his strong, resolute, good-natured face, and then, dropping her eyes, with an indrawn breath, began her usual fruitless endeavors to learn from him a little of what had occupied his day--his long, mysterious day, spent in a world of which he brought back but the scantiest tidings to her.

As usual, to-night he shook his shoulders impatiently at her questioning. "Oh, Lydia darling, don't talk shop! I'm sick and tired of it after three days of nothing else. I want to leave all that behind me when I come home. That's what a home is for!"

Lydia did not openly dissent from this axiom, though she murmured helplessly: "I feel so awfully shut out. It is what you think about most of the time, and I do not know enough about it even to imagine--"

Paul leaned across the table to lay an affectionate hand on his wife's slim fingers. "Count your mercies, my dear. It's all grab, and snap, and cutting somebody's throat before he has a chance to cut yours. It wouldn't please you if you did know anything about it--the business world." He drew a long breath, and went on appreciatively with his cutlet--Lydia had learned something about meats since the year before--"You are a very good provider, little girl; do you know it?"

"Oh, I love to," said Lydia. She added reflectively: "Wouldn't it be nice if things were so I could do the cooking myself and not have to bother with these horrible creatures that are all you can get usually?"

Paul laughed at the fancy. "That's a high ambition for my wife, I must say!"

"We'd have better things to eat even than Ellen gives us," said Lydia pensively. "If I had a little more time to put on it, I could do wonders, I'm sure of it."

"I don't doubt that," said her husband gallantly; "but did you ever know anybody who *was* her own cook?"

"Well, not except in between times, when they couldn't get anybody else," confessed Lydia. "But lots of people I know who do go through the motions of keeping one would be better off without one. They can't afford it, and--Oh, I wish we were poorer!"

Paul was highly amused by this flight of fancy. "But we're as poor as poverty already," he reminded her.

"We're poor for buying hundred-dollar broadcloth tailor-made suits for me, and cut glass for the table, but we'd have plenty if I could wear ready-made serge at--"

Paul laughed outright. "Haven't you ever noticed, my dear, that the people who wear ready-made serge are the ones who could really comfortably afford to wear calico wrappers? It goes right up and down the scale that way. Everybody is trying to sing a note above what he can."

"I know it does--but does it *have* to? Wouldn't it be better if everybody just--why doesn't somebody begin--"

"It's the law of progress, of upward growth," pronounced Paul.

Lydia was impressed by the pontifical sound of this, though she ventured faintly: "Well, but does progress always mean broadcloth and cut glass?"

"*We* have the wherewithal to cultivate our minds!" said Paul, laughing again. "Weren't the complete works of the American essayists among our wedding presents!" He referred to an old joke between them, at which Lydia laughed loyally, and the talk went on lightly until the meal was over.

As they walked away from the table together Lydia said to herself, "Now--now--" but Paul began to laugh as he told an incident of Madeleine's light-hearted, high-handed tyranny over her elderly fiance, and it seemed impossible for Lydia to bring out her story of mean and ugly tragedy.

As usual the evening was a lively one. Some acquaintances from the "younger married set" of Bellevue dropped in for a game of cards, Madeleine and "old Pete" Lowdor came out to talk over the plans for their new handsome house at the end of the street and at Paul's suggestion Lydia hastily got together a chafing-dish supper for the impromptu party which prolonged itself with much laughter and many friendly wranglings over trumps and "post-mortems" until after midnight. Paul was in the highest of gay spirits as he stood with his pretty wife on the porch, calling good-nights to his guests disappearing down the starlit driveway. He inhaled the odor of success sweet and strong in his nostrils.

As they looked back into the house, they saw the faithful Ellen clearing away the soiled dishes, her large, white, disease-scarred face impassive over her immaculate and correct maid's dress.

"Isn't she a treasure!" cried the master of the house. "To sit up to this hour!" He started, "What's that?"

From the shadow of the house a slim lad's figure shambled out into the driveway. As he passed the porch where Paul stood, one strong arm protectingly about Lydia, he looked up and the light from the open door struck full on a white, purposeless, vacant smile. The upward glance lost for him the uncertain balance of his wavering feet. He reeled, flung up his arms and pitched with drunken soddenness full length upon the gravel, picking himself up clumsily with a sound of incoherent, weak lament. "Why, it's a drunken man--in *our driveway!*" cried Paul, with proprietary indignation. "Get out of here!" he yelled angrily at the intruder's retreating back. When he turned again to Lydia he saw that one of her lightning-swift changes of mood had swept over her. He was startled at her pale face and burning, horrified eyes, and remembering her condition with apprehension, picked her up bodily and carried her up the stairs to their bedroom, soothing her with reassuring caresses.

There, sitting on the edge of their bed, her loosened hair falling about her white face, holding fast to her husband's hands, Lydia told him at last; hesitating and stumbling because in her blank ignorance she knew no words even to hint at what she feared--she told him who Patsy was, the blue-eyed, fifteen-year-old boy, just over from Ireland, ignorant of the world as a child of five, easily led, easily shamed, by his fear of appearing rustic, into any excess--and then she told him what the boy's grandmother had told her about Ellen. It was a milestone in their married life, her turning to him more intimately than she would have done to her mother, her breaking down the walls of her lifelong maiden's reserve and ignorance. She finished with her face hidden in his breast. What should she do? What *could* she do?

Paul took her into the closest embrace, kissed her shut eyes in a passion of regret that she should have learned the evil in the world, of relieved belittling of the story, Lydia's portentous beginning of which had quite startled him, and of indignation at "Mrs. O'Hern's foul mouth--for you can just be sure, darling Lydia, that it's all nothing but rowings among the servants. Probably Ellen won't let Mrs. O'Hern take her usual weekly perquisite of sugar and tea. Servants are always quarreling and the only way to do is to keep out of their lies about each other and let them fight it out themselves. You never can have any idea of who's telling the truth if you butt in and try to straighten it, and the Lord knows that Ellen's too good a cook and too much needed in this family until the new member arrives safely, to hurt her feelings with investigating any of Mrs. O'Hern's yarns. Just you refuse to listen to servants' gossip. If you'd been a little less of a darling, inexperienced school-girl, you'd have cut off such talk at the first words. Just you take my word for it, you dear, you sweetheart, you best of--" he ran on into ardent endearments, forgetting the story himself, blinding and dazzling Lydia with the excitement which always swept her away in those moments when Paul was her passionate, youthful lover.

She tried to revert to the question once or twice later, but now Paul alternated between shaming her laughingly for her gullibility and making fun of her "countrified" interest in the affairs of her servants. "But, Paul, Mrs. O'Hern says that Patsy doesn't *want* to drink and--and go to those awful houses--his father died of it--only Ellen makes him, by--"

Paul tried to close the discussion with a little impatience at her attempt to press the matter. "Every Irish boy drinks more or less, you little goose. That's nothing! Of course it's too bad to have you *see* a drunken man, but it's nothing so tragic. If he didn't drink here, he would somewhere else. The only thing we have to complain about that I can see, is having the cook's followers drunk--but Ellen's such a miracle of competence we must overlook that. As for the rest of Mrs. O'Hern's dirty stories, they're spite work evidently." As Lydia looked up at him, her face still anxious and drawn,

he ended finally, "Good gracious, Lydia, don't you suppose I know--that my experience of the world has taught me more about human nature than you know? You act to me as though you trusted your washwoman's view of things more than your husband's. And now what you want to do, anyhow, is to get some rest. You hop into bed, little rabbit, and go to sleep. Don't wait for me; I've got a lot of figuring to do."

When he went to bed, a couple of hours later, Lydia was lying quietly with closed eyes, and he did not disturb her; but afterward he woke out of a sound sleep and sat up with a sense that something was wrong. He listened. There was not a sound in the room or in the house. Apparently Lydia was not wakened by his startled movement. She lay in a profound immobility.

But something about her very motionlessness struck a chill to his heart. Women in her condition sometimes had seizures in the night, he had heard. With a shaking hand, he struck a match and leaned over her. He gave a loud, shocked exclamation to see that her eyes were open, steady and fixed, like wide, dark pools. He threw the match away, and took her in his arms with a fond murmur of endearments. "Why, poor little girl! Do you lie awake and worry about what's to come?"

Lydia drew a painful breath. "Yes," she said; "I worry a great deal about what's to come."

He kissed her gently, ardently, gently again. "You mustn't do that, darling! You're all right! Melton said there wasn't one chance in a thousand of anything but just the most temporary illness, without any complications. It won't be so bad--it'll be soon over, and think what it means to us--dearest--dearest--dearest!"

Lydia lay quiet in his arms. She had been still so long that he thought her asleep, when she said, in a whisper: "I hope it won't be a girl!"

CHAPTER XIX

LYDIA'S NEW MOTTO

Lydia's two or three big receptions, of which her mother had spoken with so casual a confidence, came off, while not exactly with nonchalant ease, still, on the whole, creditably. It is true that Dr. Melton had stormed at Lydia one sunny day in spring, finding her bent over her desk, addressing invitations.

"It's April, child!" he cried, "April! The crocuses are out and the violets are almost here--and, what is more important, your day of trial gets closer with every tick of the clock. Come outdoors and take a walk with me."

"Oh, I can't!" Lydia was aghast at the idea, looking at a mountain of envelopes before her.

"Here! I'll help you finish those, and then we'll--"

"No, no, *no!*" In Lydia's negation was a touch of the irritation that was often during these days in her attitude toward her godfather. "I can't! Please don't tease me to! The curtains to the spare room have to be put up, and the bed draperies somehow fixed. A stray dog got in there when he was wet and muddy and went to sleep on my best lace bedspread."

Dr. Melton had not practiced for years among Endbury ladies without having some knowledge of them and a corresponding readiness of mind in meeting the difficulties they declared insurmountable. "I'll buy you a white marseilles bedspread on our way back from the walk," he offered gravely.

"Oh, I've got plenty of plain white ones," she admitted incautiously, "but they don't go with the scheme of the room--and the first reception's only two days off."

Dr. Melton fixed her with an ironical and melancholy smile: "Now, Lydia, I did think you had it in you to realize that your health and the strength of your child are worth more than--"

Lydia sprang up and confronted him with an apparent anger of face and accent that was contradicted by her trembling chin and suffused eyes. "Oh, go away!" she commanded him, shaking her head and motioning him off. "Don't talk so to me! I can't help it--what I do! Everything's a part of the whole system, and I'm in that up to my neck--you know I am. If that's right, why, everything's all right, just the way everybody thinks it is. And if it's wrong--" She caught her breath, and turned back to her desk. "If it's wrong, what good would be done by little dribbling compromises of an occasional walk." She sat down wearily, and leaned her head on her hand. "I just wish you wouldn't keep me so stirred up--when I'm trying so *hard* to settle down!"

Dr. Melton seemed to divine perfectly the significance of this incoherent outbreak. He thrust out his lips in his old grimace that denoted emotion, and observed the speaker in a frowning silence. When she finished, he nodded: "You are right, Lydia, I do no good." He twirled his hat about between his fingers, looking absently into the crown, and added, "But you must forgive me, I love you very dearly."

Lydia ran over to him, conscience-stricken. He took her embrace and remorseful kiss quietly. "Don't be sorry, Lydia dear. You have just shown me, as in a flash of lightning, how much more powerful a grasp on reality you have than I."

Lydia recoiled from him with an outcry of exasperation. "I! Why, I'm almost an idiot! I haven't a grasp on anything! I can't see an inch before my nose. I'm in a perfect nightmare of perplexity all the time because I can't make out what I'm driving at--or ought to--"

She went on more quietly, with a reasoning air: "Only look here, Godfather, it came over me the other night, when I couldn't sleep, that perhaps what's the trouble with me is that I'm *lazy*! I believe that's it! I don't want to work the way Marietta does, and Mother does, and even Madeleine does over her dresses and parties and things. It must be I'm a shirk, and expect to have an easier time than most people. That *must* be it. What else can it be?"

The doctor made no protest against this theory, taking himself off in a silence most unusual with him. Lydia did not notice this; nor did she in the next two or three months remark that her godfather took quite literally and obeyed scrupulously her exhortation to leave her in peace.

She was in the grasp of this new idea. It seemed to her that in phrasing it she had hit upon the explanation of her situation which she had been so long seeking, and it was with a resolve to scourge this weakness out of her life that she now faced the future.

She found a satisfaction in the sweeping manner in which this new maxim could be applied to all the hesitations that had confused her. All her meditations heretofore had brought her nothing but uncertainty, but this new catchword of incessant activity drove her forward too resistlessly to allow any reflections as to whether she were going in the right direction. She yielded herself absolutely to that ideal of conduct which had been urged upon her all her life, and she found, as so many others find, oblivion to the problems of the spirit in this resolute refusal to recognize the spirit. It was perhaps during these next months of her life that she most nearly approximated the Endbury notion of what she should be.

She had yielded to Paul on the subject of the cook not only because of her timid distrust of her own inexperienced judgment but because of her intense reaction from the usual Endbury motto of "Husbands, hands off!" She had wanted Paul to be interested in the details of the house as she hoped to know and be interested in what concerned him, and when he showed his interest in a request she could not refuse it. She hoped that she had made a good beginning for the habit of taking counsel with each other on all matters. But she thought and hoped and reflected very little during these days. She was enormously, incredibly busy, and on the whole, she hoped, successfully so. The receptions, at least, went off very well, everybody said.

Dr. Melton did not see his goddaughter again until he came with Mrs. Sandworth to the last of these events. She was looking singularly handsome at that time, her color high, her eyes very large and dark, almost black, so dilated were the pupils. With the nicety of observation of a man who has lived much among women, the doctor noticed that her costume, while effective, was not adjusted with the exquisite feeling for finish that always pervaded the toilets of her mother and sister. Lydia was trying with all her might to make herself over, but with the best will in the world she could not attain the prayerful concentration on the process of attiring herself, characteristic of the other women of her family.

"She forgot to put the barrette in her back hair," murmured Mrs. Sandworth mournfully, as she and her brother emerged from the hand-shake of the last of the ladies assisting in receiving, "and there are two hooks of her cuff unfastened, and her collar's crooked. But I don't dare breathe a word to her about it. Since that time before her marriage when she--"

"Yes, yes, yes," her brother cut her short; "don't bring up that tragic episode again. I'd succeeded in forgetting it."

"You can call it tragic if you like," commented Mrs. Sandworth, looking about for an escape from the stranded isolation of guests who have just been passed along from the receiving line; "but what it was all about was more than I ever could--" Her eyes fell again on Lydia, and she lost herself in a sweet passion of admiration and pride. "Oh, isn't she the loveliest thing that ever drew the breath of life! Was there ever anybody else that could look so as though--as though they still had dew on them!"

She went on, with her bold inconsequence: "There is a queer streak in her. Sometimes I think she doesn't care--" She stopped to gaze at a striking costume just entering the room.

"What doesn't she care about?" asked the doctor.

Mrs. Sandworth was concentrating on sartorial details as much of her mind as was ever under control at one time, and, called upon for a development of her theory, was even more vague than usual. "Oh, I don't know--about what

everybody cares about."

"She's likely to learn, if it's at all catching," conjectured the doctor grimly, looking around the large, handsome room. An impalpable effluvium was in the air, composed of the scent of flowers, the odor of delicate food, the sounds of a discreetly small orchestra behind palms in the hallway, the rustling of silks, and the pleasurable excitement of the crowd of prosperous-looking women, pleasantly elated by the opportunity for exhibiting their best toilets.

"To think of its being our little Lydia who's the center of all this!" murmured Mrs. Sandworth, her loving eyes glistening with affectionate pride. "It really is a splendid scene, isn't it, Marius?"

"If they were all gagged, it might be. Lord! how they yell!"

"Oh, at a *reception!*" Mrs. Sandworth's accent denoted that the word was an explanation. "People have to, to make themselves heard."

"And why should they be so eager to accomplish that?" inquired the doctor. "Listen!"

Standing as they were, tightly pressed in between a number of different groups, their ears were assaulted by a disjointed mass of stentorian conversation that gave a singular illusion as if it all came from one inconceivably voluble source, the individuality of the voices being lost in the screaming enunciation which, as Mrs. Sandworth had pointed out, was a prerequisite of self-expression under the circumstances.

They heard: "--*For over a month and the sleeves were too see you again at Mrs. Elliott's I'm pouring there from four I've got to dismiss one with little plum-colored bows all along five dollars a week and the washing out, and still impossible! I was there myself all the time and they neither of thirty-five cents a pound for the most ordinary ferns and red carnations was all they had, and we thought it rather skimpy under the brought up in one big braid and caught down with at the Peterson's they were pink and white with--*"

"*Oh, no, Madeleine! that was at the Burlingame's.*" Mrs. Sandworth took a running jump into the din and sank from her brother's sight, vociferating: "*The Petersons had them of old-gold, don't you remember, with little--*"

The doctor, worming his way desperately through the masses of femininity, and resisting all attempts to engage him in the vocal fray, emerged at length into the darkened hall where the air was, as he told himself in a frenzied flight of the imagination, less like a combination of a menagerie and a perfume shop. Here, in a quiet corner, sat Lydia's father, alone. He held in one hand a large platter piled high with wafer-like sandwiches, which he was consuming at a Gargantuan rate, and as he ate he smiled to himself.

"Well, Mr. Ogre," said the doctor, sitting down beside him with a gasp of relief; "let a wave-worn mariner into your den, will you?"

Provided with an auditor, Judge Emery's smile broke into an open laugh. He waved the platter toward the uproar in the next rooms: "A boiler factory ain't in it with woman, lovely woman, is it?" he put it to his old friend.

"Gracious powers! There's nothing to laugh at in that exhibition!" the doctor reproved him, with an acrimonious savagery. "I don't know which makes me sicker; to stay in there and listen to them, or come out here and find you thinking they're *funny!*"

"They *are* funny!" insisted the Judge tranquilly. "I stood by the door and listened to the scraps of talk I could catch, till I thought I should have a fit. I never heard anything funnier on the stage."

"Look-y here, Nat," the doctor stared up at him angrily, "they're not monkeys in a zoo, to be looked at only on holidays and then laughed at! They're the other half of a whole that we're half of, and don't you forget it! Why in the world should you think it funny for them to do this tomfool trick all winter and have nervous prostration all summer to pay for it? You'd lock up a *man* as a dangerous lunatic if he spent his life so. What they're like, and what they do with their time and strength concerns us enough sight more than what the tariff is, let me tell you!"

"I admit that what your wife is like concerns you a whole lot!" The Judge laughed good-naturedly in the face of the little old bachelor. "Don't commence jumping on the American woman now! I won't stand it! She's the noblest of her sex!"

"Do you know why I am bald?" said Dr. Melton, rubbing his hand over his shining dome.

"If I did, I wouldn't admit it," the Judge put up a cautious guard, "because I foresee that whatever I say will be used as evidence against me."

"I've torn out all my hair in desperation at hearing such men as you claim to admire and respect and wish to advance the American woman. You don't give enough thought to her--real thought--from one year's end to another to know whether you think she has an immortal soul or not!"

"Oh, you can't get anywhere, trying to reason about those sort of things. You have to take souls for granted. Besides, I

give her as fair a deal in that respect as I give myself," protested Lydia's father reasonably, smiling and eating.

"There's something in *that*, now!" cried his interlocutor, with an odd Celtic lilt which sometimes invaded his speech; "but she *has* an immortal soul, and I'm by no means sure that yours is still inside you."

The Judge stood up, brushed the crumbs of his stolen feast from his well-fitting broadcloth, and smiled down indulgently at the unquiet little doctor. "She's all right, Melton, the American woman, and you're an unconscionably tiresome old fanatic. That's what *you* are! Come along and have a glass of punch with me. Lydia's cook has a genius for punch--and for sandwiches!" he added reflectively, setting down the empty platter.

Dr. Melton apparently was off on another tangent of excitability. "Did you ever see her?" he demanded with a fiercely significant accent.

The Judge made a humorous wry mouth. "Yes, I have; but what concern is a cook's moral character to her employer any more than an engineer's to the railroad--"

"Well, it mightn't hurt the railroad any if it took more cognizance of its engineers' morals--" began the doctor dryly.

The Judge cut him short with a great laugh. "Oh, Melton! Melton! You bilious sophomore! Take a vacation from finding everything so damn tragic. Take a drink on me. You're all right! Everybody's all right!"

The doctor nodded. "And the reception is the success of the season," he said.

CHAPTER XX

AN EVENING'S ENTERTAINMENT

The dinner parties, so Paul told Lydia one evening a few days later, would certainly be as successful and with but little more trouble. "Just think of the dinners Ellen's been giving us for the last two months! I don't believe there's another such cook in Ohio--within our purse, of course."

Lydia did not visibly respond to this enthusiasm. Indeed, she walked away from the last half of it, and leaned out of a window to look up at the stars. When she came back to take up the tiny dress on which she was sewing, she said: "I don't think I can stand more than this one dinner party, Paul. I'm sorry, but I don't feel at all well, and this dreadful nausea troubles me a good deal."

"Well, you look lovelier than ever before in your life," Paul reassured her tenderly, and felt a moment's pique that her face did not entirely clear at this all-important announcement. "Come, let's go over to the Derby's for a game of bridge, will you, Lydia?"

This conversation took place on a Tuesday late in May. The dinner party was set for Thursday. On Wednesday morning, after Paul's usual early departure, Lydia went to her writing desk to send a note to Madeleine Hollister. Paul had intimated that she and Madeleine were seeing less of each other than he had expected from their girlhood acquaintance, and Lydia, in her anxiety to induce Paul to talk over with her and plan with her the growth of their home life, was eager to adopt every casual suggestion he threw out. She began, therefore, a cordial invitation to Madeleine to spend several days with them. She would try again to be more intimate with her husband's sister.

She had not inherited her mother's housekeeping eye, and was never extremely observant of details. Being more than usually preoccupied this morning, she had no suspicion that someone else had been using the conveniences for writing on her desk until she turned over the sheet of paper on which she had begun her note, and saw with surprise that the other side was already covered with a coarse handwriting, unfamiliar to her.

As she looked at this in the blankest astonishment, a phrase leaped out at her comprehension, like a serpent striking. And then another. And another.

She tried to push back her chair to escape, but she was like a person paralyzed.

With returning strength to move came an overwhelming wave of nausea. She crept up to her own room and lay motionless and soundless for hour after hour, until presently it was noon, and the pleasant tinkling of gongs announced that lunch was served.

Lydia rose, and made her way down the stairs to the well-ordered table, set with the daintiest of perfectly prepared food, and stood, holding on to the back of a chair, while she rang the bell. The little second girl answered it--one of the

fitting, worthless, temporary occupants of that position.

"Tell Ellen to come here," said her mistress.

At the appearance of the cook, Lydia's white face went a little whiter. "Did you use my writing desk last evening?" she asked.

Ellen looked up, her large, square-jawed face like a mask through which her eyes probed her mistress' expression. "Yes, Mrs. Hollister; I did," she said in the admirable "servant's manner" she possessed to perfection. "I ought to ask your pardon for doing it without permission, but someone was wanting Mr. Hollister on the telephone, and I thought best to sit within hearing of the bell until you and Mr. Hollister should return, and as--"

"You left part of your letter to Patsy O'Hern," said Lydia, and sat down suddenly, as though her strength were spent.

The woman opposite her flushed a purplish red. There was a long silence. Lydia looked at her servant with a face before which Ellen finally lowered her eyes.

"I am sure, Mrs. Hollister, if you don't think I'm worth the place, and if you think you can manage without me to-morrow night, I'll go this minute," she said coolly.

Lydia did not remove her eyes from the other's flushed face. "You must go far away from Bellevue," she said. "You must not take a place anywhere near here."

Ellen looked up quickly, and down again. The color slowly died out of her face. After a sullen silence, "Yes," she said.

"That is all," said Lydia.

Paul found his wife that evening still very white. She explained Ellen's disappearance with a dry brevity. "That we should have continued to give that--that awful--to give her opportunity to work upon a boy of--" she ended brokenly. "Suppose he had been my brother!"

Paul was aghast. "But, my *dear*! To-morrow is the night of the dinner! Couldn't you have put off a few days this sudden fit of--"

Lydia broke from her white stillness with a wild outcry. She flung herself on her husband, pressing her hands on his mouth and crying out fiercely: "No, no, Paul! Not that! I can't bear to have you say that! I hoped--I hoped you wouldn't think of--"

Paul was fresh from an interview with Dr. Melton, and in his ears rang innumerable cautions against excitement or violent emotions. With his usual competent grasp on the essentials of a situation that he could not understand at all, he put aside for the time his exasperated apprehensions about the next day's event, and picking Lydia up bodily he carried her to a couch, closing her lips with gentle hands and soothing her with caresses, like a frightened child.

"Oh, you are good to me!" she murmured finally, quieted. "I must try not to get so excited. But, Paul--I *can't* tell you--about--about that letter--and later, when I saw Ellen, it was as though we fought hand to hand for Patsy, though she never--"

"There, there, dearest! Don't talk about it--just rest. You've worked yourself into a perfect fever." If there was latent in the indulgent accent of this speech the coda, "All about nothing," it escaped Lydia's ear. She only knew that the long nightmare of her lonely, horrified day was over. She clung to her husband, and thanked heaven for his pure, clean manliness.

But in a vastly different way the next day was almost as much of a nightmare. Lydia's father and mother were temporarily out of town and their at least fairly satisfactory cook was enjoying her vacation at an undiscoverable address. Lydia was cut off from asking her sister to come to her aid by the fact that Paul had prevailed upon her to omit Marietta and her husband from her guests. "If you won't give but one, we've just *got* to invite the important ones," he had said. "Your sister can take dinner with us any day, and you know her husband *isn't* the most--"

Lydia had picked up in the school of necessity a fair knowledge of cooking, for which she had discovered in herself quite a liking; but she had been too constantly in social demand to have the leisure for advancing far into culinary lore, and she now found herself dismayed before the elaborate menu that Ellen had planned, for which the materials were gathered together. She was still shaken with the emotions of the day before, and subject to sudden giddy, sick turns, which, although lasting but an instant, left her enormously fatigued.

She went furiously at the task before her, beginning by simplifying the dinner as much as she dared and could with the materials at hand, and struggling with the dishes she was obliged to retain. For years afterward, the sight of chicken salad affected her to acute nausea. The inexperienced and careless little second girl lost her head in the crisis, and had to be repeatedly calmed and assured that all that would be asked of her would be to serve the dinner to the waiters for whom Lydia had arranged hastily by telephone with Endbury's leading caterer. Ellen had planned to serve the meal with

the help of a waitress friend or two, without other outside help; a feature of the occasion that had met with Paul's hearty approval. He told Lydia that those palpably hired-for-the-occasion nigger waiters were very bad form, and belonged to a phase of Endbury's social gaucheries as outgrown now as charade parties. But now, of course, nothing else was possible.

In the intervals of cooking, Lydia left her makeshift help in the kitchen, to see that nothing burned, and in a frenzy of activity flew at some of the manifold things to be done to prepare the house for the festivity. She swept and wiped up herself the expansive floors of the two large parlors, set the rooms in order, dusted the innumerable wedding present knickknacks, cleaned the stairs, wiped free from dust the carved balustrades, ordered the bedrooms that were to serve as dressing rooms in the evening, answered the 'phone a thousand times, arranged flowers in the vases, received a reportorial call from Miss Burgess, gave cut glass and china its final polish, laid out Paul's evening clothes and arranged her own toilet ready--it was five o'clock! There were innumerable other tasks to accomplish, but she dared no longer put off setting the table.

It was to be a large dinner--large, that is, for Endbury--of twenty covers, and Lydia had never prepared a table for so many guests. The number of objects necessary for the conventional setting of a dinner table appalled her. She was so tired, and her attention was so fixed on the complicated processes going on uncertainly in the kitchen, that her brain reeled over the vast quantity of knives and forks and plates and glasses needed to convey food to twenty mouths on a festal occasion. They persistently eluded her attempts to marshal them into order. She discovered that she had put forks for the soup--that in some inexplicable way at the plate destined for an important guest there was a large kitchen spoon of iron--a wild sort of whimsical humor rose in her from the ferment of utter fatigue and anxiety. When Paul came in, looking very grave, she told him with a wavering laugh, "If I tried as hard for ten minutes to go to Heaven as I've tried all day to have this dinner right, I'd certainly have a front seat in the angel choir. If anybody here to-night is not satisfied, it'll be because he's harder to please than St. Peter himself."

"My Aunt Alexandra will be here," said Paul, the humorous side of her speech escaping him.

Lydia set down a tray of glasses, and broke into open, shaking, hysterical laughter. Paul surveyed her grimly. Her excitement had flushed her cheeks and darkened her eyes, and her sudden, apparently light-hearted, mirth put the finishing touch to a picture that could seem to her husband nothing but a care-free, not to say childish, attitude toward a situation of grave concern to him and his prospects and ambitions in the world. His inborn and highly cultivated regard for competence and success in any enterprise undertaken, drowned out, as was by no means infrequent with him, any judicial inquiry into the innate importance of the enterprise. He had an instant of bitter impatience with Lydia. He felt that he had a right to hold her to account for the outcome of events. If she were well enough to have rosy cheeks and to laugh at nothing, she was well enough to have satisfactory results expected from her efforts.

"I hope very much that everything will go well," he said curtly, turning away. "Our first dinner party means a good deal."

But everything did not go well. Indeed, it is scarcely too much to say that nothing went well. From the over-peppered soup (Lydia had forgotten to caution her rattle-brained assistant that she had already seasoned the bouillon) to the salad which, although excellent, gave out frankly, beyond any possibility of disguise, while five people were still unserved, the meal was a long procession of mishaps. Paul took up sorrowfully his wife's rather hysterical note of self-mockery, and laughed and joked over the varied eccentricities of the pretentious menu. But there was no laughter in his heart.

Never before, in all his life, from babyhood up, had he been forced to know the acrid taste of failure, and the dose was not sweetened by his intense consciousness that he was not in any way responsible. No such fiasco had ever resulted from anything he *had* been responsible for, he thought fiercely to himself, leaning forward smilingly to talk to the president of the street-railway company, who, having nothing in the shape of silverware left before his place but a knife and spoon, was eating his salad with the latter implement. "Lydia has no right to act so," he thought.

The hostess gave the effect of flushed, bright-eyed animation usual with her on exciting occasions.

"Your wife is a beauty," said the street-railway magnate, looking down the disorganized table toward her.

Paul received this assurance with the proper enthusiastic assent, but something else gleamed hotly in his face as he looked at her. "I have *some* rights," thought the young husband. "Lydia owes me something!" He never before had been moved to pity for himself.

Lydia seemed to herself to be in an endless bad dream. The exhausting efforts of the day had reduced her to a sort of coma of fatigue through which she felt but dully the successive stabs of the ill-served, unsuccessful dinner. At times, the table, the guests, the room itself, wavered before her, and she clutched at her chair to keep her balance. She did not know that she was laughing and talking gaily and eating nothing. She was only conscious of an intense longing for the end of things, and darkness and quiet.

After the meal the company moved into the double parlor. The plan had been to serve coffee there, but as people stood about waiting and this did not appear, Paul drew Lydia to one side to ask her about it. She looked at him with bright, blank eyes, and spoke in an expressionless voice: "The grocery boy forgot to deliver the coffee," she said. "There isn't any, I remember now."

He turned away silently, and the later part of the entertainment began.

There was to be music, one of the guests being Endbury's favorite amateur soprano, another a pianist much thought of. The singer took her place by the piano, assuming carefully the correct position. Lydia watched her balance on the balls of her feet, lean forward a little, throw up her chest and draw in her abdomen. As the preliminary chords of the accompaniment sounded, she was almost visibly concentrating her thoughts on the tension of her vocal chords, on the position of the soft palate and the resonance of the nasal cavities. The thoughts of her auditors followed her own. It came to Lydia some time after the performance was over that the words of the song told of love and life and tragic betrayal.

A near-by guest leaned to her and said, during the hand-clapping: "I couldn't make out what it was all about--never can understand a song--but, say! can't she put it all over the soprano that sings in the First Methodist."

His hostess gave the speaker a rather disconcerting stare, hardly explained, he thought, by the enigmatical statement that came after it: "Why, that is how we are living, all of us!"

The pianist was an old German, considered eccentric by Endbury. He had a social position on account of his son, a prosperous German-American manufacturer of buggies, and was invited because of his readiness to play on any occasion. The old man looked about him at the company with a fatherly smile, and, sitting down to his instrument, waited pointedly until all the cheerful hum of conversation had died away. The room was profoundly silent as he brought his hands down on the keys in a startling, thrilling chord. Lydia's heart began to beat fast. She felt a chill run among the roots of her hair. She was so moved she could have wept aloud, and yet, almost at once, as the musician passed on to the rich elaboration of his theme, she lost herself in a groping bewilderment. She had heard so little music! Her straining attention mocked her with its futility.

She and Paul had been married for eight months, but they had found no time for the serious study of music from which she had hoped so much. When Paul was at home for an evening he was too tired and worn for anything very deep, he said, and preferred to anything else the lighter pieces of Nevin. She now gave ear despairingly to the mighty utterance of a master, catching only now and then a tantalizing glimpse of what it might mean to her. At times, there emerged from the glorious tumult of sound some grave, earnest chord, some quick, piercing melody, some exquisite sudden cadence, which reached her heart intelligibly; but through most of it she felt herself to be listening with heartsick yearning to a lovely message in an unknown tongue. Her feeling of desolate exile from a realm of beauty she longed to enter, was intensified, as was natural in so sensitive a nature, by the strange power of music to heighten in its listeners whatever is, for the time, their predominant emotion. She felt like crying out, like beating her hands against the prison bars suddenly revealed to her. She was almost intolerably affected before the end of the selection.

"That's an awfully long piece for anybody to learn by heart!" commented her neighbor admiringly, as the old pianist finished, and stood up wiping his forehead. "Say, Mr. Burkhardt, what's the name of that selection?" he went on, leaning forward.

The old German turned toward him, and answered gravely: "That is the feerst mofement of Beethoven's Opus Von Hundred and Elefen."

"Oh, it is, is it?" said Lydia's guest, with a facetious intonation. "All of that?"

After that the soprano sang again, someone else sang a humorous negro song, there was more piano music, rendered by the prosperous son of the old pianist, who played dashingly some bright comic-opera airs. The furniture was pushed back and a few dancers whirled over the costly, hardwood waxed floors, which Lydia had cleaned that morning. She felt vaguely that everyone was being most kind and that her good-natured guests were trying to make up for the failure of the dinner by unusual efforts to have the evening pass off well. She was very grateful for this humane disposition of theirs. It was the bright spot of the experience.

But Paul, who also saw the kindly efforts of his guests, felt that this was the last intolerable dagger-thrust. Their amused compassion suffocated him. He wanted people to envy him, not pity him, he thought in mortified chagrin.

After an eternity, the hour of departure arrived. As the door shut out the last of the smiling, lying guests, the host and hostess turned to face each other.

Paul spoke first, in an even, restrained tone: "You would better go to bed, Lydia; you must be very tired."

With this, he turned away to shut up the house. He had determined to preserve at all costs the appearance of the indulgent, non-critical, over-patient husband that he intensely felt himself to be. No force, he thought grimly, shutting

his jaws hard, should drag from him a word of his real sentiments. Fanned by the wind of this virtuous resolution, his sentiments grew hotter and hotter as he walked about, locking doors and windows, and reviewing bitterly the events of the evening. If he was to restrain himself from saying anything, he would at least allow himself the privilege of feeling all that was possible to a man so deeply injured.

Lydia sat quietly waiting for him to finish, her face in her hands, conscious of nothing but fatigue, in her ears a wild echo of the inexplicable, haunting Beethoven chords.

Suddenly she started and raised her head, her face transfigured. Her eyes shone, a smile was on her lips like that of someone who hears from afar the sound of a beloved voice. She made a gesture of yearning toward her husband. "Oh, Paul--Paul!" she cried to him softly, in a tremulous voice of wonder.

He turned, the light for the first time on his black, loveless face. "What is it?" he enunciated distinctly, looking at her hard.

Before his eyes Lydia shrank back. She put up her hands instinctively to hide her face from him. Finally, "Nothing--nothing--" she murmured.

Without comment, Paul went back to his conscientious round of the house.

Lydia had felt for the first time the quickening to life of her child. And during all that day, until then, she had forgotten that she was to know motherhood.

CHAPTER XXI

AN ELEMENT OF SOLIDITY

Lydia dated the estrangement from Marietta, which grew so rapidly during the next year, from the conversation on the day after the dinner party. She was cruelly wounded by her sister's attack on her, but she could never remember the scene without one of her involuntary laughs so disconcerting to Paul, who only laughed when he felt gay, certainly at nothing which affected him seriously. But Lydia's sense of humor was so tickled at the grotesque contrast between Marietta's injured conception of the brilliant social event from which she had been excluded and the leaden fiasco which it had really been, that even at the time, in the midst of denying hotly her sister's charges of snobbishness and social ambition, she was unable to keep back a shaky laugh or two as she cried out: "Oh, Etta! If you could know how things went, you'd be too thankful to have escaped it. It was awful beyond words!"

Marietta answered her by handing her with a grim silence a copy of that morning's paper, open at *Society Notes*. Loyal Flora Burgess had lavished on "Miss Lydia's" first dinner party her entire vocabulary of deferential, not to say reverential, encomiums. The "function had inaugurated a new era of cosmopolitan amplitude of social life in Endbury," was the ending of the lengthy paragraph that described the table decorations, the menu, the costume of the hostess, the names of the music-makers afterward.

Lydia burst into a hysterical laugh. "Flora Burgess is too killing!" she cried. "She was here in the afternoon to get details, and I just let her wander around and see what she could make out. I was too busy to pay any attention to her-- Oh, Etta! I was dead and buried with fatigue before the people even began to come. I can't even remember much about it except that every single thing was wrong. That about 'cosmopolitan amplitude--' Oh, isn't Flora too funny!--means having music after dinner, I suppose. I don't know what else."

"Of course," said Marietta, rising to go, "it doesn't make any difference what it was really like! Only the people that were there know that. The report in the paper--"

"Oh, Marietta, what a thing to say--that it's all pretense, every bit--and not--"

Marietta went on steadily and mordantly: "I don't know how you feel about it, but *I* shouldn't be very easy in my mind to have my only sister's name not on the list of guests at my most exclusive social function."

Dr. Melton, who made Lydia a professional call that morning, found her with reddened eyes, slowly washing and putting away innumerable dirty dishes. She told him that the second girl, apparently overcome by the events of the day before, had disappeared during the night. Dr. Melton thrust out his lips and said nothing, but he took off his coat, put on an apron, and, pushing his patient away from the dishpan, attacked a huge pile of sticky plates. He worked rapidly and silently, with a surgeon's deftness. Lydia sat quiet for some time, looking at him. Finally, "I hadn't been crying because of dirty dishes," she told him; "I'm not such a child as that. Marietta has been here. She said some things

pretty hard to bear about her not having been invited to that awful dinner party. I didn't know what she was talking about a good deal of the time--it was all about what a snob and traitor to my family I was growing to be."

"You mustn't blame Marietta too much," said the doctor, rinsing and beginning to dry the plates with what seemed to Lydia's fatigued languor really miraculous speed. "It's true that she watches your social advance with the calm disinterestedness of a cat watching somebody pour cream out of a jug. She wants her saucerful. But look here. Did I ever tell you about the man Montaigne speaks of who spent all his life to acquire the skill necessary to throw a grain of millet through the eye of a needle? Well, that man was proud of it, but poor Marietta's haunted by doubts as to whether in her case it's been worth while. It makes her naturally inclined to be snappy."

He was so used to delighting in Lydia's understanding of his perversely obscure figures of speech that he turned about, surprised to hear no appreciative comment. She was looking away with troubled eyes.

"Paul will think I ought not to have let Marietta talk to me like that--that I ought to have resented it. I never can remember to resent things."

The doctor began setting out polished water glasses on a tray. "It is the glory of a man to pass by an offense," he quoted. "Ah, don't you suppose if we knew all about things we'd feel as relieved at not having resented an injury as if we had held our hands from striking a blind man who had inadvertently run against us?"

There was no response. It was the second time that one of his metaphors, far-fetched as he loved them, but usually intelligible to Lydia, had missed fire. He turned on her sharply. "What are you thinking about?" he asked.

She raised her tragic eyes to his. "About the mashed potatoes last night--they didn't have a bit of salt in them--they were too nasty for--"

"Oh, pshaw! It makes no difference whether your dinner party was a success or not! You know that as well as I do. A dinner party is a relic of the Dark Ages, anyhow--if not of the Stone Age! As a physician, I shudder to see people sitting down to gorge themselves on the richest possible food, all carefully rendered extra palatable in order that they may put upon their bodies the burden of throwing off an enormous amount of superfluous food. A hundred years from now people will be as ashamed of us for our piggishness as we are of our eighteenth-century forbears for their wine-swilling to the detriment of their descendants. A dinner party of to-day bears no more relation to a rational gathering of rational people for the purpose of rational social intercourse than--"

He had run on with his usual astonishing loquacity without drawing breath, overwhelming Lydia with a fresh flood of words when she tried to break in; but she now sprang up and motioned him peremptorily to silence.

"Please, please, Godfather, don't! I asked you not to unsettle me--you're not kind to do it! You're not kind! I must think it's important and, and--the necessary thing to do. I *must!*" She put her hands over her eyes as she spoke. She was trying to shut out a vision of Paul's embittered face of wrathful chagrin. "That's the trouble with me," she went on. "Something in me makes it hard for me to think it important enough to give up everything else for it--and I--"

"Why '*must!*' you?" asked the doctor bluntly, crumpling his damp dishcloth into a ball.

Lydia looked at him and saw Paul so evidently that the doctor saw with her. "I must! I *must!*" she only repeated.

Dr. Melton opened his mouth wide, closed it again with a snap, and threw the tightly wadded ball in his hand passionately upon the floor with the gesture of an angry child. Lydia was standing now, looking down at the red-faced little man as he peered up at her after his silent outbreak. His attitude of fury so contrasted with the pacific white apron which enveloped him, that she broke out into a laugh. Even as she laughed and turned away to answer a knock at the door, she was acutely thankful that it was not with Paul that she had been set upon by that swiftly mobile change of humor, that it was not at Paul that she had launched that disrespectful mirth.

The person who knocked proved to be a very large, rosy-cheeked female, who might be a big, overgrown child or a preposterously immature woman for all Lydia, looking at her in perplexity, could make out. She felt no thrill of premonition as this individual advanced into the kitchen, a pair of immense red hands folded before her.

"I'm Anastasia O'Her, ma'am," she announced with a thick accent of County Clare and a self-confident, good-humored smile, "though mostly I'm called 'Stashie--and I'm just over from th' old country to my Aunt Bridgie that washed for you till the rheumatism got her, and when she told me about what you'd done for her and Patsy--how you'd sent off that ould divil where she couldn't torment Patsy no more, and him as glad of it as Aunt Bridgie herself, just like she knew he would be, and what an awful time you do be havin' with gurrils, and a baby comin', I says to myself and to Aunt Bridgie, 'There's the lady I'm goin' to worrk for if she'll lave me do ut,' and Aunt Bridgie was readin' to me in the paper about your gran' dinner party last night and I says to her and to myself, 'There'll be a main lot of dishes to be washed th' day and I'd better step over and begin.'"

She pulled off the shawl that had covered her head of flaming hair, and smiled broadly at her two interlocutors, who remained motionless, staring at her in an ecstasy of astonishment.

As she looked into Lydia's pale face and reddened eyes, the smile died away. She clasped her big hands with a pitying gesture, and cried out a Gaelic exclamation of compassion with a much-moved accent; then, "It's time I was here," she told herself. She wiped her eyes, passed the back of her hand over her nose with a sniff, picked up the dishcloth from the floor, and advanced upon a pile of dirty silver. Her massive bulk shook the floor.

"I don't know no more about housework than Casey's pig," she told them cheerfully, "but Aunt Bridgie says in America they don't none of the gurls know nothing. They just hold their jobs because their ladies know they couldn't do no better to change, and maybe I can learn. I want to help."

She emptied the silver into the dishwater with a splash, and set to work, turning her broad face to them to say familiarly over her shoulder to Lydia, "Now, just you go and lie down and send the little ould gentleman about his business. You need to be quiet--for the sake of the one that's coming; and don't you forget I'm here. I'm--*here!*"

Dr. Melton drew Lydia away silently, and not until they had put two rooms between them and the kitchen did they dare face each other. With that first interchange of looks came peals of laughter--Lydia's light, ringing laughter--to hear which the doctor offered up heartfelt thanksgivings.

"That is your fate, Lydia," he said finally, wiping his eyes.

"Don't you just love her?" Lydia cried. "Isn't she the most *human* thing!"

"Do you remember Maeterlinck's theory that every soul summons--"

Lydia interrupted to say with a wry, humorous mouth, "You know I don't know anything. Don't ask me if I remember things."

"Well, Maeterlinck has one of his fanciful theories that everybody calls to him from the unknown those elements that he most needs, which are most in harmony with--"

"I caught a good solid element that time," cried Lydia, laughing again.

"She's embodied Loyalty," said the doctor. "It breathes from every pore."

"She's going to smash my cut glass and china something awful," Lydia foretold.

Dr. Melton took his godchild by the shoulders and shook her. "Now, Lydia Emery, you listen to me! I don't often issue an absolute command, if I am your physician, but I do now. You *let* her smash your china and cut glass, and all the rest of your devastating trash she can lay her hands on, rather than lose her--until after September, anyhow! It's a direct reward of virtue for your having shipped the 'ould devil!"

Lydia's face clouded. "I'm afraid Paul won't think her much of a substitute for Ellen," she murmured, "and we'll have to find a cook somehow even if this one learns enough to be second girl."

"Second girl!" ejaculated the doctor. "She's a human being with a capacity for loyalty."

"She's evidently awfully incompetent--"

The doctor snorted. "Competence--I loathe the word! It's used now to cover all imaginable sins, as folks used to excuse all manner of rascality in a good swordsman. We're beyond the frontier period now when competence was a matter of life and death. We ought to begin to have some glimmering realization that there are other--"

"*Oh*, what a hand for talk!" said Lydia.

The doctor rejoiced at her laughing impatience. He thought to himself, as he looked at her standing in the doorway and waving good-by to him, that she seemed a very different creature from the drooping and tearful--he interrupted his chain of thought as he boarded his car, to exclaim, "May she live long, that heavy-handed, vivifying Celt!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE VOICES IN THE WOOD

Lydia had not been mistaken in her premonition of Paul's attitude toward the new maid. He found her quite unendurable, but the direful stories told by their Bellevue acquaintances about the literal impossibility of keeping servants during the hot season induced him to postpone his wrath against the awkward, irreverent, too familiar Irishwoman until after Lydia should feel more herself. Paul's wrath lost nothing by keeping.

To Lydia, on the contrary, Anastasia's loyalty and devotion were inexpressibly comforting during the trying days of that summer. Her servant's loving heart radiated warmth and cheer throughout all her life. One day, when her mother protested against 'Stashie's habit of familiar conversation with the family (they had all soon adopted the Irish diminutive of her name), Lydia said: "I can not be too thankful for 'Stashie's love and kindness."

Mrs. Emery was outraged. "Good gracious, Lydia! What things you do say."

"Why not? Because she hasn't been to college? Neither have I. She's as well educated as I am, and a great deal better woman."

"Why, what are you talking about? She can't read!"

"I don't," said Lydia. "That's worse."

Her mother turned the conversation, thinking she would be glad when this period of high-strung nerves and fancies should be over. She told Dr. Melton that it seemed to her that "Lydia took it very hard," and she supposed they couldn't expect her to be herself until after September.

The doctor answered: "Oh, there's a great deal of nonsense about that kind of talk. A normal woman--and, thank Heaven, Lydia's that to the last degree--has the whole universe back of her. Lydia's always balanced on a hair trigger, it's true, but she *is* balanced! And now all nature is rallying to her like an army with banners."

"Ah, you never went through it yourself!" Mrs. Emery retreated to the safe stronghold of matronhood. "You don't know! I had strange fancies, like Lydia's. Women always do."

Another one of Lydia's fancies of that summer drove her to a strange disregard of caste rules. It came through a sudden impulse of compassion one hot midsummer day when Miss Burgess hobbled up the driveway in the hope of gleaning some Bellevue society notes.

"It's a terrible time of year, Miss Lydia," she said, sinking into a chair with a long, quavering sigh. "One drops from thirty and sometimes forty dollars a week to twenty or less; and it's so hard on one's feet, being on them in hot weather. I assure you mine ache like the toothache. And expenses are as high as in winter, or worse, when you have an invalid to look out for. Out here in breezy Bellevue you've no conception how hot it is on Main Street. And Mother *feels* the heat!"

All this she said, not complainingly, but in her usual twittering manner of imparting information, as though it were an incident of a five-o'clock tea, but Lydia felt a pang of remorse for her usual thoughtless attitude of exasperated hilarity over Miss Burgess' peculiarities. She noticed that the kind, vacuous face was beginning to look more than middle-aged, and that the scanty hair above it was whitening rapidly.

"Why, bring your mother out here for the day, why don't you, any time!" she said impulsively. "I can't have any social engagements, you know, the way I am, and Paul's away a good deal of the time, and 'Stashie and I can get you tea and eggs and toast, at least. I'd love to have her. Now, any morning that threatens heat, just you telephone you're both coming to spend the day."

She felt quite strange at the thought that she had never seen the mother of this devoted, unselfish, affectionate, lifelong acquaintance.

But Miss Burgess, though moved almost to tears at Lydia's "kind thoughtfulness," clung steadfastly to her standards. She had always known that she must not presume on her "exceptional opportunities for acquaintance with Endbury's social leaders," she told Lydia, nor take advantage of any inadvertent kindness of theirs. Her mother would be the first one to blame her if she did; her mother knew the world very well. She went away, murmuring broken thanks and protestations of devotion.

Lydia looked after her, disappointed. She had been quite stirred by the hope of giving some pleasure. There was little to break the long, lonely, monotonous expectancy of her life. And yet nothing surprised those who knew her better than her equable physical poise during this time of trial and discomfort. Everyone had expected so high-strung a creature to be "half-wild with nerves." But Lydia, although she continued to say occasional disconcerting things, seemed on the whole to be gaining maturity and firmness of purpose. Paul was away a great deal that summer and she had many long, solitary hours to pass--a singular contrast to the feverish hurry of the winter "season." Her old habit of involuntary questioning scrutiny came back and it is possible that her motto of "action at all costs" was passed under a closer mental review than during the winter; but though she went frequently to see her godfather and Mrs. Sandworth, she did not break her silence on whatever thoughts were occupying her mind, except in one brief, questioning explosion. This was on the occasion of her last visit to Endbury before her confinement, a few days after her call from Flora Burgess. It had occurred to her that they might know something about the reporter's family and she stopped in after her shopping to inquire.

She found her aunt and her godfather sitting in the deeply shaded, old grape arbor in their back yard; Dr. Melton with a

book, as always, Mrs. Sandworth ungirdled and expansive, tinkling an ice-filled cup and crying out upon the weather.

"Sit down, Lydia, for mercy's sake, and cool off. Yes; we know all about her; she's a patient of Marius'. Have some lemonade! Isn't it fearful! And Marius keeps reading improving books! It makes me so much hotter! She's English, you know."

Dr. Melton looked up from his book to remark, with his usual judicial moderation, "I could strangle that old harridan with joy. She has been one of the most pernicious influences the women of this town have ever had."

"Flora Burgess' mother? Why, I never heard of her in the world until the other day."

"You can't smell sewer gas," said the doctor briefly.

Mrs. Sandworth laughed. "Marius almost killed himself last winter to pull her through pneumonia. He worked over her night and day. Oh, Marius is a great deal better than he talks--strangle--!"

"I'm a fool, if that's what you mean," said the doctor.

"What is the matter with Flora Burgess' mother?" asked Lydia.

"She's been a plague spot in this town for years--that lower-middle-class old Briton, with her beastly ideas of caste--ever since she began sending out her daughter to preach her damnable gospel to defenseless Endbury homes."

"Marius--*my dear!*" chided Mrs. Sandworth--"The Gospel--damnable! You forget yourself!"

The doctor did not laugh. "They're the ones," he went on, "who first started this idiotic idea of there being a social stigma attached to living in any but just such parts of town."

"You live in just such a part of town yourself," said Lydia.

"My good-for-nothing, pretentious, fashionable patients wouldn't come to me if I didn't."

"Why do you have to have that kind of patients?"

Occasionally, of late, with her godfather, Lydia had displayed a certain uncompromising directness, rather out of character with her usual gentleness, which the doctor found very disconcerting. He was silent now.

Mrs. Sandworth's greater simplicity saw no difficulties in the way of an answer. "Because, Lydia, he's one of the Kentucky Meltons, and because, as I said, he talks a great deal worse than he is."

"Because I am a fool," said the doctor again. This time he flushed as he spoke.

"He doesn't like things common around him," went on Mrs. Sandworth, "any more than any gentleman does. And as for strangling old Mrs. Burgess, what good would that do? It can't be she who's influencing Endbury, because all it's trying to do is to be just like every other town in Ohio."

"In the Union!" amended Dr. Melton grimly. He subsided after this into one of his fidgety, grimacing, finger-nail-gnawing reveries. He was wondering whether he dared tell Lydia of a talk he had had that morning with her father. After a look at Lydia's flushed, tired face, he decided that he would better not; but as the two women fell into a discussion of the layette, the conversation, Mr. Emery's nervous voice, his sharp, impatient gestures, came back to him vividly. He looked graver and graver, as he did after each visit to his old friend, and after each fruitless exhortation to "go slow and rest more." Mr. Emery was in the midst of a very important trial and, as he had very reasonably reminded his physician, this was not a good time to relax his grasp on things. "Now I'm back in practice, in competition with younger men, I *can't* sag back! It's absurd to ask it of me."

"You were a fool to go back into practice at your age."

"A fool! I've doubled my income."

"Yes; and your arteries--look here, suppose you were dead. The bar would get along without you, wouldn't it?"

"But I'm not dead," the other truthfully opposed to this fallacious supposition, and turned again to his papers.

The doctor shut his medicine case with a spiteful snap. "Don't fool yourself that it's devotion to the common weal that drives you ahead! Don't make a pretty picture of yourself as working to the last in heroic service of your fellow-man! You know, as I know, that if you dropped out this minute, American jurisprudence would continue on its triumphant, misguided way quite as energetically as now."

Mr. Emery looked up, dropping for once the mask of humorous tolerance with which he was accustomed to hide any real preoccupation of his own. "Look here, Melton, I'm too nervous to stand much fooling these days. If you want to know the reason why I'm going on, I'll tell you. I've got to. I need the money."

"Gracious powers! Did you get caught in that B. and R. slump?"

The Judge smiled a little bitterly. "No; I haven't lost any money--for a very good reason. I never was ahead enough to have any to lose. Haven't you any idea of what the cost of living the way we do--"

Dr. Melton interrupted him, wild-eyed: "Why, Nat Emery! You have yourself and your wife to feed and clothe and shelter--and you tell me that costs so much that you can't stop working when there's--"

"Oh, go away, Melton; you make me tired!" The Judge made a weary gesture of dismissal. "You're always talking like a child, or a preacher, about how things *might* be! You know what an establishment like ours costs to keep up, as well as I do. I'm in it--we've sort of gradually got in deeper and deeper, the way folks do--and it would take a thousand times more out of me to break loose than to go on. You're an old fuss, anyhow. I'm all right. Only for the Lord's sake leave me quiet now."

The doctor shivered and put his hand over his eyes as he remembered how, to his physician's eye, the increasing ill health of his old friend gleamed vividly from his white face.

Mrs. Sandworth brought him back to the present with an astonished "Good gracious! how anybody can even *pretend* to shiver on a day like this!" She added: "Look here, Marius, are you going to sit there and moon all the afternoon? Here's Lydia going already."

Seasoned to his eccentricities as she was, she was startled by his answer. "Julia," he said solemnly, "did you ever consider how many kinds of murder aren't mentioned in the statute books?"

"Marius! What ideas! Remember Lydia!"

"Oh, I remember Lydia!" he said soberly. He went to lay a hand fondly on her shoulder. "Are you really going, my dear? I'll walk along to the waiting-room with you."

"Don't talk her to death!" cried Mrs. Sandworth after them.

"I won't say a word," he answered.

It was a promise that he almost literally kept. He was in one of the exaggeratedly humble moods which alternated with his florid, talkative, cock-sure periods.

Lydia, too, was quite thoughtful and subdued. They descended in a complete silence the dusty street, blazing in the late afternoon sun, and passed into the inferno of a crowded city square in midsummer. As they stood before the waiting-room, Lydia asked suddenly: "Godfather, how can we, any of us, do any better?"

"God knows!" he said, with a gesture of impotence, and went his way.

Lydia entered the waiting-room and went to ask a man in uniform when the next car left for Bellevue.

"There's been an accident in the power-house, lady," he told her, "and that line ain't runnin'."

Lydia gave an exclamation of dismay. "But I must get back to Bellevue to-night!"

Paul was out of town, but she knew the agonies of anxiety 'Stashie would suffer if she did not appear. "Oh, but I can telephone," she reminded herself.

"You kin get out there if you don't mind takin' the long way around," the man explained with a friendly interest. "If you take the Garfield line and change at Ironton to the Onteora branch, it'll bring you back on the other side of Bellevue, and Bellevue ain't so big but what it won't be a very long walk to where you live."

Lydia thanked him, touched, as she so often was, with the kind and, to her, welcome absence of impersonality in working people; and, assuring herself that she had time enough to eat something before her car's departure, betook herself to a dairy lunch-room where she ate a conscientiously substantial supper. The heat of the day had left her little appetite; but to "take care of herself" now seemed at last one of the worth-while things to do which she had always had so eager a longing.

At seven o'clock she took the trolley pointed out to her by her friend, the starter, who noticed and remembered her when she returned to the waiting-room. The evening rush was over, and for some time she was the only passenger. Then a very tired-looking, middle-aged man, an accountant perhaps, in a shabby alpaca coat, boarded the car and sank at once into a restless doze, his heat-paled face nodding about like a broken-necked doll's. Lydia herself felt heavy on her the death-like fatigue which the last weeks had brought to her, but she was not sleepy. She looked out intently at the flat, fertile, kindly country, gradually darkening in the summer twilight. She was very fond of her home landscape. She had not taken so considerable a journey on a trolley for a long time--perhaps not since the trip to the Mallory house-party. That was a long time ago.

At the edge of thick woods the car came to a sudden stop. The lights went out. The conductor disappeared, twitched at the trolley, and went around for a consultation with the motorman, who had at once philosophically pulled off his worn glove and sat down on the step. "Power's off!" he called back casually into the car to the accountant, who had

started up wildly, with the idea, apparently, that he had been carried past his station. "We've got to wait till they turn her on again."

"How long'll that be?"

"Oh, I don't know. The whole system is on the bum to-day. Maybe half an hour; maybe more. Better take another nap."

The accountant looked around the car, encountered Lydia's eyes, and smiled sheepishly. After a time of silent waiting, enlivened only by the murmur of the conversation between the motorman and the conductor outside, the gray-haired man suggested to Lydia that it would be cooler out under the trees, and if she would like to go he would be glad to help her. When he had her established on a grassy bank he forbore further talk, and sat so still that, as the quiet moments slipped by, Lydia almost forgot him.

It was singularly pleasant there, with the rustling blackness of the wood behind them, and before them the sweep of the open farming country, shimmering faintly in the light of the stars now beginning to show in the great unbroken arch of the heavens.

Here the talk of the two men on the steps of the car was distinctly audible, and Lydia, with much interest, pieced together a character and life-history for each out of their desultory, friendly chat; but presently they too fell silent, listening to the stir of the night breezes in the forest. Lydia leaned her head against a tree and closed her eyes.

She never knew if it were from a doze, or but from a reverie that she was aroused by a sudden thrilling sound back of her--the clear, deep voice of a distant 'cello. Her heart began to beat faster, as it always did at the sound of music, and she sat up amazed, looking back into the intense blackness of the wood. And then, like a waking dream, came a flood of melody from what seemed to her an angel choir--fresh young voices, throbbing and proclaiming through the summer night some joyous, ever-ascending message. Lydia felt her pulses loud at her temples. Almost a faintness of pleasure came over her. There was something ineffably sweet about the disembodied voices sending their triumphant chant up to the stars.

The sound stopped as suddenly as it began. The motorman stirred and drew a long breath. "They do fine, don't they?" he said. "My oldest girl's learning to sing alto with them."

"He ain't musical himself, is he?" asked the conductor.

"No; *he* ain't. It's some Dutch friends that does the playing. But he got the whole thing up, and runs the children. It's a nawful good thing for *them*, let me tell you."

"What'd he do it for, I wonder," queried the conductor idly.

"Aw, I don't know. He's kind o' funny, anyhow. Said he wanted to teach young folks how to enjoy 'emselves without spending money. That kind of talk hits their *folks* in the right spot, you bet. He owns a slice of this farm, you know, and he's given some of the younger kids pieces of ground for gardens, and he's got up a night class in carpentering for young fellows that work in town all day. He's a crack-a-jack of a carpenter himself."

"He'll run into the unions if he don't look out," prophesied the conductor.

"I guess likely," assented the motorman. "They got after Dielman the other day, did you hear, because he--" The talk drifted to gossip of the world of work-people.

It stopped short as the 'cello again sent out its rich, vibrant introduction to the peal of full-throated joy. There seemed to be no other sound in all the enchanted, starlit world than this fervid harmony.

This time it did not stop, but went on and on, swelling and dying away and bursting out again into new ecstasies. In one of the pauses, when nothing but the 'cello's chant came to her ears, Lydia suddenly heard mingling with it the sweet, faint voice of a little stream whispering vaguely, near her. It sounded almost like rain on autumn leaves. The lights in the car flared up, blinding white, but the two men on the step did not stir. The conductor sat with his arms folded on his knees, his head on his arms. The motorman leaned against the end of the car. When the music finally died, after one long, ringing, exultant shout, no one moved for a time.

Then the motorman stood up, drawing on his glove.

"Quite a concert!" said the conductor, starting for the back platform.

"They do *fine*!" repeated the motorman.

The accountant came forward from the shadow and helped Lydia up the steps. There were traces of tears on his tired face.

In September, when her mother leaned over her to say in a joyful, trembling voice, "Oh, Lydia, it's a girl, a darling little girl!" Lydia opened her white lips to say, "She is Ariadne."

"What did you say?" asked her mother.

"We must see that she has the clue," said Lydia faintly.

Mrs. Emery tiptoed to the doctor. "Keep her very quiet," she whispered; "she is a little out of her head."

CHAPTER XXIII

FOR ARIADNE'S SAKE

Little Ariadne was six months old before Lydia could begin to make the slightest effort to resume the social routine of her life. This was not at all on account of ill health, for she had recovered her strength rapidly and completely, and, like a good many normal women, had found maternity a solvent of various slight physical disorders of her girlhood. She felt now a more assured physical poise than ever before, and could not attribute her disappearance from Endbury social life to weakness. The fact was that Dr. Melton had upheld her in her wish to nurse her baby herself, which limited her to very short absences from the house and to a very quiet life within doors. She also discovered that the servant problem was by no means simplified by the new member of the family. "Girls" had always been unwilling to come out to Bellevue because of the distance from their friends and followers, and they now put forth another universally recognized obstacle in the phrase, "I never work out where there is a baby. They make so much dirt." Anastasia O'Hern was there, to be sure--heavy-handed, warm-hearted 'Stashie, who took the new little girl to her loyal spinster heart and wept tears of joy over her safe arrival; but 'Stashie had proved, as Paul predicted from the first time he saw her, incorrigibly rattle-headed and loose-ended. She had learned to prepare a number of simple, homely dishes, quite enough to supply the actual needs of the everyday household, and what she cooked was unusually palatable. She had the Celtic feeling for savoriness. She had also managed, under Lydia's zealous tuition, to overcome the Celtic tolerance for dirt, and thanks to her square, powerful body, as strong as a ditch-digger's, she made light work of keeping the house in a most gratifying state of cleanliness.

But there were gaps in her equipment that were not to be filled by any amount of tuition. In the first place, as Paul said of her, she was as much like the traditional trim maid as a hippopotamus is like a gazelle. Furthermore, as Dr. Melton summed up the matter in answer to one of Paul's outbreaks against her, she was utterly incapable of comprehending that satisfied vanity is the vital element in human life. For anything that pertained to the appearance of things, 'Stashie was deaf, dumb and blind. She would as soon as not put one of her savory stews on the table in an earthen crock, and she never could be trusted to set the table properly. There were always some kitchen spoons among the silver, and the dishes looked, as Paul said, "as though she had stood off and thrown them at a bull's-eye in the middle of the table." Moreover, she herself could not emancipate herself from the ideas of toilet gleaned in the little one-room cabin in County Clare. She was passionately devoted to Lydia, and took with the humblest gratitude any hints about the care of her person, but it was like trying to make a color-blind person into a painter! Anastasia could only love on her knees, and serve, and sympathize and cherish; she could not remember to comb her hair, or to put on a clean apron when she opened the door, even if it were Madame Hollister herself who rang. She had once opened to that important personage attired in a calico wrapper, a sweater, and a pair of rubber boots, having just come in from emptying the ashes--one of the heavy tasks, outside her regular work, which she took upon her strong, willing self. "But I was clane, and I got her into the house in two minutes from the time she rang, the poor old soul!" she protested to Lydia, who, at Paul's instance, had taken her to task.

Lydia explained, "But Mr. Hollister's aunt is a person who would rather wait half an hour in the cold than see you without an apron."

To which 'Stashie exclaimed, in awestruck wonder before the mysteries of creation, "Folks do be the beatin'est, don't they now, Mis' Hollister!"

"And you must not speak of Mr. Hollister's aunt as a 'poor old soul,'" explained Lydia, apprehensive of Paul's wrath if he ever chanced to hear such a characterization.

"But she is that," protested 'Stashie. "Anybody that's her age and hobbles around so crippled up with the rheumatism--my heart bleeds for 'em."

"She is very rich--" began Lydia, but after a moment's hesitation she had not continued her lesson in social value. She often found that 'Stashie's questions brought her to a standstill.

There was something lacking in the Irishwoman's mental outfit, namely, the capacity even to conceive that ideal of

impersonal self-effacement, which, as Paul said truthfully, is the everywhere accepted standard for servants. Her loquacity was a never-ending joke to Madeleine Lowder and her husband, who were exulting in a couple of deft, silent, expensive Japanese "boys" and who, since Madeleine frankly expressed her horror at the bother of having children, seemed likely to continue ignorant, except at comfortable second-hand, of harassing domestic difficulties.

If Lydia had not been in such dire need of another pair of hands than her own slender ones, or if the supply from Endbury intelligence offices had been a whit less unreliable and uncertain, she would not have felt justified in retaining the burly, uncouth Celt, in spite of her own affection, so intensely did Paul dislike her. As it was, she felt guilty for her presence and miserably responsible for her homeliness of conduct. 'Stashie was a constant point of friction between husband and wife, and Lydia was trying with desperate ingenuity to avoid points of friction by some other method than the usual Endbury one of divided interests. Many times she lay awake at night, convinced that her duty was to dismiss Anastasia; only to rise in the morning equally convinced that things without her would be in the long run even harder and more disagreeable for Paul than they were now. The upshot of the matter was that she herself was a very incompetent person, she was remorsefully sure of that; although her mother and Marietta and Paul's aunt all told her that she need expect nothing during the first year of a baby's life but one wretched round of domestic confusion.

Lydia did not find it so. She was immensely occupied, it is true, for though Ariadne was a strong, healthy child, who spent most of her time, her grandmother complained, in sleeping, to Lydia's more intimate contact with the situation there seemed to be more things to be done for the baby, in addition to the usual cares of housekeeping, than could possibly be crowded into twenty-four hours. And yet she was happier during those six months than ever before in her life; happier than she had ever dreamed anyone could be. She stepped about incessantly from one task to another and was very tired at night, but there was no nervous strain on her, and she had no moments of blasting skepticism as to the value of her labors.

Everything she did, even the most menial tasks connected with the baby, was dignified, to her mind, by its usefulness; and she so systematized and organized her busy days that she was always ahead of her work. Paul was obliged to alter his judgment of her as impractical and incapable--although of course the dearest and sweetest of little wives--for nothing could have been more competent than the way she managed her baby and her simple housekeeping. Indeed, there came to the young husband's mind not infrequently, and always with a slight aroma of bitterness, the conviction that Lydia was perfectly able to do whatever she really wished to do and considered important; and that previous conditions must have been due to her unwillingness to set herself seriously at the problems before her. It was a new theory about his wife's character, which the intelligent young man laid by on a mental shelf for future use after this period of intense domesticity should be past.

At present, he accepted thankfully his clean house and his savory food, was not too much put out by 'Stashie's eccentricities, since there was no one but the immediate families to see them, and rejoiced with a whimsical tenderness in Lydia's passion of satisfaction with her baby. He saw so little of the droll, sleeping, eating little mite that he could not as yet take it very seriously as his baby. But it was, on the whole, a happy half-year for him too. He was much moved and pleased by Lydia's joy. He had meant to make his wife happy.

Lydia herself was transported by the mere physical intoxication of new motherhood, a potion more exciting, so her much experienced physician said, than any wine ever fermented. She hung over her sleeping baby, poring upon the exquisite fineness of the skin, upon the rosy little mouth, still sucking comically at an imaginary meal, upon the dimpled, fragile hands, upon the peaceful relaxation of the body, till the very trusting, appealing essence of babyhood flooded her senses like a strong drug; and when the child was awake, and she could bathe the much creased little body, and handle the soft arms, and drop passionate kisses on the satin-smooth skin, and rub her cheek on the downy head, she found herself sometimes trembling and dizzy with emotion. She felt constantly buoyed up by a deep trust and belief in life which she had not known before. The huge and steadying continuity of existence was revealed to her in those days. It was a revelation that was never to leave her. She outgrew definitely the sense of the fragmentary futility of living which had always been, inarticulate, unvoiced, but intensely felt, the torment of her earlier life.

It grieved her generous heart and her aspiration to share all with her husband that the exigences of his busy life deprived him of any knowledge of this newly-opened well of sweet waters, that he had nothing from his parenthood but an amused, half shame-faced pride in points about the baby which, he was informed, were creditable.

At a faint hint of this feeling on Lydia's part, her sister-in-law broke into her good-natured laughter at Lydia's notions. "What can a man know about a baby?" she cried conclusively.

"Why, I didn't know about one till Ariadne came. I learned on her. What's to hinder a man's doing the same thing?"

Madeleine was so much amused by this fantastic idea that she repeated it to Dr. Melton, who came in just then.

"Don't it take *Lydia!*" she appealed to him.

The doctor considered the lovely, fair-haired creature in silence for a moment before answering. Then, "Yes; of course

you're right," he assented. "It's a strictly feminine monopoly. It's as true that all men are incapable of understanding the significance of a baby in the universe and in their own lives, as it is true that all women love babies and desire them." His tone was full of a heavy significance. He could never keep his temper with Paul's sister.

Madeleine received this without a quiver. She neither blushed nor looked in the least abashed, but there was an unnecessary firmness in her voice as she answered, looking him steadily in the eye: "Exactly! That's just what I've been telling Lydia." She often said that she was the only woman in Endbury who wasn't afraid of that impertinent little doctor.

After Madeleine had gone away, Lydia looked at her godfather with shining eyes. "I am living! I am living!" she told him, holding up the baby to him with a gesture infinitely significant; "and I like it as well as I thought I should!"

"Most people do," he informed her, "when they get a peck at it. It generally takes something cataclysmic, too, to tear them loose from their squirrel-cages--like babies, or getting converted."

If he thought that early married life could also be classed among these beneficently uprooting agencies, he kept his thoughts to himself. Lydia's marriage had been eminently free from disagreeable shocks or surprises, and amply deserved to be called successful in the usual reasonable and moderate application of that adjective to matrimony; but there had been nothing in it, certainly, to destroy even temporarily anyone's grasp on what are known as the realities of life.

The doctor considered, and added to his last speech: "Getting converted is surer. Babies grow up!"

Lydia felt that her godfather was right, and that babies gave one only a short respite, when, toward spring, she observed in all the inhabitants of her world repeated signs of uneasy dissatisfaction with her "submergence in domesticity," as Mrs. Emery put it in a family council. Her father inquired mildly, one day in March, with the touchingly vague interest he took in his children's affairs, if it weren't about time she returned a few calls and accepted some invitations, and began "to live *like* folks again." "Ariadne isn't the first baby in the world," he concluded.

"She's the first one *I* ever had," Lydia reminded him, with the humorous smile that was so like his own.

"Well, you mustn't forget, as so many young mothers do, that you're a member of society and a wife, as well as a wet-nurse," he said.

Marietta had never resumed an easy or genial intercourse with the Hollisters since the affair of the dinner party, but she came to call at not infrequent intervals, and Paul's sister dropped in often, to "keep an eye on Lydia," as she told her husband. She had an affection for her sister-in-law, in spite of an exasperated amusement over her liability to break out with new ideas at unexpected moments. Both these ladies were loud in their exhortations to Lydia not to let maternity be in her life the encumbering, unbeautifying, too lengthy episode it was to women with less force of character than their own. "You do get so *out* of things," Madeleine told her with her usual breathless italicizing, "if you stay away too long. You just never can catch up! There's a behind-the-timesy *smell* about your clothes--honest, there is--if you let them go too long."

Marietta added her quota of experienced wisdom to the discussion. "If you just hang over a baby all the time, you get morbid, and queer, and different."

Madeleine had laughed, and summed up the matter with a terse, "Worse than that! You get left!"

Lydia's elder brother, George, the rich one, who lived in Cleveland and manufactured rakes and hoes, wrote her one of his rare letters to the same effect. Lydia thought it likely that he had been moved to this unusual show of interest in her affairs by proddings from her mother and Marietta. If this surmise was correct, and if a similar request had been sent to Henry, the other member of the Emery family, the one who had married the grocer's daughter, the appeal had a strikingly different effect. From Oregon came an impetuous, slangily-worded exhortation to Lydia not to make a fool of herself and miss the best of life to live up to the tommyrot standard of old dry-as-dust Endbury. The Emerys heard but seldom from this erring son, and Lydia, who had been but a child when he left home, had never before received a letter from him. He wrote from a fruit farm in Oregon, the description of which, on the grandiloquent letter-head, gave an impression of amplex and prosperity which was not contradicted by the full-blooded satisfaction in life which breathed from every line of the breezy, good-natured letter.

The incident stirred Lydia's imagination. It spoke of a wider horizon--of a fresher air than that about her. She tried to remember the loud-talking, much-laughing, easy-going young man as she had seen him last. They were too far apart in years to have had much companionship, but there had been between them an unspoken affection which had never died. People always said that George and Marietta were alike and Lydia and Harry. To this Mrs. Emery always protested that Lydia wasn't in the *least* like Henry, and she didn't know what people were talking about; but the remark gave a secret pleasure to Lydia. She, too, was very fond of laughing, and her brother's vein of light-hearted nonsense had been a great delight to her. It was not present in any of the rest of the family, and certainly did not show itself in her at

this period of her life.

During this time Paul's attention was concentrated on bringing about a reallocation of American Electric territory in the Middle West, an arrangement that would add several busy cities to his district and make a decided difference in his salary and commissions. He worked early and late in the Endbury office, and made many trips into all parts of the field, to gather data conclusive of the value of his scheme. Lydia had tried hard to get from him information enough to understand what it was all about, but he put her off with vague, fatigued assurances that it was too complicated for her to grasp, or for him to go over without his papers; that it would take him too long to explain, and that, anyhow, she could be sure of one thing--it was all straight, clean business, designed entirely to give the public better service and more work from everybody all 'round. Lydia did not doubt this. It was always a great source of satisfaction to her to feel secure and unshaken trust in her father's and her husband's business integrity, and she was sorry for Marietta, who could not, she feared, count among her spiritual possessions any such faith in Ralph. It was, on the other hand, one of her most unresigned regrets, that she was not allowed to share in these ideals for public service of her husband and father--these ideals so distantly glimpsed by her, and perhaps not very consciously felt by them. It was not that they refused to answer any one of her questions, but they were so little in the habit of articulating this phase of their activities that their tongues balked stubbornly before her ignorant and fumbling attempts to enter this inner chamber.

"Oh, it's all right, Lydia! Just you trust me!" Paul would cry, with a hint of vexation in his voice, as if he felt that questions could mean only suspicion.

Lydia's tentative efforts to construct a bridge between her world and his met constantly with this ill success. She had had so little training in bridge-building, she thought sadly.

One evening that spring, such a futile attempt of hers was interrupted by the son of one of their neighbors, a lad of eighteen, who had just been given a subordinate position in his father's business. As he strolled up to their veranda steps, Lydia looked up from the dress she was enlarging for the rapidly growing baby and reflected that astonishingly rapid growth is the law of all healthy youth. The tall boy looked almost ludicrous to her in his ultra-correct man's outfit, so vividly did she recall him, three or four years before, in short trousers and round-collared shirt-waist. His smooth, rosy face had still the downy bloom of adolescence.

"Howd' do, Walter!" said Paul, glancing up from a pile of blue-prints over which he had been straining his eyes in the fading evening light.

"Evening," answered the boy, nodding and sitting down on the top step with one knee up. "D'you mind if I smoke, Mrs. Hollister?"

"Not at all," she answered gravely, tickled by the elaborate carelessness with which he handled his new pipe.

"What you working on, Hollister?" he went on with the manner of one old business man to another.

Lydia hid a smile. She found him delicious. She began to think how she could make Dr. Melton laugh with her account of Walter the Man.

"The lay-out of the new power-house--Elliott-Gridley works in Urbana," answered Paul, in a straightforward, reasonable tone, a little absent.

Lydia stopped smiling. It was a tone he had never used to answer any business question she had ever put to him. "I'm figuring on their generators," he went on in explanation.

"Big contract?" asked Walter.

"Two thousand kilowatt turbo generator," answered Paul.

The other whistled. "Whew! I didn't know they had the cash!"

"They haven't," said Paul briefly.

"Oh, chattel-mortgage?" surmised the other.

"Lease-contract," Paul corrected. "That doesn't have to be recorded."

"What's the matter with recording it?"

"Afraid of their credit. They don't want Dunn's sending all over creation that they've put chattel-mortgages on their equipment, do they?"

"No; sure! I see." The boy grasped instantly, with a quick nod, the other's meaning. "Well, that's *one* way of gettin' 'round it!" he added admiringly after an instant's pause.

Lydia had laid down her work and was looking intently at her two companions. At this she gave a stifled exclamation which made the boy turn his head. "Say, Mrs. Hollister, aren't you looking kind of pale this evening?" he asked. "These

first hot nights do take it out of a person, don't they? Mr. Hollister ought to take you to Put-in-Bay for a holiday. Momma'd take care of the baby for you and welcome. She's crazy about babies." He was again the overgrown school-boy that Lydia knew. The conversation drifted to indifferent topics. Lydia did not take her usual share in it, and when their caller had gone Paul inquired if she really were exhausted by the heat.

"Oh, no," she said; "you know I don't mind the heat."

"You didn't say much when Walter was here, and I--"

"I was thinking," Lydia broke in. "I was thinking that I couldn't understand a word you and Walter were saying any more than if you were talking Hebrew. I was thinking that that little boy knows more about your business than I do."

Paul did not attempt to deny this, but he laughed at her dramatic accent. "Sure, he does! And about how to tie a four-in-hand, and what's the best stud to wear at the back of a collar, and where to buy socks. What's that to you?"

Lydia looked at him with quivering, silent lips.

He answered, with a little heat: "Why, look-y here, Lydia, suppose I were a doctor. You wouldn't expect to know how many grains of morphine or what d'you call 'em I was going to use in--"

"But Dr. Melton *is* a doctor, and I know lots about what he thinks of as he lives day after day--there are other things besides technical details and grains of morphine--other problems--human things--Why, for instance, there's one question that torments him all the time--how much it's right to humor people who aren't sick but think they are. He talks to me a great deal about such--"

Paul laughed, rising and gathering up his blue-prints. "Well, I can't think of any problem that torments me but the everlasting one of how to sell more generators and motors than my competitors. Come on indoors, Honey; I've got to have some light if I finish going over these to-night."

His accent was evidently intended to end the discussion, and Lydia allowed it to do so, although the incident was one she could not put out of her mind. She watched Walter going back and forth to Endbury with a jealousy the absurdity of which she herself realized, and she listened with a painful intentness to the boy's talk during his occasional idle sojourns on their veranda steps. Yet she had been used to hearing Paul talk unintelligibly to the business associates whom, from time to time, he brought out to the house to dine and to talk business afterward. Somehow, she said to herself, it's being just *Walter* seemed to bring it home to her. To have that boy--and yet she liked him, too, she thought. She looked sometimes into his fresh, innocently keen face with a yearning apprehension. Paul was amused at his precocious airs, and yet was not without respect for his rapidly developing business capacity. He said once, "Walter's a real nice boy. I shouldn't mind having a son like that myself!"

The remark startled Lydia. If she were to have a son he *would* be like that, she realized. And he would grow up and marry some--she sprang up and caught Ariadne to her in a sudden fierce embrace.

"You'll break your back lifting that heavy baby 'round so," Paul remonstrated with justice.

For all her aversion to the set forms of "society" as understood by Endbury, Lydia was fond of having people about her, "to try to get really acquainted with them" she said, and during that summer the Hollister veranda in the evening became a rendezvous for their Bellevue neighbors. Paul rather deplored the time wasted in this unprofitable variety of informal social life which, in his phrase, "counted for nothing" but he was always glad to see Walter. "At the rate he's going and the way he's taking hold, he'll be a valuable business friend in a few years," he said prophetically to Lydia, and he assumed more and more the airs of a comrade with the lad.

One evening when Walter came lounging over to the veranda, Lydia was busy indoors, but later she stepped to the door in time to hear Paul say, laughing: "Well, for all that, he's not so good as Wellman Phelps' stenographer."

"How so?" asked the boy, alert for a pleasantry from his elder.

"Why, Phelps carries this fellow 'round with him everywhere he goes, has had him for years, and twice a week all he has to do is to say: 'Say, Fred; write my wife, will you?'"

His listener broke out into a peal of boyish laughter. "Pretty good!" he applauded the joke.

"It's a fact," Paul went on. "Fred writes it and signs it and sends it off, and Phelps never has to trouble his head about it."

Lydia stepped back into the darkness of the hall.

When she came out later, a misty figure in white, Paul rose, saying, "Well, Walter, I'll leave you to Mrs. Hollister now. I've got some work to do before I get to bed."

Lydia sat silent, looking at the boy's face, clear and untarnished in the moonlight. He was looking dreamily away at the lawn, dappled with the shadow of the slender young trees. They seemed creatures scarcely more sylvan than he,

sprawled, like a loitering faun with his hands clasped behind his head. His mouth had the pure, full outlines of a child's.

"What are you thinking about, Walter?" Lydia asked him suddenly.

He started, and brought his limpid gaze to hers. "About how to cross-index our follow-up letter catalogue better," he answered promptly.

"Really? Really?" She leaned toward him, urging him to frankness.

He was surprised at her tone. "Why, sure!" he told her. "Why not? What else?"

Lydia said no more.

She had never felt more helplessly her remoteness from her husband's world than during that spring. It was a sentiment that Paul, apparently, did not reciprocate. In spite of his frequent absences from home and his detached manner about most domestic questions, he had as definite ideas about his wife's resumption of her social duties as had everyone else. "It made him uneasy," as he put it, "to be losing so many points in the game."

"Look here, my dear," he said one evening in spring when the question came up; "summer's almost here, and this winter's been as good as dropped right out. Can't you just pick up a few threads and make a beginning? It'll make it easier in the fall." He added, uneasily, "We don't want old Lowder and Madeleine to get ahead of us entirely, you know. You can leave the kid with 'Stashie, can't you, once in a while? She ought to be able to do *that* much, I should think." He spoke as though he had assigned to her the simplest possible of all domestic undertakings. As Lydia made no response, he said finally, before attacking a pile of papers, "If I'm going to earn a lot more money, what good'll it do us if you don't do your share? Besides, we owe it to the kid. You want to do your best by your little girl, don't you?"

As always, Lydia responded with a helpless alacrity to that appeal. "Oh, yes! Oh, yes! We must do our best for her." This phrase summed up the religion she had at last found after so much fervent, undirected search. The church, as she knew it, was chiefly the social center of various fashionable activities which differed from ordinary fashionable enterprises only in being used to bring in money, which money, handed over to the rector, disappeared into the maw of some unknown, voracious, charitable institution. And beyond the church there had been no element in the life she knew, that was not frankly materialistic. But now, as the miracle of awakening consciousness took place daily in her very sight, and as the first dawns of a personality began to look out of her child's eyes, all Lydia's vague spiritual cravings, all the groping tendrils of her aspirations, clung about the conviction more and more summing up her inner life, that she must do her best for Ariadne, must make the world, into which that little new soul had come, a better place than she herself had found it. She felt as naively and passionately that her child must be saved the mistakes that she had made, as though she were the first mother who ever sent up over her baby's head that pitiful, universal prayer.

The matter of the social duty of the young Hollisters was finally compromised by Lydia's accepting a number of invitations for the latter part of the season, and giving a series of big receptions in May. They were not by a hair nor a jot nor a tittle to be distinguished from their predecessors of the year before. As they seemed hardly adequate, Lydia suggested half-heartedly that they give a dinner party, but Paul replied, "With 'Stashie to pour soup down people's backs and ask them how their baby's whooping cough is, as she passes the potatoes?"

The hot weather came with the rush that was always so unexpected and so invariable, and another season was over. It was a busy, silent, thoughtful summer for Lydia. Of course (much to Lydia's distress), Ariadne had been weaned when her mother had been forced to leave her to "go out" again, and this necessitated such anxious attention to her diet and general regimen during the hot weather that Lydia was very grateful to have little to interfere with her.

The General Office had accepted provisionally Paul's redistributing plan, and in his anxiety to prove its value he was away from home more even than usual. The heat was terrible, but Lydia and he both knew no other climate, and Lydia loved the summer as the time of year when the fierceness of Nature forced on all her world a reluctant adjournment of their usual methods of spending their lives. She was absorbed in Ariadne, and the slow, blazing summer days were none too long for her.

The child began to develop an individuality. She was a sensitive, quickly-responsive little thing; exactly, so Mrs. Emery said, like Lydia at her age, except that she seemed to have none of Lydia's native mirth, but, rather, a little pensive air that made her singularly appealing to all who saw her, and that pierced her mother's heart with an anguish of protecting love.

Lydia said to her godfather one day, suddenly, "I wonder if people can be taught how to fight?"

He had one of his flashes of intuition. "The baby, you mean?"

Lydia evaded the directness of this. "Oh, in general, aren't folks better off if they like to fight for themselves? Don't they *have* to?"

He considered the question in one of his frowning silences, so long that Lydia started when he spoke again. "They

don't need to fight with claws for their food, as they used to do. Things are arranged now so that the physically strong, who like such a life, are the ones who choose it. They get food for the others. Why shouldn't the morally strong fight for the weaker ones and make it possible for everyone to have a chance at developing the best of himself without having to battle with others to do it?"

"That's pretty vague," said Lydia.

"Why, look here," said the doctor. "You don't plow the field to plant the wheat that makes your bread. That's a man of a coarser physical fiber than yours, who is strengthened by the effort, and not exhausted as you would be. Why shouldn't the world be so organized that somebody of coarser moral texture than yours should do battle with the forces of materialism and tragic triviality that--"

"But Ariadne's growing up! She will need all that so *soon*-- and the world won't be organized then, you know it won't-- and she's no fighter by instinct, any more than--" She was silent. The doctor filled in her incomplete sentence mentally, and found no answer to make.

CHAPTER XXIV

"THROUGH PITY AND TERROR EFFECTING A PURIFICATION OF THE HEART"

One hot day in August, Ariadne slept later than usual and when she woke was quite unlike her usual romping, active self. Her round face was deeply flushed, and she lay listlessly in her little bed, repulsing with a feeble fretfulness every attempt to give her food. Lydia's heart swelled so that she was choked with its palpitations. Paul was out of town. She was alone in the house except for her servant. To that ignorant warm heart she turned with an inexpressible thankfulness. "Oh, 'Stashie! Stashie!" she called in a voice that brought the other clattering breathlessly up the stairs. "The baby! Look at the baby! And she won't touch her bottle."

The tragic change in the Irishwoman's face as she looked at their darling, their anguished community of feeling--there was instantly a bond for the two women which wonderfully ignored all the dividing differences between them. Lydia felt herself--as she rarely did--not alone. It brought a wild comfort into her tumult. "'Stashie, you don't--you don't think she's--*sick*?" She brought the word out with horrified difficulty.

'Stashie was running down the back stairs. "I'm 'phonin' to th' little ould doctor," she called over her shoulder.

Lydia ran to catch up Ariadne. The child turned from her mother with a moan and closed her eyes heavily. A moment later, to Lydia's terror, she had sunk into a stupor.

The doctor found mistress and maid hanging over the baby's bed with white faces and trembling lips, hand in hand, like sisters. He examined the child silently, swiftly, looking with a face of inscrutable blankness at the clinical thermometer with which he had taken her temperature. "Just turn her so she'll lie comfortably," he told 'Stashie, "and then you stay with her a moment. I want a talk with your mistress."

In the hall, he cast at Lydia a glance of almost angry exhortation to summon her strength. "Are you fit to be a mother?" he asked harshly.

"Wait a minute," said Lydia; she drew a long breath and took hold of the balustrade. "Yes," she answered.

"Ariadne's very sick. I oughtn't to have allowed you to wean her with hot weather coming on. You'd better wire Paul."

"Yes," she said, not blenching. "What else can I do?"

"Phone to the hospital for a trained nurse, start some water boiling to sterilize things, and get somebody here in a hurry to go to the nearest drug store for me. I'll go back to her now."

"Is she--is she--dangerously--?" asked Lydia in a low, steady voice.

"Yes; she is," he said unsparingly.

The telegram Lydia sent her husband read: "Ariadne suddenly taken very sick. Dr. Melton says dangerously. He thinks she does not suffer much, though she seems to. When shall I expect you?"

The answer she received in a few hours read: "Have two nurses. Get Jones, Cleveland, consultation. Impossible to leave."

It was handed her as she was running up the stairs with a pitcher of hot water. She read it, as she did everything that

day, in a dreamlike rapidity and quietness, and showed it to Dr. Melton without comment. He handed it back without a word. Later, he turned for an instant from the little bed to say, irrelevantly, "Peterson, of Toledo, would be better than Jones, if I have to have anybody. But so far, it's simple enough--damnably simple."

He was obliged to leave for a time after this, called by a patient at the point of death. That seemed quite natural to Lydia. Death was thick in the air. He left the baby to a clear-eyed, deft-handed, impersonal trained nurse, on whom Lydia waited slavishly, sitting motionless in a corner of the room until she was sent for something, then flying noiselessly upon her errand.

Her mother and father were out of town, and Marietta limited herself to telephoning frequent inquiries. She told 'Stashie to tell her sister she knew she would be only in the way, with two nurses in the house. Lydia made 'Stashie answer all the telephone calls. She felt that if she broke her silence, if she tried to speak--and then she could not bear to be out of the sight of the little figure with the flushed cheeks, moving her head back and forth on the pillow and gazing about with bright, unseeing eyes. As night came on, she began to give, in a voice not her own, little piteous cries of suffering, or strange delirious mockeries of her pretty laughter and quaint, unintelligible, prattling talk. Once, as the long, hot night stood still, the baby called out, quite clearly: "Mamma! Mamma!" It was the first time she had ever said it.

Lydia sprang up and rushed toward the bed like an insane person, her arms outstretched, her eyes glittering. Dr. Melton did not forbid her to take up her child, but he said in a neutral tone, "It would be better for her to lie perfectly quiet."

Lydia stopped short, shuddering. The doctor did not take his eyes from his little patient. After a moment the mother went slowly back to her seat. "Hand me the thermometer," said the doctor to the nurse.

In the early morning came a telegram from Paul. "Wire me frequently baby's condition. Spare no expense in treatment."

Lydia answered: "Ariadne slightly worse. Doctor says crisis in three days."

This time she put in no extra information as to the baby's suffering, and her message was under ten words, like his own. She despatched him thereafter a bulletin every four or five hours. They ran mostly to the effect that Ariadne was about the same.

The doctor came and went, the nurses relieved each other, the telephone rang for Marietta's inquiries, Flora Burgess called once a day to get the news from 'Stashie. Lydia was slave to the nurses, alert for the slightest service she could render them, divining, with a desperate intuition, their needs before they were formulated. 'Stashie was the only person who paid the least attention to her, 'Stashie the only phenomena to break in on the solitude that surrounded her like an illimitable plain. 'Stashie made her eat. 'Stashie saw to it that once or twice she lay down. 'Stashie combed her hair, and bathed her white face--most of all, 'Stashie went about with eyes that reflected faithfully the suffering in Lydia's own. She said very little, but as they passed, the two women sometimes exchanged brief words: "Niver you think it possible, Mis' Hollister!"

"No," Lydia would answer resolutely; "it's not possible."

But as the hours slowly filed past the doctor assured her bluntly that it would be quite possible. "There's a fighting chance," he said, "and nothing more." He added relentlessly, "If I hadn't been such a fool as to let you wean her--"

There was in his manner none of his usual tenderness to his godchild. One would have thought he scarcely saw her. He was the physician wholly. Lydia was grateful to him for this. She could not have borne his tenderness then, but his professional concentration left her horribly alone.

No, not alone! There was always 'Stashie--silent 'Stashie, with red eyes, her heart bleeding. But even 'Stashie's loyal heart could not know all the bitterness of Lydia's. 'Stashie's breasts did not swell and throb, as if in mockery. 'Stashie did not hear, over and over, "If she had not been weaned--"

On the night and near the hour when the crisis was expected, Lydia was at the end of the hall, where she had installed an oil-stove. She was heating water needed for some of the processes of the sick room. It had begun to steam up in the thick, hot night air, was singing loudly, and would boil in an instant. She sat looking at it in her tense, trembling quiet. There was no light but the blue flame of the stove.

Suddenly there rang loudly in her ears the question to which she had deafened herself with such crucifying effort--"What if Ariadne should die?" It was as though someone had called to her. She looked down into the black abyss from which she had willfully turned away her eyes, and saw that it was fathomless. A throe of revolt and hatred shook her. She bowed her head to her knees, racked by an anguish compared with which the torture of childbirth was nothing; and out of this deadly pain came forth, as in childbirth, something alive--a vision as swift, as passing as a glimpse into the gates of Paradise; a blinding certainty of immensity, of the hugeness of the whole of which she and Ariadne were a part; of the sacredness of life, which was to be lived sacredly, even if-- She raised her head, living a more exalted instant than she had ever dreamed she would know.

The water broke into quick, dancing bubbles. In a period of time incalculably short, transfiguration had come to her.

The door at the other end of the hall opened and Dr. Melton's light, uneven footstep echoed back of her. She did not turn. He laid a hand on her shoulder. It was trembling, and with a wonderful consciousness of endless courage she turned to comfort him. His lips were twitching so that for an instant he could not speak. Then, "She'll pull through. I'm pretty sure now, she'll--" he got out and leaned against the wall.

Lydia took him into a protecting embrace as though it were his baby who had turned back from the gates of death. She had come into a larger heritage. She was mother to all that suffered. Looking down on the head which, for an instant, lay on her bosom, she noticed how white the hair was. He was an old man, her godfather, he had been on a long strain-. He looked up at her. And then in an instant it was over. He had mastered himself and had grasped the handle of the basin.

"How long has this been boiling?" he asked.

Lydia pointed to her watch, hanging on the wall. "Three minutes by that," she said. "May I leave to tell 'Stashie?"

The doctor nodded absently.

Neither spoke of Paul.

Lydia hurried across the dark, silent house with swift sureness. The happiness she was about to confer cast a radiance upon her. She touched the door to the servant's room, and ran her fingers lightly over it to find the knob. Faint as the noise was, it was answered instantly by a stir inside. There was a thud of bare feet and a quick rush. Lydia felt the door swing open before her in the darkness and spoke quickly to the trembling, breathing form she divined there, "The doctor says she's safe."

Strong arms were about her, hot tears not her own rained down on her face. Before she knew it, she was swept to her knees, where, locked in the other's close embrace, she felt the big heart thump loud against her own and heard go up above her head a wild "Oh, God! Oh, Mary Mother! Oh, Christ! Oh, Mary Mother! Glory be to God! Hail, Mary, Mother of God! Thanks be to God! Thanks be--"

Kneeling there in the blackness, with her servant's arms around her, Lydia thought it the first prayer she had ever heard.

Ariadne grew well with the miraculous rapidity of children, and when Paul came back was almost herself again, if a little thinner.

It was upon Lydia that Paul's eyes fastened, Lydia very white, her face almost translucent, her starry eyes contradicting the tremor of her lips. He drew her to him, crying out: "Why, Lydia darling, you look as though you'd been drawn through a knot-hole! This has been enough sight harder on you than on the baby! What in the world wore *you* out so? I thought you had two nurses!"

He looked closely into her face, seeing more changes: "Why, you poor, poor, poor thing!" he said compassionately. "You look positively years older."

"Oh, I am that," she told him, seeming to speak, oddly enough, he thought, exultantly.

"You just shouldn't allow yourself to get so wrought up over Ariadne," he expostulated affectionately. "You'll wear yourself out! What earthly good did it do the baby? Sickness is a matter for professionals, I tell you what! You had the two nurses and your precious old Dr. Melton that you swear by! What more could be done? That's the reason I didn't come back. I knew well enough that there wasn't an earthly thing I could do to help."

Lydia looked at him so strangely that he noticed it. "Oh, of course I could have been company for you. But that was the *only* thing! Getting the baby well was the business of the hour, *wasn't* it now? And the doctor and nurses were looking out for that. Besides, you had 'Stashie to wait on you."

"Yes; I had 'Stashie," admitted Lydia.

Paul perceived uneasily some enigmatic quality in her quiet answer, and went on reasonably: "Now, Lydia, don't go making yourself out a martyr because I didn't come back. You know I'd have come if there was anything to be done! I'd have come from the ends of the earth to help you nurse her if we'd had to do that! But, thank the Lord, I make enough money so we could do better by the little tad than that!"

"Suppose I had gone to the theater that night," asked Lydia slowly. "There was nothing I could do here."

Paul was justifiably aggrieved. "Good Lord, Lydia! I wasn't off amusing myself! I was doing *business!*"

His special accent for the word was never more pronounced.

"Making money to pay for the trained nurses that saved her life," he ended. His conviction of the unanswerable force of this statement put him again in good humor. "Now, little madame, you listen to me. You're going to take a junketing honeymoon off with me, or I'll know the reason why! I'm going to take you up to Put-in-Bay for a vacation! Pretty near

all our card-club gang are there now, and we'll have a gay old time and cheer you up! I bet you just let yourself go, and worried yourself into a fever, didn't you?"

During this speech Lydia stood leaning against him, feeling the cloth of his sleeve rough on her bare forearm, feeling the stir and life of his body, the warmth of his breath on her face. She had an impulse to scream wildly to him, as though to make him hear and stop and turn, before he finally disappeared from her sight; and she faced him dumbly. There were no words to tell him--she tried to speak, but before his absent, kind, wandering eyes, a foreknowledge of her own inarticulateness closed her lips. He had not been there, and so he would never know. She stirred, moved away, and rearranged the flowers in a vase. "Oh, yes; I worried, of course," she said. "The baby was awfully sick for three days."

She felt desperately that she was failing in the most obvious duty not to try to make him understand what had happened in his absence. She bethought herself of one fact, the mere statement of which should tell him a thousand times more eloquently than words, something of what she had suffered. "The doctor told me twice that she wouldn't have been sick if she hadn't been weaned." She said this with an accent of immense significance, clasping her hands together hard.

Paul was unpacking his suit-case. "Great Scott! You nursed her six months!" he said conclusively, over his shoulder. "Besides, you *had* to wean her--don't you remember?"

"Oh, yes; I remember," said Lydia. Her hands dropped to her sides.

"Don't they get over things quickly?" commented Paul, looking around at the baby. "To see her creeping around like a little hop-toad and squeaking that rubber bunny--why, I declare, I don't believe that anything's been the matter with her at all. You and the doctor lost your nerve, I guess."

Three or four days later he was called away again. Their regular routine began. The long, slow days, slid past the house in Bellevue in endless, dreamy procession. Ariadne grew fast, developing constantly new faculties, new powers. By the end of the summer she was no longer a baby, but a person. The young mother felt the same mysterious forces of change and growth working irresistibly in herself. The long summer, thoughtful and solitary, marked the end of one period in her life.

She looked forward shrinkingly to the winter. What would happen to this new self whose growth in her was keeping pace with her child's? What would happen next?

CHAPTER XXV

A BLACK MILESTONE

What happened was, in the first week of October, the sudden death of her father. It was sudden only to his wife and daughter, whom, as always, the Judge had tried to spare, at all costs, the knowledge of anything unpleasant. Dr. Melton thought that perhaps the strong man's incredulity of anything for him to fear had a good deal to do with his repeated refusals to allow his wife or daughter to be warned of the danger of apoplexy. Without that hypothesis, it seemed incredible, he told Mrs. Sandworth, that so kind a man could be so cruel.

"Everything's incredible," murmured Mrs. Sandworth, her handkerchief at her eyes, her loving heart aching for the newly-made widow, her lifelong friend.

Her brother did not answer. He sat, gnawing savagely on his finger nails, his thoughts centered, as always, on his darling Lydia--fatherless.

He had prided himself on his acute insight into human nature in general, and upon his specialized, intensified knowledge of those two women whom he had known so long and studied so minutely; but "I've been a conceited blockhead, and vanity's treacherous as well as damnable," he cried out to his sister some days later, amazed beyond expression at the way in which their loss affected Lydia and her mother.

Mrs. Emery's attitude was a revelation to him, a revelation that left him almost as angrily full of grief as she herself. He had thought best on the whole not to disclose to her the substance of the several conversations he had had with his dead friend on the subject of finances. With two prosperous sons, the widow would be well taken care of, he thought, perhaps adding with a little acidity, "just as she always has been, without a thought on her part." But when Mrs. Emery, divining the truth with an awful intuition, came flying to him after the settlement, he was not proof against the fury of her interrogations. If she wanted to know, he would tell her, he thought grimly to himself.

"There is nothing left," she began, bursting into his office, "but the house, which has a mortgage, and the insurance--nothing! Nothing!"

It was rather soon for her to be resentful, the doctor thought bitterly, misreading the misery on her face. "No," he said.

"Had the Judge lost any money--do you know?"

"No; I think not."

"But where--what--we had at one time five thousand dollars at least in the savings bank. I happened to know of that small account. I supposed of course there was more. There is no trace of even that, the administrator says."

"That went into the extra expenses of the year Lydia made her debut. And her wedding cost a great deal, he told me one day--and her trousseau--and other expenses at that time."

Used as the doctor was to the universal custom of divided interests among his well-to-do patients, it did not seem too strange to him to be giving information about her own affairs to this gray-haired matron. She was not the first widow to whom he had been forced to break bad news of her husband's business.

Mrs. Emery stared at him, her dry lips apart, a glaze over her eyes. He thought her expression strange. As she said nothing, he added, with a little sour pleasure in defending his dead friend, even if it should give a prick to a survivor, "The Judge was so scrupulously honest, you know." The widow sat down and laid her arms across the table, still staring hard at the doctor. It came to him that she was not looking at him at all, but at some devastating inner sight, which seared her heart, but from which she could not turn away her eyes. He himself turned away, beginning to be aware of some passion within her beyond his divination. There was a long silence.

Finally, "That was the reason he would not stop working," said the woman in a voice which made the physician whirl about. He looked sharply into her face, and what he saw there took him in one stride to her side. She kept her stony eyes still on the place where he had been--eyes that saw only, as though for the first time, some long procession of past events.

"I see everything now," she went on with the same flat intonation. "He *could* not stop. That was the reason why he would never rest."

She got slowly to her feet, smoothing over and over one side of her skirt with a strange automatic gesture. She was looking full into the doctor's face now. "I have killed him," she said quietly, and fell as though struck down by a blow from behind.

Her long, long illness was spent in the Melton's home, with the doctor in attendance and Julia Sandworth, utterly devoted, constantly at hand. The old Emery house, the outward symbol of her married life, was sold, and the big "yard" cut up into building lots long before she was able to sit up. Lydia came frequently, but, acting on the doctor's express command, never brought Ariadne. The outbreaks of self-reproach and embittered grief that were likely to burst upon the widow, even in the midst of one of her quiet, listless days, were not, he said, for a child to see or hear, especially such a sensitive little thing as Ariadne. Those wild bursts of remorse were delirious, he told Lydia, but to his sister he said he wished they were. "I imagine they are the only times when she comes really to herself," he added sadly.



"I SEE EVERYTHING NOW," SHE WENT ON. "HE COULD NOT STOP"

The especial agony for the sick woman was that nothing of what had happened seemed to her now in the least necessary. "Why, if I had only known--if I had only dreamed how things were--" she cried incessantly to those about her. "What did I care about anything compared with Nat! I loved my husband! What did I care--if I had only dreamed that--if I had only known what I was doing!"

Dr. Melton labored in heartsick pity to remove her fixed idea, which soon became a monomania, that she alone was to blame for the Judge's death. It now seemed to him, in his sympathy with her grief, that she had been like a child entrusted with some frail, priceless object and not warned of its fragility. She herself cried out constantly with astonished hatred upon a world that had left her so.

"If anyone had warned me--had given me the least idea that it was so serious--I could have lived in three rooms--we had been poor--what did I care for anything but Nathaniel! I only did all those things because--because there was nothing else to do!"

Lydia tried to break the current with a reminder of the sweet memories of the past. "Father loved you so! He loved to give you what you wanted, Mother dear."

"What I wanted! I wanted my husband. I want my husband!" the widow screamed like a person on the rack.

The doctor sent Lydia away with a hasty gesture. "You must not see her when she is violent," he said. "You would never forget it."

It was something he himself never forgot, used as he was to pitiful scenes in the life of suffering humanity. He was almost like a sick person himself, going about his practice with sunken eyes and gray face. His need for sympathy was so great that he abandoned the tacit silence about the Emerys which had existed between him and Rankin ever since Lydia's marriage, and, going out to the house in the Black Rock woods, unburdened to the younger man the horror of his heart.

"She's suffering," he cried. "She's literally heartbroken! She is! It's real! And what has she had to make up for it? Oh, it's

monstrous! One thing she says keeps ringing in my ears. That gray-haired woman, a human being my own age--the silly, tragic, childish thing she keeps saying--'I only did all those things--I only wanted all those things--because there was nothing else!' *Nothing else!*" He turned on his host with a fierce "Good God! She's right. What else was there ever for--for any woman of her class--"

Rankin pushed his shivering, fidgeting visitor into a chair and, laying a big hand on his shoulder, said with a faint smile: "Maybe I can divert your mind for an instant with a story--another one of my great-aunt's, only it's an old one this time; you've probably heard it--about the old man who said to his wife on his death-bed, 'I've tried to be a good husband to you, dear. It's been hard on my teeth sometimes, but I've always eaten the crusts and let you have the soft bread.' You remember what the wife's answer was?"

"No," said the doctor frowning.

"It's the epitome of tragedy. She said, 'Oh, my dear, and I like crusts so!'"

The doctor stared into the fire. "Do you mean--there's work for them?"

"I mean work for them," repeated the younger man.

The word echoed in a long silence.

"It's the most precious possession we have," said Rankin finally. "We ought to share more evenly."

The doctor rose to go. "Generally I forget that we're of different generations," he said with apparent irrelevance, "but there are times when I feel it keenly."

"Why now especially?" Rankin wondered. "I've stated a doctrine that is yours, too."

"No; you wouldn't see, of course. Yes; it's my doctrine--in theory. I believe it, as people believe in Christianity. I should be equally loath to see anybody doubt it, or practice it. Ah, I'm a fool! Besides, I was born in Kentucky. And I'm sixty-seven years old."

He shut the door behind him with emphasis.

He was on his way to Bellevue to see Lydia. Knowing her tender heart, he had expected to see her drowned in grief over her father's death. Her dry-eyed quiet made him uneasy. That morning, he found her holding Ariadne on her knees and telling her in a self-possessed, low tone, which did not tremble, some stories of "when grandfather was a little boy."

"I don't want her to grow up without knowing something of my father," she explained to the doctor.

Her godfather laid a hand on her arm. "Don't keep the tears back so, Lydia," he implored.

She gave him as great a shock of surprise as her mother had done.

"If I could cry," she said quietly, "it would be because I feel so little sorrow. I do not miss my father at all--or hardly at all."

The doctor caught at his chair and stared.

"How should I?" she went on drearily. "I almost never saw him. I never spoke to him about anything that really mattered. I never let him know me--or anything I really felt."

"What are you talking about?" cried the doctor. "You always lived at home."

"I never lived with my father. He was always away in the morning before I was up. I was away, or busy, in the evening when he was there. On Sundays he never went to church as Mother and I did--I suppose now because he had some other religion of his own. But if he had I never knew what it was--or anything else that was in his mind or heart. It never occurred to me that I could. He tried to love me--I remember so many times now--and *that* makes me cry!--how he tried to love me! He was so glad to see me when I got home from Europe--but he never knew anything that happened to me. I told you once before that when I had pneumonia and nearly died Mother kept it from him because he was on a big case. It was all like that--always. He never knew."

Dr. Melton broke in, his voice uncertain, his face horrified: "Lydia, I cannot let you go on! you are unfair--you shock me. You are morbid! I knew your father intimately. He loved you beyond expression. He would have done anything for you. But his profession is an exacting one. Put yourself in his place a little. It is all or nothing in the law--as in business."

"When you bring children into the world, you expect to have them cost you some money, don't you? You know you mustn't let them die of starvation. Why oughtn't you to expect to have them cost you thought, and some sharing of your life with them, and some time--real time, not just scraps that you can't use for business?"

As the doctor faced her, open-mouthed and silent, she went on, still dry-eyed, but with a quaver in her voice that was like a sob: "But, oh, the worst of my blame is for myself! I was a blind, selfish, self-centered egotist. I could have changed things if I had only tried harder. I am paying for it now. I am paying for it!"

She took her child up in her arms and bent over the dark silky hair. She whispered, "It's not that I have lost my father. I never had a father--but you!" She put out her hand and pressed the doctor's hand. "And my poor father had no daughter."

She set the child on the floor with a gesture almost violent, and cried out loudly, breaking for the first time her cheerless calm, "And now it is too late!"

Ariadne turned her rosy round face to her mother's, startled, almost frightened. Lydia knelt down and put her arms about the child. She looked solemnly into her godfather's eyes, and, as though she were taking a great and resolute oath, she said, "But it is not too late for Ariadne."

CHAPTER XXVI

A HINT FROM CHILDHOOD

As the spring advanced and Judge Emery's widow recovered a little strength, it became apparent that life in Endbury, with its heartbreaking associations, would be intolerable to her. In anxious family councils many futile plans were suggested, but they were all brushed decisively away by the unexpected arrival from Oregon of the younger son of the family.

One day in May, a throbbingly sunshiny day, full of a fierce hot vigor of vitality, Lydia was with her mother in the Melton's darkened parlor. As so often, the two women had been crying and now sat in a weary lethargy, hand in hand. There came a step on the porch, in the hall, and in the doorway stood a tall stranger. Lydia looked at him blankly, but her mother gave a cry and flung herself into his arms.

"I've come to take you home with me, Momma dear," he said quietly, using the old name for her, which had been banished from the Emery household since Lydia's early childhood. The sound of it went to her heart.

The newcomer smiled at her over his mother's head. It was her father's smile, the quaint, half-wistful, humorous smile, which had seemed so incongruous on the Judge's powerful face. "I'm your brother Harry, little Lyddie," he said, "and I've come to take care of poor Momma."

During all that summer it was a bitter regret to Lydia that she had seen her brother so short a time. He had decreed that the sooner his mother was taken away from Endbury, the better for her, and Mrs. Emery had clung to him, assenting passively to all he said, and peering constantly, with tear-blurred eyes, into his face to see again his astonishing resemblance to his father. They had left the day after his arrival.

He had found time, however, to go out to Bellevue for a brief visit, to see Lydia's home and her little daughter--Paul was away on a business trip--and the half-hour he spent there was one that Lydia never forgot. The tall, sunburned Westerner, with his kind, humorous eyes, his affectionate smile, his quaint, homely phrases, haunted the house for the rest of the summer. The time of his stay had been too breathlessly short for any serious talk. He had looked about at the big, handsome house with a half-mocking awe, inspected the "grounds" with a lively interest in the small horticultural beginnings Lydia had been able to achieve, told her she ought to see his two hundred acres of apple-trees; and for the time that was left before his trolley-car was due he played with his little niece and talked over her head to his sister.

"She's a dandy, Lyddie! She's a jim-dandy of a little girl! She ought to come out and learn to ride straddle with her cousins. I got a boy about her age--say, they'd look fine together! He's a towhead, like all the rest of 'em--like their mother."

For months afterward Lydia could close her eyes and see again the transfigured expression that had come over his face at the mention of his wife. "Talk about luck!" he said, after a moment's pause, "there never was such luck as my getting Annie. Say, I wish you could know her, Lyddie. I tell you what--shoulder to shoulder, every minute, she's stood up to things right there beside me for twelve years--Lord! It don't seem more than six months when I stop to think about it. We had some hard sledding along at the first, but with the two of us pulling together--. She's laughed at sickness and drought and bugs and floods. We're all through that now, we're doing fine; but, honest, it was worth it, to know Annie

through and through as I do. There isn't a thing about the business she doesn't know as well as I do, and good reason why, too. We've worked it all out together. We've stuck close, we have. I've helped in the house and with the kids, and she's come right out into the orchards with me. Share and share alike--that's our motto."

He was silent a moment, caressing Ariadne's dark hair gently, and reviewing the past with shining eyes. "Lord! Lord! It's been a good life!" He turned to his sister with a smile. "Well, Lyddie, I expect you know something about it, too. You certainly are fixed fine, and everybody says you've married a splendid fellow."

Lydia leaned forward eagerly, the impulse to unburden herself overwhelming. "Oh, Paul is the best man--" she began, "so true and kind and--and--pure--but Harry, we don't--we can't--his business--" She turned away from her brother's too keen eyes and stared blindly at the wall, conscious of an ache in her heart like a physical hurt.

Later, as they were talking of old memories, of Lydia's childhood, Harry asked suddenly: "How'd you happen to give your little girl such a funny name?"

It was a question that had not been put to Lydia before. Her family had taken for granted that it was a feverish fancy of her sick-bed. She gazed at her brother earnestly, and was about to speak when he looked at his watch and stood up, glancing uneasily down toward the trolley track. It was too late--he would be gone so soon--like something she had dreamed. "Oh, I liked the name," she said vaguely; adding, "Harry! I wish you could stay longer! There's so much I should like to talk over with you. Oh, how I wish you'd never gone away."

"You come out and see us," he urged. "It'd do you good to get away from this old hole-in-the-ground! We live six miles from a neighbor, so you'd have to get along without tea-parties, but I bet Annie and the kids would give you a good time all right."

He kissed Lydia good-by, tossed Ariadne high in the air, and as he hurried down the driveway he called back over his shoulder: "Take good care of my little niece for me! I tell you it's the kids that count the most!" It was a saying that filled ringingly for Lydia the long, hot days of the quiet summer that ensued. As for Ariadne, she did not for months stop talking of "nice, laughy, Unkie Hawy." Her fluency of speech was increasing out of all proportion to her age.

Whatever slow changes might be taking place in Lydia, went on silently and obscurely during that summer; but in the fall a new moral horizon burst upon her with the realization that she was again to become a mother. Another life was to be entrusted to her hands, to hers and Paul's, and with the knowledge came the certainty that she must now begin to take some action to place her outer life more in accord with her new inner self. It would be the worst moral cowardice longer to evade the issue.

Thus bravely did she exhort herself, and, though shrinking with apprehension at the very thought of entering upon a combat, attempted to shame herself into a little courage.

When Paul heard of his wife's hopes, he was enchanted. He cried out jubilantly: "I bet you it'll be a boy this time!" and caught her to him in an embrace of affection so ardent that for a moment she glowed like a bride. She clung to him, happy in the warmth of feeling that, responsive, as always, to his touch, sprang up in her; and when in his good-natured, half-laughing, dictatorial way he made her lie down at once and promise to rest and be quiet, the boyish absurdity of his solicitude was sweet to her.

He disappeared in answer to a telephone call, and she closed her eyes, savoring the pleasure of the little scene. How she needed Paul to reconcile her to life! How kind he really was! How good! His was the clean, honorable affection he had promised her on their wedding day. If she were to have any faith in the novels she read (like most American women of the leisure class, her education after her marriage consisted principally in reading the novels people talked about), if there was any truth in what she read in these stories, she felt she was blest far above most women in that there had come to her since her marriage no revelation of a hidden, unclean side to her husband's nature.

But Lydia had never felt herself closely touched by reading; it all seemed remote from her own life and problems. The sexual questions on which the plots invariably turned, which formed the very core and center of the lives of the various female characters, had, as a matter of fact, according to her honest observation of her acquaintances, a very subordinate place in the average American life about her. The marital unhappiness, estrangement, and fragmentary incompleteness in the circle she knew, over which she had grieved and puzzled, had nothing to do with what novels mean by "unfaithfulness." The women of Endbury, unlike the heroines of fiction, did not fear that their husbands would fall in love with other women. The men of Endbury spent as little time in sentimentalizing over other men's wives as they did over their own.

She often wondered why writers did not treat of the other problems that beset her class--for instance, why it was only women in frontier conditions, like Harry's wife, who could share in their husband's lives; why nobody tried to change things so that they could do more of their part in the work of the world; why they could not have a share in the activities that gave other men, even little boys like Walter, so much closer knowledge of their husbands' characters than they, their wives, had. She had a dim notion, caught from stray indications in the magazines, that writers were

considering such questions in books other than novels, but she had no idea how to search them out. The woman's club to which she belonged was occupied with the art of Masaccio, who was, so a visitor from Chicago's aesthetic circles informed them, the "latest thing" in art interests.

She decided to ask Paul if he had heard of such books. She would ask him so many such questions in the new life that was to begin. They had been married more than three years and, so far as their relations to each other went, they were by no means inharmonious; but of the close-knit, deep-rooted intimacy of soul and mind that had been her dream of married life, there had not been even a beginning. Well, she told herself bravely, four years were but a short period in a lifetime. They were both so young yet. They could begin now.

Paul came back from the telephone, note-book in hand, jotting down some figures. He smiled at her over the top of the book, and before he sat down to his desk he covered her carefully with a shawl, stroked her hair, and closed her eyes, saying with an absent tenderness: "There! take a nap, dear, while I finish these notes."

He looked supremely satisfied with himself in the instant before he plunged into his calculations, and Lydia guessed that he was congratulating himself on having remembered her in the midst of absorbing business cares. She lay looking at him as he worked, her mind full of busy thoughts.

Chiefly, as she went over their situation, she felt guilty to think how entirely apart from him all her real life was passed. The doubts, the racking spiritual changes, that had come to her, she had kept all to herself; and yet she could say honestly that her silence had been involuntary, instinctive, she fancied whimsically, like the reticence as to emotions that one keeps in the hurly-burly of a railway station. With tickets to be bought and trunks to be checked and time-tables to be consulted, it is absurd to try to communicate to a busy and preoccupied companion inexplicable qualms of soul-sickness. Any sensible woman--and Lydia, like most American women, had been trained by precept and example to desire above all things to be sensible and not emotionally troublesome to the men of her family--any sensible woman kept her thoughts to herself till the time came when she could talk them over without interfering with the business on hand.

As she lay on the sofa and watched Paul's face sharpen in his concentration, it occurred to her that the point of the whole matter was that for her and Paul the suitable and leisurely time for mutual discussion had never come. That was all! That was the whole trouble! It was not any inherent lack of common feeling between them. Simply, there was always business on hand with which she must not interfere.

Paul lifted his head, his eyes half closed in a narrowed, speculative gaze upon some knotty point in his calculation. This long, sideways look happened to fall upon Lydia, and she turned cold before the profound unconsciousness of her existence in those eyes apparently fixed so piercingly upon her. She had a quick fancy that the blank wall of abstraction at which that vacant stare was directed really and palpably separated her husband from her.

For a moment she wondered if she were growing like the women she had heard her father so unsparingly condemn--silly, childish, egotistic women who could not bear to have their husbands think of anything but themselves, who were jealous of the very business which earned them and their children a living. She acquitted herself of this charge proudly. She did not want all of Paul's time; she wanted only some of it. And then, it was not to have him thinking of her, but with her about the common problems of their life; it was to think with him about the problems of his life; it was to have him help her by his sound, well-balanced, well-trained mind, which, so everyone said, worked such miracles in business; to have him help her through the thicket of confusion into which she was plunged by her inability to accept the plainly-marked road over which all of her world was pressing forward. Perhaps it was all right, she thought, the way Endbury people "did." She asked nothing better than to be convinced that it was; she longed for a satisfying answer. But Paul did not even know she had doubts! How could he, she asked herself, exonerating him from blame. He was away so many hours of the day and days of the year; and when he came home he was so tired!

It was characteristic of her temper that she had learned quickly and without bitterness the lesson every wife must learn, that neither tenderness nor delicate perceptions of shades of feeling can be extorted from a very tired or very preoccupied man. Masculine fatigue brings with it a healthy bluntness as to what is being expected in the way of emotional responsiveness, and men will not allow their sense of duty to spur their jaded affection to the point of exhaustion. Lydia noted this, felt that she could not with any show of reason resent it, since it showed a state of things as hard for Paul as for her; but she could not blind herself to the fact that the inevitable result was Paul's complete ignorance of her real life. She felt herself to be so different from the girl he had married as scarcely to be recognizable, and yet there was no way by which he could have caught even a glimpse of the changes that had made her so. The short periods they spent with each other were necessarily more than filled by consultations about matters of household administration and plans for their social life, and about the way to spend the money that Paul earned. Paul was a very good-natured and consciously indulgent husband, but Lydia seldom emerged from an hour's conversation with him without an uneasy feeling that she was not by any means getting out of the money he furnished her the largest amount possible of what he wanted; and this sensation was scarcely conducive to an expression of what was, after all, on her part nothing but a vague aspiration toward an ideal--an aspiration that came to her clearly only at times

of great tranquillity and peace, when her mind was quite at rest.

She was going around and around the treadmill of her familiar perplexities when a trifling incident, so small, so dependent on its framing of situation, accent, expression and gesture as scarcely to be recordable, gave her a sudden glimpse of quite another side to the matter. She was shocked into realizing that just as their way of life hid from Paul what was going on in her mind, so he also, in all probability, was rapidly changing without her knowledge.

Paul finished his figuring, pushed the papers to one side with a sigh of fatigue, and turned his eyes thoughtfully on his wife. "That's very good news of yours, Lydia dear, about the expected son and heir. But it's rather a pity it didn't come last winter, isn't it?"

"How so?" she asked.

"Why, you had to be out of things on account of being in mourning, anyhow. If this had happened the year your father died, you could have killed two birds with one stone, don't you see?"

Lydia's perception of a thousand reasonable explanations and excuses for this speech was so quick that it was upon her almost before she was aware of her resentment. She hurried to shut the door on a blighting new vision of her husband, by telling herself loudly that it was to be expected Paul should feel so; but, rapid as her loyal, wifely movement had been, she had felt a gust of hot revulsion against something in her husband which her affection for him forbade her to name.

She could not put out of her mind, his look, his accent, his air of taking for granted that the speech was a natural one. The knowledge that Marietta would be too bewildered by her dwelling on the incident even to laugh at her, did not avail to free her of the heavy doubts that filled her. Was she mistaken in feeling that it indicated an alarming increase of materialism in Paul? She was really too fanciful, she told herself many times a day, surprised to find herself going over it again. Was it a mere chance remark--a little stone in the garden path--or was it the first visible outcropping of a stratum of unconquerable granite which grimly underlay all the flower beds of his good nature?

The final impression on her mind was of a new motive for coming to a better, closer understanding with Paul about the fundamentals of their life. It had not occurred to her before, in spite of all her struggles "to be good," as she put it to herself with her childlike naivete, that Paul might be needing her as much as she needed him! Spurred on by this new reason for breaking through the impalpable wall that separated their inner lives, she resolved that she would no longer let herself be dominated by the inconsequent multiplicity of the trifling incidents that filled their days.

If she could only get close to Paul she was sure that all would be well. She made herself hope, with a brave belittling of the tangle that baffled her, that perhaps just one long, serious talk with Paul would be all that was needed. If she could just make Paul see what she saw, he could tell her how to set to work to remedy things. Paul was so clever. Paul was always so kind--when he saw!

She began watching for a favorable opportunity for this long, serious talk, and as day after day fled past with only a glimpse of Paul desperately in a hurry in the morning and desperately tired at night, she was aware that her idea of the shape their life was taking had not exaggerated the extent of the broad flood of trivialities that separated them. Although the light laugh of her girlhood was rarer than before her marriage, life had not proved it to be the result of mere animal spirits. She still saw a great deal to laugh at, though sometimes it was tremulous laughter, carrying her to the edge of tears. And she often laughed to herself during these days at the absurd incongruity of what her heart was swelling to utter and the occasions on which she would have to speak.

'Stashie was away, tending her aunt who was ill, away for an indefinite period, for Patsy's steady wages quite sufficed to keep his cousin at home to care for his grandmother. Lydia sometimes feared the satisfaction she took in Patsy's exemplary career was tinctured with vainglory for her own share in it, but, if so, she was punished for it now, since it was his very prosperity that took away from her the only steady domestic help she had ever been able to keep. She had now only a cook, a slatternly negress, with a gift for frying chicken and making beaten biscuit, and a total incapacity to conceive of any other activity as possible for her. Lydia had telephoned to the two employment agencies in Endbury and had been informed, by no means for the first time, that the supply of girls willing to work in the suburbs had entirely given out. For the time being there was simply not one to be had, so for the next few days Lydia, as well as Paul, was more than usually occupied; but her fixed intention to "talk things over with him" was not shaken. And yet--day after day went by with the routine unvaried--there was no time in the morning; in the evening Paul was too tired, and on Sundays there was always "Company," it being practically their only time for daylight entertainment. Often Paul brought a business associate home for dinner; his family or hers came in; there were always callers in the afternoon; and they were usually invited out to supper or had guests themselves. It was the busiest day of the week.

Ever since her father's death she had been reviving in her mind, shocked to find them so few, her positive, personal recollections of him, and one of them now came back to her with a symbolic meaning. It had been a not uncommon occurrence in her childhood--a school picnic in the Black Rock woods; but this one stood out from all the others

because, by what freak of chance she never knew, her father had gone with her instead of her mother. How proud she had been to have him there! How eagerly she had done the honors of the "entertainment"! How anxiously she had hoped that he would be pleased with the recitations, the songs, the May-day dance!

One of the events of the day was to be the recitation of a fairy poem by a boy in one of the upper grades. He was to step out of the bushes in the character of a Brownie. The child had but just thrust his head through the leaves and begun, "I come to tell ye of a world ye mortals wot not of," when a terrific clap of thunder overhead, followed by lightning, and rain in torrents, broke up the picnic and sent everyone flying for shelter to a near-by barn. Lydia had been very much afraid of thunderstorms, and she could still remember how, through all her confusion and terror, she had admired the fixity of purpose of the little Brownie, piteous in his drenched fairy costume, gasping out, as they ran along: "I come to tell ye--I come to tell ye, mortals--" to his scurrying audience.

When they reached the barn and were huddled in the hay, wet and forlorn, and deafened by the peals of thunder, the determined little boy had stood up on a farm wagon on the barn floor, and the instant the storm abated began again with his insistent tidings of a world they wot not of. With her father's death fresh in her mind, Lydia could not without a throb of pain recall his rare outburst of hearty laughter at the child's perseverance. "I bet on that kid!" he had cried out, applauding vigorously at the end. "Who *is* he?"

"Paul Hollister," she had told him, proud to know the bigger children. "He's a very especial friend of mine."

"Well, you can bet he'll get on," her father had assured her.

The opening of the Brownie's speech had come to be one of the humorous catchwords of the Emery household, to express firmness of purpose, and it was now with a mixture of laughter and tears that Lydia recalled the scene--the dusky interior of the barn, the sweet, strong scent of the hay, the absurd little figure grimacing and squeaking on the farm wagon, and her big, little-known, all-powerful father, one strong arm around her, protecting her from all she feared, as nothing in the world could protect her now.

She was grown up now, and must learn how to protect her own children against dangers less obvious than thunderstorms. It was her turn now to insist on making herself heard above uproar and confusion. Her little Brownie playmate shamed her into action. She would not wait for a pause in the clatter of small events about Paul and herself; she would raise her voice and shout to him, if necessary, overcoming the shy reluctance of the spirit to speak aloud of its life.

CHAPTER XXVII

LYDIA REACHES HER GOAL AND HAS HER TALK WITH HER HUSBAND

Paul was still asleep when Lydia opened her eyes one morning and said to herself with a little laugh, but quite resolutely: "I come to tell ye of a world ye mortals wot not of."

As she dressed noiselessly, she fortified herself with the thought that she had, in her nervousness, greatly overestimated the seriousness of her undertaking. There was nothing so formidable in what she meant to do, after all. She only wished to talk reasonably with her husband about how to avoid having their life degenerate into a mere campaign for material advancement. She did not use this phrase in her thoughts about the matter. She thought more deeply, and perhaps more clearly, than during her confused girlhood, but she had no learned or dignified expressions for the new ideas dawning in her. As she coiled her dark hair above her face, rather pale these days, like a white flower instead of the glowing rose it had been, she said to herself, like a child: "Now, I mustn't get excited. I must remember that all I want is a chance for all of us, Paul and the children and me, to grow up as good as we can, and loving one another the most for the nicest things in us and not because we're handy stepping-stones to help one another get on. And we can't do that if we don't really put our minds to it and make that the thing we're trying hardest to do. The other things--the parties and making money and dressing better than we can really afford to--they're only all right if they don't get to seeming the things to look out for first. We must find out how to keep them second."

A golden shaft of winter sunshine fell on Paul's face. He opened his eyes and yawned, smiling good-naturedly at his wife. Lydia summoned her courage and fairly ran to the bed, sitting down by him and taking his strong hand in hers.

"Oh, you india-rubber ball!" he cried in humorous despair at her. "Don't you know a woman with your expectations oughtn't to go hurling herself around that way?"

"I know--I'm too eager always," she apologized. "But, Paul, I've been waiting for a nice quiet time to have a long talk with you about something that's troubling me, and I just decided I wouldn't wait another minute."

Paul patted her cheek. He was feeling very much refreshed by his night's sleep. He smiled at his young wife again. "Why, fire away, Lydia dear. I'm no ogre. You don't have to wait till I'm in a good temper, do you? What is it? More money?"

"Oh, no, *no!*" She repudiated the idea so hotly that he laughed, "Well, you can't scare me with anything else. What's up?"

Lydia hesitated, distracted, now that her chance had come, with the desire to speak clearly. "Paul dear, it's very serious, and I want you to take it seriously. It may take a great effort to change things, too. I'm very unhappy about the way we are--"

A wail from Ariadne's room gave warning that the child had wakened, as she not infrequently did, terrified by a bad dream. Lydia fled in to comfort her, and later, when she came back, leading the droll little figure in its pink sleeping-drawers, Paul was dressing with his usual careful haste. He stopped an instant to laugh at Ariadne's face of determined woe and tossed her up until an unwilling smile broke through her pouting gloom. Then he turned to Lydia, as to another child, and rubbed his cheek on hers with a boyish gesture. "Now, you other little forlornity, what's the matter with you?"

Lydia warmed, as always, at the tenderness of his tone, though she noticed with an inward laugh that he continued buttoning his vest as he caressed her and that his eyes wandered to the clock with a wary alertness. "Perhaps you'd better wait and tell me at the table," he went on briskly. "I'm all ready to go down." He pulled his coat on with his astonishing quickness, and ran downstairs.

Lydia put Ariadne into her own bed, telling the docile little thing to stay there till Mother came back for her, and followed Paul, huddling together the remnants of her resolution which looked very wan in the morning light. Breakfast was not ready; the table was not even set, and when she went out into the kitchen she was met by a heavy-eyed cook, moving futilely about among dirty pots and pans and murmuring something about a headache. Lydia could not stop then to investigate further, but, hurrying about, managed to get a breakfast ready for Paul before his first interest in the morning paper had evaporated enough to make him impatient of the delay.

He fell to with a hearty appetite as soon as the food was set before him, not noticing for several moments that Lydia's breakfast was not yet ready. When he did so, he spoke with a solicitous sharpness: "Lydia, you need a guardian! You ought to eat as a matter of duty! I bet half your queer notions come from your just pecking around at any old thing when I'm not here to keep track of you."

He poured out another cup of coffee for himself as he spoke.

"Yes, dear; I know, I do. I will," Lydia assured him, with her quick acquiescence to his wishes. "But this morning Mary is sick, or something, and I got yours first."

Paul spoke briefly, with his mouth full of toast: "If you were more regular in the way you run the house, and insisted on never varying the--"

"But I was afraid you would be late," said Lydia. It was the daily terror of her life.

"I *am* late now," he told her, with his good-humored insistence on facts. "I've missed the 7:40, and I've just time to catch the next one if I hurry. Do you happen to know, dear, where I put that catalogue from Elberstrom and Company? The big red book with the picture of a dynamo on the cover. I was looking over it last night, and Heaven knows where I may have dropped it."

The opinion as to the proper answer to a speech like this was one of the sharply marked lines of divergence between Madeleine Lowder and her brother's wife. "Soak him one when you get a chance, Lydia," she was wont to urge facetiously, and her advice in the present case would unhesitatingly have been to answer as acrimoniously as possible that if he were more regular in the way he handled such things his wife would have to spend less time ransacking the house looking for them. But in spite of such practical and experienced counsel, Lydia was scarcely conscious of refraining from the entirely justifiable and entirely futile customary recriminations, and she was as unaware as Paul of the vast amount of embittering domestic friction which was spared them by her silence. She had some great natural advantages for the task of creating a better domestic life at which she was now so eagerly setting herself, and one of them was this incapacity to resent petty injustices done to herself. She was handicapped in any effort by her utter lack of intellectual training and by a natural tendency to mental confusion, but her lack of small vanities not only spared her untold suffering, but added much to her singleness of aim.

She now went about searching for the catalogue, finally finding it in the library under the couch. When she came back to the dining-room she saw Paul standing up by the table, wiping his mouth. Evidently he was ready to start. How

absurd she had been to think of talking seriously to him in the morning!

"Mary brought your breakfast in," he said nodding toward an untidy tray. "I hate to seem to be finding fault all the time, but really her breath was enough to set the house on fire! Can't you keep her down to moderate drinking?"

"I'll try," said Lydia.

Paul took the catalogue from her hand and reached for his hat. They were in the hall now. "Good-by, Honey," he said, kissing her hastily and darting out of the house.

Lydia had but just turned back to the dining-room when he opened the door and came in again, bringing a gust of fresh winter air with him. "Say, dear, you forgot about something you wanted to tell me about. I've got eight minutes before the trolley, so now's your chance. What is it? Something about the plumbing?"

In the dusky hall Lydia faced him for a moment in silence, with so singular an expression on her face that he looked apprehensive of some sort of scene. Then she broke out into breathless, quavering laughter, whose uncertainty did not prevent Paul from great relief at her apparent change of mood. "Never mind," she said, leaning against the newel-post, "I'll tell you--I'll tell you some other time."

He kissed her again, and she felt that it was with a greater tenderness now that he no longer feared a possibly disagreeable communication from her.

After he had gone, she thought loyally, putting things in the order of importance she had been taught all her life, "Well, it *is* hard for him to have perplexities at home and not to be able to give the freshest and best of himself to business." It was not until later, as she was dressing Ariadne, that she swung slowly back to her new doubt of that view of the problem.

Ariadne was in one of her most talkative moods, and was describing at great length the dream that had frightened her so. There was a hen with six little chickens, she told her mother, and one of them was as big--as big--

"Yes, dear; and what did the big little chicken do?" Lydia laced up the little shoes, on her knees before the small figure, her mind whirling. "That was just the trouble, she couldn't make it seem right any more, that Paul's best and freshest should *all* go to making money and none to a consideration of why he wished to make it."

"Yes, Ariadne, and it flew over the house, and then?"

She began buttoning the child's dress, and lost herself in ecstasy over the wisps of soft curls at the back of the rosy neck. She dropped a sudden kiss on the spot, in the midst of Ariadne's narrative, and the child squealed in delighted surprise. Lydia was carried away by one of her own childlike impulses of gayety, and burrowed bear-like, growling savagely, in the soft flesh. Ariadne doubled up, shrieking with laughter, the irresistible laughter of childhood. Lydia laughed in response, and the two were off for one of their rollicking frolics. They were like a couple of kittens together. Finally, "Come, dear; we must get our breakfasts," said Lydia, leading along the little girl, still flushed and smiling from her play.

Her passion for the child grew with Ariadne's growth, and there were times when she was tempted to agree in the unspoken axiom of those about her, that all she needed was enough children to fill her heart and hands too full for thought; but sometimes at night, when Paul was away and she had the little crib moved close to her bed, very different ideas came to her in the silent hours when she lay listening to the child's quick, regular breathing. At such times, when her mind grew very clear in the long pause between the hurry of one day and the next, she had rather a sort of horror in bringing any more lives into a world which she could do so little to make ready for them. Ariadne was here, and, oh! She must do something to make it better for her! Her desire that Ariadne should find it easier than she to know how to live well, rose to a fervor that was a prayer emanating from all her being. Perhaps she was not clever or strong enough to know how to make her own life and Paul's anything but a dreary struggle to get ahead of other people, but somehow--somehow, Ariadne must have a better chance.

Something of all this came to her mind in the reaction from her frolic, as she established the child in her high-chair and sat down to her own cold breakfast; but she soon fell, instead, to pondering the question of Mary in the kitchen. She had not now that terror of a violent scene which had embittered the first year of her housekeeping, but she felt a qualm of revulsion from the dirty negress who, as she entered the kitchen, turned to face her with insolent eyes. It seemed a plague-spot in her life that in the center of her home, otherwise so carefully guarded, there should be this presence, come from she shuddered to think what evil haunts of that part of Endbury known as the "Black Hole." She thought, as so many women have thought, that there must be something wrong in a system that made her husband spend all his strength laboring to make money so much of which was paid, in one form or another, to this black incubus. She thought, as so many other women have thought, that there must be something wrong with a system of life that meant that, with rare exceptions, such help was all that could be coaxed into doing housework; but Lydia, unlike the other women she knew, did not--could not--stop at the realization that something was wrong. Some irresistible impulse

moved her to try at least to set it right.

On this occasion, however, as she faced the concrete result of the system, she was too languid, and felt too acutely the need for sparing her strength, to do more than tell her cook briefly that if she did not stop drinking she would be dismissed. Mary made no reply, looking down at her torn apron, her face heavy and sullen. She prepared some sort of luncheon, however, and by night had recovered enough so that with Lydia's help the dinner was eatable.

Paul was late to dinner, and when he sat down heavily at the table Lydia's heart failed her at the sight of his face, fairly haggard with fatigue. She kept Ariadne quiet, the child having already learned that when Daddy came home from the city there must be no more noisy play; and she served Paul with a quickness that outstripped words. She longed unspeakably to put on one side forever all her vexing questions and simply to cherish and care for her husband physically. He had so much to burden him already--all he could carry. But she had been so long bringing herself to the point of resolution in the matter, she had so firmly convinced herself that her duty lay along that dark and obscure path, that she clung to her purpose.

After dinner, when she came downstairs from putting Ariadne to bed, she found him already bent over the writing-table, covering a sheet of paper with figures. "You remember, Paul, I have something to talk over with you," she began, her mouth twitching in a nervous smile.

He pushed the papers aside, and looked up at her with a weary tenderness. "Oh, yes; I do remember. We might as well have it over now, I suppose. Wait a minute, though." He went to the couch, piled the pillows at one end, and lay down, his hands clasped under his head. "I might as well rest myself while we talk, mightn't I?"

"Oh, yes, yes, poor dear!" cried Lydia remorsefully. "I wish I didn't *have* to bother you!"

"I wish so, too," he said whimsically. "Sure it's nothing you can't settle yourself?" He closed his eyes and yawned.

"I don't *want* to settle it myself!" cried Lydia with a rush, seeing an opening ready-made. "That's the point. I want you to be in it! I want you to help me! Paul, I'm sure there's something the matter with the way we live--I don't like it! I don't see that it helps us a bit--or anyone else--you're just killing yourself to make money that goes to get us things we don't need nearly as much as we need more of each other! We're not getting a bit nearer to each other--actually further away, for we're both getting different from what we were without the other's knowing how! And we're not getting nicer--and what's the use of living if we don't do that? We're just getting more and more set on scrambling along ahead of other people. And we're not even having a good time out of it! And here is Ariadne--and another one coming--and we've nothing to give them but just this--this--this--"

She had poured out her accumulated, pent-up convictions with passion, feeling an immense relief that she had at last expressed herself--that at last she had made a breach in the wall that separated her from Paul. At the end, as she hesitated for a phrase to sum up her indictment of their life, her eyes fell on Paul's face. Its expression turned her cold. She stopped short. He did not open his eyes, and the ensuing silence was filled with his regular, heavy breathing. He had fallen asleep.

Lydia folded her hands in her lap and sat looking at him intently. In the tumult of her emotions there was neither bitterness nor resentment. But a cloud had passed between her and the sun. She sat there a long time, her face very pale and grave. After a time she laid her hand on her husband's shoulder. She felt an intolerable need to feel him at least physically near.

The telephone bell rang distinctly in the hall. Paul bounded to his feet, wide awake.

"I bet that's the Washburn superintendent!" he cried. "He said they might call me up here if they came to a decision." He had apparently forgotten Lydia's presence, or else the fact that she knew nothing of his affairs. He disappeared into the hall, his long, springy, active step resounding quickly as he hurried to the instrument. Lydia heard his voice, decisive, masterful, quiet, evidently dictating terms of some bargain that had been hanging in the balance. When he came back, his head was up, like a conqueror's. "I've got their contract!" he told her, and then, snatching her up, he whirled her about, shouting out a "yip! yip! yip!" of triumph.

In spite of herself Lydia's chin began to tremble. She felt a stinging in her eyes. Paul saw these signs of emotion and was conscience-stricken. "Oh, I'm a black-hearted monster!" he cried, in burlesque contrition. "I must have dropped off just as you began your spiel. But, Lydia, if *you'd* taken that West Virginia trip, you'd go to sleep if the Angel Gabriel were blowing his horn! I was gone three days, you know, and, honest, I didn't have three hours' consecutive sleep! Don't be too mad at me. Start over again. I'll listen to every word, honest to gracious I will. I feel as waked up as a fighting cock, anyhow, by this Washburn business! To think I've pulled that off at last!"

"I'm not mad at *you*, Paul," said Lydia, trying to speak steadily, and holding with desperate resolution to her purpose of communicating with her husband. "I'm mad at the conditions that made you so sleepy you couldn't keep awake! All I had to say is that I don't like our way of life--I don't see that it's making us any better, and I want Ariadne--I want our

children to have a better one. I want you to help me make it so."

Paul stared at her, stupefied by this attack on axioms. "Good gracious, my dear! What are you talking about? 'Our way of life!' What do you mean? There's nothing peculiar about the way we live. Our life is just like everybody else's."

Lydia burned with impatience at the appearance of this argument, beyond which she had never been able to induce her mother or Marietta to advance a step. She cried out passionately: "What if it is! If it's not the right kind of life, what difference does it make if everybody's life *is* like it!"

The idea which her excitement instantly suggested to Paul was reassuring. Before Ariadne came, he remembered, Lydia had had queer spells of nervous tension. He patted her on the shoulder and spoke in the tone used to soothe a nervous horse. "There, Lydia! There, dear! Don't get so wrought up! Remember you're not yourself. You do too much thinking. Come, now, just curl up here and put your head on my--"

Lydia feared greatly the relaxing influence of his caressing touch. If once he put forth his personal magnetism, it would be so hard to go on. She drew away gently. "*Can* anybody do too much thinking, Paul? The trouble must be that I'm not thinking right. And, oh, I want to, so! *Please* help me! Everybody says you have such a wonderful head for organization and for science--if I were a dynamo that wasn't working, you could set me right!"

Paul laughed, and made another attempt to divert her. "I couldn't if the dynamo looked as pretty and kissable as you do!" He was paying very little attention to what she said. He was only uncomfortable and uneasy to see her so white and trembling. He wished he had proposed taking her out for the evening. She had been having too dull a time. He ought to see that she got more amusement. They said that comic opera now running in town was very funny.

"Paul, listen to me!" she was crying desperately as these thoughts went through his head. "Listen to me, and look honestly at the way we've been living since we were married, and you *must* see that something's all wrong. I never see you--never, never, do you realize that? except when you're in a raging hurry in the morning or tired to death at night, and when I'm just as tired as you are, so all we can do is to go to bed so we can get up in the morning and begin it all over again. Or else we tire ourselves out one degree more by entertaining people we don't really like--or rather people about whose real selves we don't know enough to know whether we like them or not--we have them because they're influential, or because everybody else entertains them, or because they can help us to get on--or can be smoothed over so they won't hinder our getting on. And there's no prospect of doing anything different from this all the days of our life--"

"But, look-y here, Lydia, that's the way things *are* in this world! The men have to go away the first thing in the morning--and all the rest of what you say! *I* can't help it! What do you come to me about it for? You might as well break out crying because I can't give you eyes in the back of your head. That's the way things are!"

Lydia made a violent gesture of unbelief. "That's what everybody's been telling me all my life--but now I'm a grown woman, with eyes to see, and something inside me that won't let me say I see what I don't--*and I don't see that!* I don't *believe* it has to be so. I can't believe it!"

Paul laughed a little impatiently, irritated and uneasy, as he always was, at any attempt to examine too closely the foundations of existing ideas. "Why, Lydia, what's the matter with you? You sound as though you'd been reading some fool socialist literature or something."

"You know I don't read anything, Paul. I never hear about anything but novels. I never have time for anything else, and very likely I couldn't understand it if I read it, not having any education. That's one thing I want you to help me with. All I want is a chance for us to live together a little more, to have a few more thoughts in common, and, oh! to be trying to be making something better out of ourselves for our children's sake. I can't see that we're learning to be anything but--you, to be an efficient machine for making money, I to think of how to entertain as though we had more money than we really have. I don't seem really to know you or live with you any more than if we were two guests stopping at the same hotel. If socialists are trying to fix things better, why shouldn't we have time--both of us--to read their books; and you could help me know what they mean?"

Paul laughed again, a scornful, hateful laugh, which brought the color up to Lydia's pale face like a blow. "I gather, then, Lydia, that what you're asking me to do is to neglect my business in order to read socialist literature with you?"

His wife's rare resentment rose. She spoke with dignity: "I begged you to be serious, Paul, and to try to understand what I mean, although I'm so fumbling, and say it so badly. As for its being impossible to change things, I've heard you say a great many times that there are no conditions that can't be changed if people would really try--"

"Good heavens! I said that of *business* conditions!" shouted Paul, outraged at being so misquoted.

"Well, if it's true of them--No; I feel that things are the way they are because we don't really care enough to have them some other way. If you really cared as much about sharing a part of your life with me--really sharing--as you do about getting the Washburn contract--"

Her indignant and angry tone, so entirely unusual, moved Paul, more than her words, to shocked protest. He looked deeply wounded, and his accent was that of a man righteously aggrieved. "Lydia, I lay most of this absurd outbreak to your nervous condition, and so I can't blame you for it. But I can't help pointing out to you that it is entirely uncalled for. There are few women who have a husband as absolutely devoted as yours. You grumble about my not sharing my life with you--why, I *give* it to you entire!" His astonished bitterness grew as he voiced it. "What am I working so hard for if not to provide for you and our child--our children! Good Heavens! What more *can* I do for you than to keep my nose on the grindstone every minute. There are limits to even a husband's time and endurance and capacity for work."

Lydia heard a frightened roaring in her ears at this unexpected turn to the conversation. Paul had never spoken so to her before. This was a very different tone from his irritation over defective housekeeping. She was as horrified as he over the picture that he held up with such apparently justified indignation, the picture of her as a querulous and ungrateful wife. Why, Paul was looking at her as though he hated her! For the first time in her married life, she conceived the possibility that she and Paul might quarrel, really seriously quarrel, about fundamental things. The idea terrified her beyond words. Her mind, undisciplined and never very clear, became quite confused, and only her long preparation and expectation of this talk enabled her to keep on at all, although now she could but falter ahead blindly. "Why, Paul dear--don't look at me so! I never dreamed of *blaming* you for it! It's just because I want things better for you that I'm so anxious to--"

"You haven't noticed me complaining any, have you?" put in Paul grimly, still looking at her coldly.

--It's because I can't bear to see you work so hard to get me things I'd ever so much rather go without than have you grow so you can't see anything but business--it seems all twisted! I'd rather you'd pay an assistant to go off on these out-of-town trips, and we'd get along on less money--live in a smaller house, and not entertain."

"Oh, Lydia, you talk like a child! How can I talk business with you when you have such crazy, impractical ideas? It's not just the money an assistant would cost! Either he'd not be so good as I, and then I'd lose my reputation for efficiency and my chance for promotion, or else he *would* be as good and he'd get the job permanently and divide the field with me. A man has to look a long way ahead in business!"

"But, Paul, what if he *did* divide the field with you? What if you don't get ahead of everybody else, if you'd have time and strength to think of other things more--you said the other day that you weren't sleeping well any more, and you're losing your taste for books and music and outdoors--why, I'd rather live in four rooms right over your office, so that you wouldn't have that hour lost going and coming--"

Paul broke in with a curt scorn: "Oh, Lydia! What nonsense! Why don't you propose living in a tent, to save rent?"

"Why I would--I would in a minute if I thought it would make things any better!" Lydia cried with a desperate simplicity.

At this crowning absurdity, Paul began to laugh, his ill-humor actually swept away by his amusement at Lydia's preposterous fancies. It was too foolish to try to reason seriously with her. He put his hand on her shining dark hair, ruffling it up like a teasing boy. "I guess you'd better leave the economic status of society alone, Lydia. You might break something if you go charging around it so fierce."

A call came from the darkness of the hall: "Mis' Hollister!"

"It's Mary," said Paul; "probably you forgot to give her any instructions about breakfast, in your anxiety about the future of the world. If you can calm down enough for such prosaic details, do tell her for the Lord's sake not to put so much salt in the oatmeal as there was this morning."

Lydia found the negress with her wraps on, glooming darkly, "Mis' Hollister, I'm gwine to leave," she announced briefly.

Lydia felt for a chair. Mary had promised faithfully to stay through the winter, until after her confinement. "What's the matter, Mary?"

"I cyant stay in no house wheah de lady says I drinks."

"You will stay until--until I am able to be about, won't you?"

"My things is gone aready," said Mary, moving heavily toward the door, "and I'm gwine now." As she disappeared, she remarked casually, "I didn't have no time to wash the supper dishes. Good-by."

"What's the matter with Mary?" called Paul.

Lydia went back to him, trying to smile. "She's gone--left," she announced.

Paul opened his eyes with a look of keen annoyance. "You can't break in a new cook *now*!" he said. "She can't go now!"

"She's gone," repeated Lydia wearily. "I don't know how anybody could make her stay."

Paul got up from the couch with his lips closed tightly together, and, sitting down in a straight chair, took Lydia on his knee as though she were a child. "Now, see here, my wife, you mustn't get your feelings hurt if I do some plain talking for a minute. You've been telling me what you think about things, and now it's my turn. And what *I* think is that if my dear young wife would spend more time looking after her own business she'd have fewer complaints to make about my doing the same. The thing for you to do is to accept conditions as they are and do your best in them--and, really, Lydia, make your best a little better."

Lydia was on the point of nervous tears from sheer fatigue, but she clung to her point with a tenacity which in so yielding a nature was profoundly eloquent. "But, Paul, if everybody had always settled down and accepted conditions, and never tried to make them better--"

"There's a difference between conditions that have to be accepted and those that can be changed," said Paul sententiously.

Lydia tore herself away from him and stood up, trembling with excitement. She felt that they had stumbled upon the very root of the matter. "But who's to decide which our conditions are?"

Paul caught at her, laughing. "I am, of course, you firebrand! Didn't you promise to honor and obey?" He went on with more seriousness, a tender, impatient, condescending seriousness: "Now, Lydia, just stop and think! Do you, can you, consider this a good time for you to try to settle the affairs of the universe--still all upset about your father's death, and goodness knows what crazy ideas it started in your head--and with an addition to the family expected! *And* the cook just left!"

"But that's the way things always are!" she protested. "That's life. There's never a time when something important hasn't just happened or isn't just going to happen, you have to go right ahead, or you never--why, Paul, I've waited for two years for a really good chance for this talk with you--"

"Thank the Lord!" he ejaculated. "I hope it'll be another two before you treat me to another evening like this. Oh, pshaw, Lydia! You're morbid, moping around the house too much--and your condition and all. Wait till you've got another baby to play with--I don't remember you had any doubts of anything the first six months of Ariadne's life. You ought to have a baby a year to keep you out of mischief! Just you wait till you can entertain and live like folks again. In the meantime you hustle around and keep busy and you won't be so bothered with thinking and worrying."

Unknowingly, they had drawn again near to the heart of their discussion. Unknowingly Lydia stood before the answer from her husband, the final statement that she wished to hear.

"But to hustle and keep busy--that's good only so long as you keep at it. The minute you stop--"

Paul's answer was an epoch in her thought.

"*Don't stop!*" he cried, surprised at her overlooking so obvious a solution.

At this bullet-like retort, Lydia shivered as though she had been struck. She turned away with a blind impulse for flight. Her gesture brought her husband flying to her. He took her forcibly in his arms. "What the devil--what is the matter *now*?" he asked, praying for patience. She hung unresponsive in his grasp. "What's the matter?" he repeated.

"You've just told me a horrible thing," she whispered; "that life is so dreadful that the only way we can get through it at all is by never looking at--"

Paul actually shook her in his exasperation. "Gee whiz, Lydia! you're enough to drive a man to drink! I never told you any such melodramatic nonsense. I told you straight horse sense, which is that if you took more interest in your work, in the work that every woman of your class and position has to do, you'd have less time to think foolishness--and your husband would have an easier life."

Her trembling lips opened to speak again, but he closed them with a firm hand. "And now, as your natural guardian, I'm not going to let you say another word about it. You dear little silly! However did you get us so wound up! Blessed if I have any idea what it's all been about!"

He was determined to end the discussion. He was relieved beyond expression that he had been able to get through it without saying anything unkind to his wife. He never meant to do that. He now went on, shaking a finger at her:

"You listen to me, Lydia-Emery-that-was! Do you know what we are going to do? We're going out into that howling desolation that Mary has probably left in the kitchen, and we're going to see if we can find a couple of clean glasses, and we're going to have a glass of beer apiece and a ham sandwich and a piece of the pie that's left over from dinner. You don't know what's the matter with you, but I do! You're starved! You're as hungry as you can be, aren't you now?"

Lydia had sunk into a chair during this speech and was now regarding him fixedly, her hands clasped between her knees. At his final appeal to her, she closed her eyes. "Yes," she said with a long breath; "yes, I am."

CHAPTER XXVIII

"THE AMERICAN MAN"

A ripple from the surging wave of culture which, for some years, had been sweeping over the women's clubs of the Middle West, began to agitate the extremely stationary waters of Endbury social life. The Women's Literary Club felt that, as the long-established intellectual authority of the town, it should somehow join in the new movement. The organization of this club dated back to a period now comparatively remote. Mrs. Emery, who had been a charter member, had never been more genuinely puzzled by Dr. Melton's eccentricities than when he had received with a yell of laughter her announcement that she had just helped to form a "literary club," which would be the "most exclusive social organization" in Endbury. It had lived up to this expectation. To belong to it meant much, and both Paul and Flora Burgess had been gratified when, on her mother's resignation, Lydia had been elected to the vacant place.

This close corporation, composed of ladies in the very inner circle, felt keenly the stimulating consciousness of its importance in the higher life of the town, and had too much civic pride to allow Endbury to lag behind the other towns in Ohio. Columbus women, owing to the large German population of the city, were getting a reputation for being musical; Cincinnati had always been artistic; Toledo had literary aspirations; Cleveland went in for civic improvement. The leading spirits of the Woman's Literary Club of Endbury cast about for some other sphere of interest to annex as their very own property.

They were hesitating whether to undertake a campaign of municipal house-cleaning, or to devote themselves to the study of the sonnet form in English verse, when an unusual opportunity for distinction opened before them. The daughter of the club's president was married to a professor in the State University of Michigan, and on one of her visits home she suggested that her mother's club invite to address it the Alliance Francaise lecturer of that year. He had to come out to Ann Arbor, anyhow--Ann Arbor was not very far from Endbury--not far, that is, as compared with the journey the lecturer would have made from Columbia and Harvard to "Michigan State." One of the club husbands was a railroad man and, maybe, could give them transportation. Frenchmen were always anxious to make all the money they could--she was sure that M. Buisine could be induced to come for a not extravagant honorarium. Why should not Endbury go in for cosmopolitanism? That certainly would be something new in Ohio.

And so it was arranged for an afternoon for the first week in December, a very grand "house-darkened-and-candle-lighted performance," as Madeleine Lowder labeled this last degree of Endbury ceremonious elaboration. It was held at the house of Paul's aunt, so that, naturally, Lydia could by no means absent herself. Madeleine came for her, and together they took Ariadne to Marietta's house and left her there for safe-keeping. Lydia was intensely conscious, under her sister's forbearing silence, that Marietta had never been asked to join the Woman's Literary Club. Even the jaunty Madeleine was aware of a tension in the brief conversation over the child's head, and remarked as she and Lydia walked away from the house: "Well, really now, *was* that the most tactful thing in the world?"

"What else could I do?" asked Lydia, at her wit's end. "I don't dare leave Ariadne with those awful things from the employment agencies, and 'Stashie's not coming back till next week."

"Oh, *she's* coming again, is she?" commented her companion. "Well, that'll mean lots of fun watching Paul squirm. But don't mind him, Lydia." Madeleine was one of the women who prided herself on her loyal sense of solidarity among her sex. "If he says a word, you poke him one in the eye. Keep her till after your confinement, anyhow. A woman ought to be allowed to run her house without any man butting in. We let them alone; they ought to let us."

There never was a person in the world, Lydia thought, in whom marriage had made less difference than in Paul's sister. She was exactly the same as in her girlhood. Lydia wondered at her with an ever-growing amazement. The enormous significance of the marriage service, the mysteries of the dual existence, her new responsibilities,--they all seemed non-existent. Paul said approvingly that Madeleine knew how to get along with less fuss than any woman he ever saw. Her breezy high spirits were much admired in Endbury, and her good humor and prodigious satisfaction with life were considered very cheerfully infectious.

The two women had reached Madame Hollister's house while Madeleine was expounding her theory of matrimony, and now took their places in the throng of extremely well-dressed women sitting on camp chairs, the rows of which filled the two parlors. The lecturer with the president of the club, occupied a dais at the other end of the room. He was a tall, ugly man, with prominent blue eyes, gray hair upstanding in close-cropped military stiffness, and a two-pronged grizzled beard. He was looking over his audience with a leisurely smiling scrutiny that roused in Lydia a secret resentment.

"He's very distinguished looking, isn't he?" whispered Madeleine. "So different! And *cool!* I'd like to see Pete Lowder

sit up there to be stared at by all this gang of women."

"Oh, he's probably used to it," said her neighbor on the other side. "They say he's spoken before any number of women's clubs. He does two a day sometimes. He's seen lots of American society women before now."

Madeleine stared at him curiously. "I wonder what he thinks of us! I wonder! I'd give anything to know!" she said. She repeated this sentiment in varying forms several times.

Lydia wondered why Madeleine should care so acutely about the opinion of a stranger and a foreigner, and finally, in her naive, straightforward way, she put this question to her. Madeleine was not one of the many who evaded Lydia's questions, or answered them only with a laugh at their oddity. She was very straightforward herself and generally had a very clear idea of what underlay any action or feeling on her part. But this time her usual rough-and-ready methods of analysis seemed at fault.

"Oh, because," she said indefinitely. "Don't you always want to know what men are thinking of you?"

"Men that know something about me, maybe," Lydia amended.

Madeleine laughed. "*They're* the ones that don't think at all, one way or the other," she reminded her sister-in-law.

The president of the club rose. Her introduction of the speaker was greeted with cordial, muted applause from gloved hands. There was a scraping of chairs, a stir of draperies, and little gusts of delicate perfumes floated out, as the hundred or more women settled themselves at the right angle, all their keen, handsome, nervous faces lifted to the speaker in a pleasant expectancy. Not only were they agreeably aware that they were forming part of one of the most recherche events of Endbury's social life, but they were remembering piquant rumors of M. Buisine's sensational attacks on American materialism. The afternoon promised something more interesting than their usual programme of home-made essays and papers.

Their expectation was not disappointed. In fluent English, apparently smooth with long practice on the same theme, he wove felicitous and forceful elaborations on the proverb relating to people who are absent and the estimation in which they are held by those present. He had seen in America, he said, everything but the American man. He had seen hundreds and thousands of women as well-dressed as Parisiennes (and, as a rule, much more expensively), as self-possessed as English great ladies, as cultivated as Russian princesses, as universally and variously handsome as visions in a painter's dream--("He's not afraid of laying it on thick, is he?" whispered Madeleine with an appreciative laugh)--but, except for a few professors in college, he had seen no men. He had inquired for them everywhere and was told that he did not see them because he was a man of letters. If he had been the inventor of a new variety of railroad brake he would have seen millions. He was told that the men, unlike their wives, had no intellectual interests, had no clubs with any serious purposes, had no artistic aims, had no home life, no knowledge of their children, no interest in education--that, in short, they left the whole business of worthy living to their wives, and devoted themselves exclusively to the wild-beast joys of tearing and rending their business competitors.

He gave many picturesque instances of his contention, he sketched several lively and amusing portraits of the one or two business men he had succeeded in running down; their tongue-tied stupefaction before the ordinary topics of civilization, their scorn of all aesthetic considerations; their incapacity to conceive of an intellectual life as worthy a grown man; the Stone-age simplicity with which they referred everything to savage cunning; their oblivion to any other standard than "success," by which they meant possessing something that they had taken away by force from somebody else.

It was indeed a very entertaining lecture, a most stimulating, interesting experience to the crowd of well-dressed women; although perhaps some of them found it a little long after the dining-room across the hall began to be filled with waiters preparing the refreshments and an appetizing smell of freshly-made coffee filled the air. Still, it was a lecture they had paid for, and it was gratifying to have it so full and conscientiously elaborated.

The ideas promulgated were not startlingly new to them, since they had read magazine articles on "Why American Women Marry Foreigners" and similar analyses of the society in which they lived; but to have it said to one's face, by a living man, a tall, ugly, distinguished foreigner, with the ribbon of the Legion of Honor in his buttonhole,--that brought it home to one! They nodded their beautifully-hatted heads at the truth of his well-chosen, significant anecdotes, they laughed at his sallies, they applauded heartily at the end when the lecturer sat down, the little smile, that Lydia found so teasing, still on his bearded lips.

"Well, he hit things off pretty close, for a foreigner, didn't he?" commented Madeleine cheerfully, gathering her white furs up to the whiter skin of her long, fair throat and preparing for a rush on the refreshment room. "He must have kept his eyes open pretty wide since he landed."

Lydia did not answer, nor did she join in the stampede to the dining-room. She sat still, her hands clasped tightly in her lap, her eyes very bright and dark in her pale face. She was left quite alone in the deserted room. Across the hall was

the loud, incessant uproar of feminine conversation released from the imprisonment of an hour's silence. From the scraps of talk that were intelligible, it might have been one of her own receptions. Lydia heard not a mention of the opinions to which they had been listening. Apparently, they were regarded as an entertaining episode in a social afternoon. She listened intently. She looked across at the crowd of her acquaintances as though she were seeing them for the first time. In their midst was the tall foreigner, smiling, talking, bowing, drinking tea. He was being introduced in succession to all of his admiring auditors.

Lydia rose to go and made her way to the dressing-room on the second floor for her wraps. As she returned toward the head of the stairs she saw a man's figure ascending, and stood aside to let him pass. He bowed with an unconscious assurance unlike that of any man Lydia had ever seen, and looked at her pale face and burning eyes with some curiosity. A faint aroma of delicate food and fading flowers and woman's sachet-powder hung about him. It was the lecturer, fresh from his throng of admirers. Lydia's heart leaped to a sudden valiant impulse, astonishing to her usual shyness, and she spoke out boldly, hastily: "Why did you tell us all that about our men? Didn't you think any of us would realize that they are good--our men are--good and pure and kind! Didn't you think we'd know that anything that's the matter with them must be the matter with us, too? They had mothers as well as fathers! It's not fair to blame everything on the men! It's not fair, and it can't be true! We're all in together, men and women. One can't be anything the other isn't!"

She spoke with a swift, grave directness, looking squarely into the man's eyes, for she was as tall as he. They were quite alone in the upper hall. From below came the clatter of the talking, eating women. The Frenchman did not speak for a moment. For the first time the faint smile on his lips died away. He paid to Lydia the tribute of a look as grave as her own. Finally, "Madame, you should be French," he told her.

The remark was so unexpected an answer to her attack that Lydia's eyes wavered. "I mean," he went on in explanation, "that you are acting as my wife would act if she heard the men of her nation abused in their absence. I mean also that I have delivered practically this same lecture over thirty times in America before audiences of women, and you are the first to--Madame, I should like to know your husband!" he exclaimed with another bow.

"My husband is like all other American men," cried Lydia sharply, touched to the quick by this reference. "It is because he is that I--" She broke off with her gesture of passionate unresignation to her lack of fluency. Already the heat of the impulse that had carried her into speech was dying away. She began to hesitate for words.

"Oh, I can't say what I mean--you must know it, anyhow! You blame the fathers for leaving all the bringing-up of the children to their wives, and yet you point out that the sons keep growing up all the time to be--to be--to be all you blame their fathers for being! If we women were half so--fine--as you tell us, why haven't we changed things?"

The foreigner made a vivid, surprised, affirmatory gesture. "Exactly! exactly! exactly, Madame!" he cried. "It is the question I have asked myself a thousand times: Why is it--why is it that women so strong-willed, so unyielding in the seeking what they desire, why is it that apparently they have no influence on the general fabric of the society in--"

"Perhaps it is," said Lydia unsparingly, her latent anger coming to the surface again and furnishing her fluency, "perhaps it is because people who see our faults don't help us to correct them, but flatter us by telling us we haven't any, and all the time think ill of us behind our backs."

The lecturer began to answer with aplomb and an attempt at graceful cynicism: "Ah, Madame, put yourself in my place! I am addressing audiences of women. Would it be tactful to--" but under Lydia's honest eyes he faltered, stopped, flushed darkly under his heavy beard, up over his high, narrow forehead to the roots of his gray hair. He swallowed hard. "Madame," he said, "you have rebuked me--deservedly. I--I demand your pardon."

"Oh, you needn't mind me," said Lydia humbly; "my opinion doesn't amount to anything. I oughtn't to talk, either. I don't *do* anything different from the rest--the women downstairs, I mean. I can only see there's something wrong--" She found the other's gaze into her troubled eyes so friendly that she was moved to cry out to him, all her hostility gone: "What *is* the trouble, anyhow?"

The lecturer flushed again, this time touched by her appeal. "I proudly put at your service any reflections I have made--as though you were my daughter. I have a daughter about your age, who is also married--who faces your problems. Madame, you look fatigued--will you not sit down?" He led her to a sofa on one side of the hall and took a seat beside her. "Is not the trouble," he began, "that the women have too much leisure and the men too little--the women too little work, the men too much?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!" Lydia's meditations had long ago carried her past that point; she was impatient at his taking time to state it. "But how can we change it?"

"You cannot change it in a day. It has taken many years to grow. It has seemed to me that one way to change it is by using your leisure differently. Even those women who use their leisure for the best self-improvement have not used it well. Many of my countrymen say that the culture of American women is like a child's idea of ornamentation--the

hanging on the outside of all odd bits of broken finery. I have not found it always so. I have met many learned women here, many women more cultivated than my own wife. But listen, Madame, to the words of an old man. Culture is dust and ashes if the spiritual foundations of life are not well laid; and, believe me, it takes two, a man and a woman, to lay those foundations. It can not be done alone."

"But how, how--" began Lydia impatiently.

"In the only way that anything can be accomplished in this world, by working! Your women have not worked patiently, resolutely, against the desertion of their men. Worse--they have encouraged it! Have you never heard an American, woman say: 'Oh, I can't bear a man around the house! They are so in the way!' Or, 'I let my husband's business alone. I want him to let--'"

He imitated an accent so familiar to Lydia that she winced. "Oh, don't!" she said. "I see all that."

"You must find few to see with you."

"But how to change it?" She leaned toward him as though he could impart some magic formula to her.

"With the men, work to have them share your problems--work to share theirs. Do not be discouraged by repeated failure. Defeat should not exist for the spirit. And, oh, the true way--you pointed it out in your first words. You have the training of the children. Their ideals are yours to make. A generation is a short--"

His face answered more and more the eager intentness of her own. He raised his hand with a gesture that underlined his next words: "But remember always, always, what Amiel says, that a child will divine what we really worship, and that no teaching will avail with him if we *teach* in contradiction to what we *are*."

They were interrupted by a loud hail from the stairs. Madeleine Lowder's handsome head showed through the balustrade, and back of her were other amused faces.

"I started to look you up, Lydia," she said, advancing upon them hilariously, "I thought maybe you weren't feeling well, and then I saw you monopolizing the lion so that everybody was wondering where in the world he was, and you were so wrapped up that you never even noticed me, so I motioned the others to see what a demure little cat of a sister I have."

She stood before them at the end of this facetious explanation, laughing, frank, sure of herself, and as beautiful as a great rosy flower.

"Your *sister*," said the lecturer incredulously to Lydia.

"My husband's sister," Lydia corrected him, and presented the newcomer in one phrase.

"Isn't she a sly, designing creature, Mr. Buisine?" cried Madeleine, in her usual state of hearty enjoyment of her situation. "You haven't met many as up-and-coming, have you now?"

"I do not know the meaning of your adjective, Mademoiselle; but it is true that I have met few like your brother's wife."

"I'm not Mademoiselle!" Madeleine was greatly amused at the idea.

The lecturer looked at her with a return to his enigmatic smile of the earlier afternoon. "I never saw a person who looked more unmarried than yourself, Mademoiselle," he persisted.

"Oh, we American women know the secret of not looking married," said Madeleine proudly.

"You do indeed," said the Frenchman with the manner of gallantry. "All of you look unmarried."

Lydia rose to go. The lecturer looked at her, his eyes softening, and made a silent gesture of farewell.

He turned back to Madeleine. "But I *am*," she assured him, pleased and flattered with the centering of their persiflage on herself. She made a gesture toward Lydia, disappearing down the stairs. "I'm as much married as *she* is!"

M. Buisine continued smiling. "That is quite, quite incredible," he told her.

CHAPTER XXIX

"... in tragic life, God wot,
No villain need be. Passions spin the plot."

"Say, Lydia," said Madeleine with her bluff good humor, coming into the house a few days after the French lecture, "say, I'm awfully sorry I told Paul! I never supposed he'd go and get mad. It was just my fool notion of being funny."

Lydia was dusting the balustrade, her back to her visitor. She tingled all through at this speech, and for an instant went on with her work, trying to decide if she should betray the fact that she knew nothing of the incident to which Madeleine's remark seemed to refer, or if she should, as she had done so many times already, conceal under a silence her ignorance of what her husband told other people. She never learned of matters pertaining to Paul's profession except from chance remarks of his business associates. He had not even told her, until questioned, about his great inspiration for rearranging the territory covered in that region by his company; a plan that must have engrossed his thoughts and fired his enthusiasm during months of apparently common life with his wife. And Paul had been genuinely surprised, and a little put out at her desire to know of it.

She decided that she dared not in this instance keep silent. She was too entirely in the dark as to what Madeleine had done. "I don't know what you're talking about, Madeleine," she said, turning around, dust-cloth in hand, trying to speak casually.

Her sister-in-law stared. "Didn't Paul come home and give it to you? He looked as though he were going to."

Lydia's heart sank in a vague premonition of evil. "Paul hasn't said anything to me. Why in the world should he? Is it about 'Stashie'? She's been back several days now, but I thought he hadn't noticed her much."

"Well, he *hasn't* said anything, that's a fact!" exclaimed Madeleine, with the frank implication in her voice that she had not before believed Lydia's statement. "My, no! It's not about 'Stashie'. It's about the French lecturer."

Lydia's astonishment at this unexpected answer quite took away her breath. "*About the--*" she began.

"Why, look-y here, it was this way," explained Madeleine rapidly. "I told you I was only joking. I thought it would be fun to tease Paul about the mash you made on old What's-his-name--about your sitting off on a sofa with him, and being so wrapped up you didn't even notice when the whole gang of us came to look at you--and maybe I stretched it some about how you looked leaning forward and gazing into his eyes--" She broke off with a laugh, cheerfully unable to continue a serious attitude toward life. "Oh, never you mind! It does a married man good to make him jealous once in a while. Keeps 'em from getting too stodgy and husbandy."

"Jealous!" cried Lydia. "Paul jealous! Of me! Never!" Her certainty on the point was instant and fixed.

"Well, you'd ha' thought he was, if you'd seen him. I was jollyng him along--we were in the trolley, going to Endbury. I had to take that early car so's to keep a date with Briggs, and, oh, Lydia! that brown suit he's making for me is a *dream*, simply a dream! He's put a little braid, just the least little bit, along--"

"What did Paul say?"

"Paul? Oh, yes--How'd I get switched off onto Briggs? Why, Paul didn't say *anything*; that was what made me see he wasn't taking it right. He just sat still and listened and listened till it made me feel foolish. I thought he'd jolly me back, you know. He's usually a great hand for that. And then when I looked at him I saw he looked as black as a thundercloud--that nasty look he has when he's real mad. When we were children and he'd look that way, I'd grab up any old thing and hit him quick, so's to get it in before he hit me. Well, I was awfully sorry, and I said, 'Why, hold on a minute, Paul, let me tell you--' but he said he guessed I'd told him about enough, and before I could open my mouth he dropped off the car. We'd got in as far as Hayes Avenue. I wanted to explain, you know, that the Frenchman was old enough to be our *grandfather*!"

"When did this happen?"

"Oh, I don't know; three or four days ago--why, Thursday, it must have been, for after I got through with Briggs I went on to that--"

"And this is Monday," said Lydia; "four days."

At the sight of her sister-in-law's troubled eyes, Madeleine was again overcome with facile remorse. She clapped her on the shoulder hearteningly. "I'm awfully sorry, Lyd, but don't you go being afraid of Paul. You're too gentle with him, anyhow. A married woman can't afford to be. You have to keep the men in their places, and you can't do that if you don't knock 'em the side of the head once in so often. It's good for 'em. Honest! And about this, don't you worry your head a minute. Like as not Paul's forgot everything about it. He'd forget anything, you know he would, if an interesting job came up in business. And if he ever does say anything, you just laugh and tell him about old Thingamajig's white hair and pop eyes, and he'll laugh at the joke on himself."

Lydia drew back with a gesture of extreme repugnance. "Don't talk so--as though Paul could be so--so vulgar."

Madeleine laughed. "I guess you won't find a man in *this* world that isn't 'vulgar' that way."

"Why, I've been *married* to Paul for years--he wouldn't think I--no matter what you told him, he couldn't conceive of my--"

Mrs. Lowder, as usual, found her brother's wife very diverting. "Of your doing a little hand-holding on the side? Oh, go on! Flirting's no crime! And you did--honest to goodness, you did, turn that old fellow's head. You ought to have seen the way he looked after you."

Lydia cut her off with a sharp "Oh, *don't!*" She was now sitting, still absently grasping the dust-cloth.

Madeleine stood for a moment looking at her in a meditative silence rather unusual for her. "Lydia, you don't look a bit well," she said kindly. "Are you still bothered with that nausea?" She sat down by her sister-in-law and put her arms around her with an impulse of affectionate pity that almost undid Lydia, always so helplessly responsive to tenderness. "What's the matter, Lyd?" Madeleine went on. "Something's not going just right. Are you scared about this second confinement? Is Paul being horrid about something? You just take my advice, and if you want anything out of him, you fight for it. Nobody gets anything in this world if they don't put up a fight for it."

Lydia began to say that there were some things which lost their value if obtained by fighting, but suddenly she stopped her faltering words, drew a long breath, and laid her head on the other's shoulder. More than wifely loyalty kept her silent. All her lifelong experience of Madeleine crystallized into a certainty of her limitations, and with this certainty came the realization that Madeleine stood for all the circle of people about her. Lydia had learned one lesson of life. She knew, she now knew intensely, that there was no cry by which she could reach the spiritual ear of the warm human beings so close to her in the body. She knew there was no language in which she could make intelligible her travail of soul. In the moment the two women sat thus, she renounced, once for all, any hope of outside aid in her perplexities. They lay between herself and Paul. She could hope to find expression and relief for them only through that unique privilege of marriage, utter intimacy.

She kissed her husband's sister gently, comforted somewhat by the mere fact of her presence. "You're good to bother about me, Maddely," she said, using a pet name of their common childhood. "I guess I'm not feeling very well these days. But that's to be expected."

"Well, I tell you what, I wouldn't be so patient about it as *you* are!" cried the other wife. "It's simply horrid to have all this a second time, and Ariadne so little yet. It's *mean* of Paul."

She continued voicing an indignant sympathy with her usual energy. Lydia looked at her with a vague smile. At the first words of the childless woman, she had been filled with the mother-hunger which gave savor to her life during those days. As Madeleine went on, she sat unheeding, lost in a fond impatience to feel the tiny body on her knees, the downy head against her cheek. Her arms ached with emptiness. For an instant, so vivid was her sense of it, the child seemed to be there, in her arms. She felt the eager tug of the soft lips at her breast. She looked down--"Well, anyhow, you poor, dear thing! I hope you will bottle-feed this one! It would be just a little *too* much if they made you nurse it!"

Lydia did not even attempt a protest. Her submissive, entire acceptance of spiritual isolation seemed an answer to many of the conflicting impulses which had hitherto distracted her. She wished that she could reassure Madeleine by telling her that she would never again make another "odd" speech to her. She renounced all common life except the childlike, harmless, animal-like one of mutual material wants, and this renunciation brought her already a peace which, though barren, was infinitely calming after her former struggling uncertainties. "How did those waists come out that you sent to the cleaner's, Madeleine?" she asked, in a bright, natural tone of interest. "I hope the blue one *didn't* fade."

Madeleine reported to her husband that Lydia had seemed in one of her queer notional moods at first, but cheered up afterward and talked more "like folks," and seemed more like herself than she had since her father died. They had a real good visit together she said, and she began to think she could get some good satisfaction out of having Lydia for a neighbor, after all.

But after Lydia was alone, there sprang upon her the terror of living on such terms with Paul. No, no! Never that! It would be dying by inches! Beaten back to this last inner stronghold of the dismantled castle of her ideals of life, she prepared to defend it with the energy of desperation.

She did not believe Madeleine's story, or, at least, not her interpretation of Paul's attitude, but she felt a dreary chill at his silence toward her. It seemed to her that their marriage ought to have brought her husband an irresistible impulse to have in all their relations with each other a perfect openness. She resolved that she would begin to help him to that impulse that very day; now, at once.

When Paul came in, he seemed abstracted, and went directly upstairs to pack a satchel, stating with his usual absence of explanatory comment that he was called to Evanston on business. He ate his dinner rather silently, glancing furtively at the paper. Only at the breakfast-table--such was their convention--did he allow himself to become absorbed in the news.

Ariadne prattled to her mother of her adventures in the kitchen, where Patsy O'Hern, 'Stashie's cousin Patsy, was visiting her, and he made Ariadne a "horse out of a potato and toothpicks for legs, and a little wagon out of a matchbox, and a paper doll to sit and drive, and Patsy was perfectly lovely, anyhow, and he was making such a lot of money every day, and, oh, he made the wheels out of potato, too, as round as could be he cut it, and he gave every cent of it to his grandmother and she loved him as much as she did 'Stashie, and wasn't it good to have 'Stashie back, and--"

Paul frowned silently over his pie.

"Come, dear; it's seven o'clock and bedtime," said Lydia, leading the little girl away.

When she came back she noticed by the clock that she had been gone almost half an hour. She was surprised to see Paul still in the dining-room, as though he had not stirred since she left him. He was sitting in an attitude of moody idleness, singular with him, his elbows on the table, his chin in his hands. He looked desperately, tragically tired.

No inward monitor gave any warning to Lydia of what the next few moments were to be in her life. She crossed the room quickly to her husband, feeling a great longing to be close to him.

As she did so, a rattling clatter of tin was heard from the kitchen, followed by a shout of roaring laughter. Something in Paul's tense face snapped. He started up, overturning his chair: "Oh, *damn* that idiot!" he cried.

The door opened behind them. 'Stashie stood there, her red hair hidden in a mass of soft dough that was beginning to ooze down over her perspiring, laughing face. "I just wanted to show you what a comical thing happened, Mis' Hollister," she began, in her familiar way. "'Twould make a pig laugh, now! I'd begun my bread dough, and put it on a shelf, an'--"

"Oh, get out of here!" Paul yelled at her furiously. "And less noise out of you in the kitchen!"

He slammed the door shut on her retreat, and turned to Lydia with a face she did not recognize. The room grew black before her eyes.

"I suppose you still prefer that dirty Irish slut to my wishes," he said.

His words, his accent, the quality of his voice, were the zigzag of lightning to his wife. The storm burst over her head like thunder.

She was amazed to feel a great wave of anger surge up in her, responsive to his own. She cried, in outraged resentment at his injustice: "You know very well--" and stopped, horrified at the passion which rose clamoring to her lips.

"I know very well that my home is the last place where my wishes are consulted," said Paul, catching her up.

"I will dismiss 'Stashie to-morrow," returned Lydia with a bitter, proud brevity.

"You're rather slow to take a hint. How long has she been with us? As for your saying that you can't get anyone else, and can't keep house decently as other decent people do, there isn't a word of truth in it! You can do whatever you care enough about to try to do. You didn't make an incompetent mess of taking care of the baby as you did out of that disgusting dinner party!"

It was the first time he had ever spoken outright to her of that experience. Lydia was transfixed to hear the poison of the memory as fresh in his voice as though it had happened yesterday.

"I'm simply not worth putting yourself out for," went on Paul, turning away and picking up his overcoat. "I'm only a common, ignorant, materialistic beast of an American husband!" He added in an insulting tone: "I suppose you'd like two husbands; one to earn your living for you, and one to talk to about your soul and to exchange near-culture with!"

He had not looked at Lydia as he poured out this sudden flood of acrimony, but at her quick, fierce reply, he faced her.

"I'd like *one* husband," she cried white with indignation.

"And I'd like a wife!" Paul flashed back at her hotly. "A wife that'd be a help and not a hindrance to everything I want to do--a wife that'd be loyal to me behind my back, and not listen to sneaking foreigners telling her that she's a misunderstood martyr--*martyr!*" His sense of injury exalted him. "Yes; all you American wives are martyrs, all right, I must say. While your husbands are working like dogs to make you money, you're sitting around with nothing to do but drink tea and listen to a foreigner who tells you--in summer time, while you're enjoying the cool breeze out here on a--maybe you think a dynamo-room's a funny place to be, with the thermometer standing at--what am I *doing* when I'm away from you? Enjoying myself, no doubt. Maybe you think it's enjoyment to travel all night on a--maybe you think it's nice to make yourself conspicuous with another man that's been abusing your--"

Lydia could hear no more for a loud roaring in her ears. She knew then the blackest moment of her life--a sickening scorn for the man before her. Madeleine had been right, then. They were of the same blood. His sister knew him better than--she, his wife, his wedded wife, was not to be spared the pollution of having her husband--

"I didn't take any stock in Madeleine's nasty insinuations about your flirting with him, of course, but it showed me what you've been thinking about me all this time I've been working like a--"

Lydia drew the first conscious breath since the beginning of this nightmare. The earth was still under her feet, struck down to it though she was. The roaring in her ears stopped. She heard Paul say:

"Maybe you think I'm made of iron! I tell you I'm right on my nerves every minute! Dr. Melton threatens me with a breakdown every time I see him!" There was a sort of angry pride in this statement. "I can't sleep! I'm doing ten men's work! And what do I get from you? Any rest? Any quiet? Why, these first years, when you might have made things easier for me by taking all other cares off my mind and leaving me free for business--they've actually been harder because of you!"

He thrust his arms into his overcoat and caught up his satchel. "I haven't wanted anything so hard to give! Good Lord! All I asked for was a well-kept house where I could invite my friends without being ashamed of it, and to live like other decent people!" He moved to the door, and put one hand, one strong, thin hand, on the knob. With the unearthly clearness of one in a terrible accident, Lydia noticed every detail of his appearance. He was flushed, a purple, congested color, singularly unlike his usual indoor pallor; hurried pulses throbbed visibly, almost audibly, at his temples; one eyelid twitched rapidly and steadily, like a clock ticking. With a gesture as automatic as drawing breath, he jerked out his watch and looked at it, apparently to make sure of catching his trolley, although his valedictory was poured out with such a passionate unpremeditation that the action must have been involuntary and unconscious. "But I don't even ask that now--since it doesn't suit you to bother to give it! All I ask now ought to be easy enough for any woman to do--not to *bother* me! Leave me alone! Keep your everlasting stewing and fussing and hysterical putting-on to yourself! I don't bother you with my affairs--I haven't, and I never will--why, for God's sake, can't you-- Some men marry women who help them, and pull with them loyally, instead of pulling the other way all the time! Such a woman would have made me a thousand times more successful than I--"

Lydia broke in with a loud voice of anguished questioning: "Do they make them better men?" she asked piercingly.

Her husband looked at her over his shoulder. "Oh, you and your goody-goody cant!" he said, and going out without further speech, closed the door behind him.

The clock struck the half-hour. Their conversation had lasted less than five minutes.

CHAPTER XXX

TRIBUTE TO THE MINOTAUR

The scene of Paul's departure was no worse than many an outbreak in the ordinary married life of ordinary, quick-tempered, over-tired married people, for whom an open quarrel brings relief like the clearing of the air after an electric storm, but to Lydia it was no such surface manifestation of nerves. The impulse that had made them both break out into the cruel words came from some long-gathering bitterness, the very existence of which was like the end of all things to her. A single flash of lightning had showed her to the edge of what a terrifying precipice they had strayed, and then had left her in darkness.

That was how it seemed to her; she was in the most impenetrable blackness, though the little girl played on beside her with a child's cheerful blindness to its elder's emotion, and Anastasia detected nothing but that her mistress had a better color than before and stepped about quite briskly.

It was the restless activity of a tortured animal which drove Lydia from one household task to another, hurrying her into a trembling physical exhaustion, which, however, brought with it no instant's cessation of the tumult in her heart. The night after Paul's departure was like a black eternity to her tuming wildly on her bed, or rising to walk as wildly about the silent house. "But I can't stand this!--to hate and be hated! I can not bear it! I must do something--but what? but what?" Once she feared she had screamed out these ever-recurring words, so audibly like a cry of agony did they ring in her ears; but, forcing herself to an instant's immobility, she heard Ariadne's light, regular breathing continue undisturbed.

She sat down on her bed and told herself that she would go out of her mind if she could not think something different from this chaos of angry misery. She fell on her knees, she sent her soul out in a supreme appeal for help and, still kneeling, she felt the intolerable tension within her loosen. She began to cry softly. The unnatural strength which had sustained her gave way; she sank together in a heap, her head leaning against the bed, her arms thrown out across it.

Here Anastasia found her the next morning, apparently asleep, although upon being called she seemed to come to herself from a deeper unconsciousness.

Whatever it had been, the hour or two of oblivion that lay back of her was like a wall between her soul and the worst phase of her suffering. In answer to her cry for help, perhaps an appeal to the best in her own nature, there had come a cessation of what was to her the only unbearable pain--the bitter, blaming anger which had flared up in her, answering her husband's anger like the reflection of a torch in a mirror. In that silent hour before dawn, she had seen Paul suddenly as a victim to forces outside himself quite as much as she was; poor, tired Paul, with his haggard face, flushed with a wrath that was not his own, but an involuntary expression of suffering, the scream of a man caught in the cogs of a great machine. She hung before her mental vision now, constantly, the picture of Paul as she had seen him when she came downstairs; Paul leaning his chin on his hands, his jaded face white and drawn under his thinning, graying hair.

The alleviation which came through this conception of her husband was tempered by the final disappearance of her old feeling that Paul was stronger, clearer-headed, than she, and that if she could but once make him stop and understand the forces in their life which she feared, he could conquer them as easily as he conquered obstacles in the way of their material success. She now felt that he was not even as strong as she, since he could not get even her faint glimpse of their common enemy, this Minotaur of futile materialism which had devoured the young years of their marriage and was now threatening to destroy the possibility of a great, strongly-rooted affection which had lain so clearly before them. She felt staggered by the responsibility of having to be strong enough for two; and as another day wore on this new preoccupation became almost as absorbing an obsession as her anger of the night before.

But this was steadying in the very velocity with which her mind swept around the circle of possible courses of action. Her thoughts hummed with a steady, dizzy speed around and around the central idea that something must be done and that she was now the only one to do it. 'Stashie thought to herself that she had never seen Mrs. Hollister look so well, her eyes were so bright, her cheeks so pink.

Lydia had set herself the task of getting down and sorting the curtains in the house, preparatory to sending them to the cleaner. Above the piles of dingy drapery, her face shone, as 'Stashie had noted, with a strange, feverish brightness. Her knees shook under her, but she walked about quickly. Ariadne ran in and out of the house, chirping away to her mother of various wonderful discoveries in the world of outdoors. Lydia heard her as from a distance, although she gave relevant answers to the child's talk.

"It has come down," she was saying to herself, "to a life-and-death struggle. It isn't a question now of how much of the best in Paul, in me, in our life, we can save. It's whether we can save *any*! How dirty lace curtains get! It must be the soft coal--yes, it is a life and death struggle--I must see to Ariadne's underwear. It is too warm for these sunny days.-- Oh! Oh! Paul and I have quarreled! And what about! About such sickeningly trivial things--how badly 'Stashie dusts! There are rolls of dust under the piano--but I thought people only quarreled--quarreled terribly--over great things: unfaithfulness, cruelty, differences in religion! Oh, if I only now had a religion, a religion which would--Yes, Ariadne; but only to the edge of the driveway and back. How muddy the driveway is! Paul said it should have more gravel--*Paul!* How *can* he come back to me after such--Madeleine says married people always quarrel--how can they look into each other's eyes again! We must escape that sort of life! We must! We *must!*"

The thought of what she had hoped from her marriage and of what she had, filled her with the most passionate self-reproach. It must be at least half her fault, since she and Paul made up but one whole. As she helped 'Stashie sort the dingy curtains, she was saying over and over to herself that she was responsible, responsible as much as for Ariadne's health. This conception so possessed her now that she felt herself able to accomplish anything, even the miracle needed.

To have achieved this state of passionate resolution gave her for a moment the sense of having started upon the straight road to escape from her nightmare; and for the first time since the door had slammed behind Paul she drew a long breath and was able to give more than a blind gaze to the world about her.

She noticed that, though it was after twelve o'clock, Ariadne had not been told to come to luncheon. When the little girl came running at her mother's call, her vivid face flushed with happy play, Lydia knew a throb of that exquisite, unreasoning parent's joy, lying too near the very springs of life for any sickness of the spirit to affect it. Like everything else, however, the touch of the child's tight-clinging arms about her neck brought her back to her preoccupation. Ariadne must not be allowed to grow up to such a regret as she felt, that she had never known her father. There were moments, she saw them clearly, when Paul realized with difficulty the fact of his daughter's existence, and he never realized it as a fact involving any need for a new attitude on his part.

"When is Daddy coming back to us *vis* time?" asked Ariadne over her egg.

Anastasia paused furtively at the door. She had had a divination of trouble in the last talk between her master and mistress. The door had slammed. Mr. Hollister had not called for the tie she was pressing for him in the kitchen--'Stashie

told herself fiercely that "killing wud be too good for her, makin' trouble like the divil's own!" She listened anxious for Lydia's answer.

"Daddy's coming back to us as soon as his business is done," said Paul's wife. At the turn of her phrase she turned cold, and added with a quick vehemence: "No, no! before that! Long before that!" She went on, to cover her agitation and get the maid out of the room, "'Stashie, get the baby a glass of milk."

"The front door bell's ringin'," said 'Stashie, departing in that direction, with the assurance of her own ability to choose the proper task for herself, so exasperating to her master.

She came back bringing Miss Burgess in her wake, Miss Burgess apologizing for "coming right *in*, that way," exclaiming effusively at the pretty picture made by mother and child,—"She must be such company for you, Miss Lydia"—Miss Burgess, deferential, sure of her own position and her hostess', and determinedly pleased with the general state of things. Lydia repressed a sigh of impatience, but, noting the tired lines in the little woman's face, told Anastasia to make another cup of tea for Miss Burgess and cook her an egg.

"Oh, delighted, I'm sure! Quite an honor to have the same lunch with little Miss Hollister."

Ariadne did not smile at this remark, though from the speaker's accent it was meant as a pleasantry.

Miss Burgess cast about in her mind for another bit of suitable badinage, but finding none, she began at once on the object of her visit.

"Now, my dear, I want you to listen to all I have to say before you make one objection. It's an idea of my very own. You'll let me get through without interruption?"

"Yes, oh, yes," murmured Lydia, lifting Ariadne down from her high-chair and untying the napkin from about her thin little neck.

The introduction of a new element in her surroundings had for a moment broken the thread of her exalted resolutions. She wondered with a sore heart, as though it had been a common lovers' quarrel, how she and Paul could ever get over the first sight of each other again. She was wondering how, with the most passionate resolve in the world, she could do anything at all under the leaden garment of physical fatigue which would weigh her down in the months to come.

Miss Burgess began in her best style, which she so evidently considered very good indeed, that she could not doubt Lydia's attention. It was all about a home for working-women she explained; a new charity which had come from the East, had caught on like anything among the Smart Set of Columbus, and was about to be introduced into Endbury. The most exclusive young people in Columbus—the East End Set (Miss Burgess had a genius for achieving oral capitalization) gave a parlor play for the first benefit there, in one of the Old Broad Street Homes, and they were willing to repeat it in Endbury to introduce it there. A Perfectly splendid crowd was sure to come, tickets could be Any Price, and the hostess who lent her house to it could have the glory of a most unique affair. Mrs. Lowder would be overwhelmed with delight to have the pick of the Society of the Capital at her house, but Miss Burgess had thought it such an opportunity for Miss Lydia to come out of mourning with, since it was for charity. She motioned Lydia, about to speak, sternly to silence: "You said you wouldn't interrupt! And you haven't let me say *half* yet! That's your side of it—the side your dear mother would think of if she were only here; but there's another side that you can't, you *oughtn't* to resist!" She finished her tea with a hasty swallow and, going around the table, sat down by Lydia, laying her hand impressively on the young matron's slim arm. "You're the sweetest thing in the world, of course, but, like other people of your fortunate class, you can't realize how perfectly awfully lucky you are, nor how unlucky *poor* people are! Of course it stands to reason that you can't even imagine the life of a working-woman—you, a woman of entire leisure, with every want supplied before you speak of it by a husband who adores you! Why, Miss Lydia, to give you some idea let me tell you just one little thing. Lots and lots of the working-women of Endbury live with their families in two or three rooms right on that horrid Main Street near their work because they can't afford *carfares*!"

Lydia looked at her without speaking. She remembered her futile, desperate, foolish proposition to Paul to get more time together by living near his work. With a roar, the flood of her bewilderment, diverted for a time, broke over her again. She braced herself against it. Through her companion's dimly-heard exhortations that, from her high heaven of self-indulgence, she stoop to lend a hand to her less favored sisters, she repeated to herself, clinging to the phrase as though it were a magic formula: "If I can only wish hard enough to make things better, nothing can prevent me."

The telephone bell rang, and Miss Burgess interrupted herself to say: "It's for me, I know. I told them at the office to call me up here." She got herself out of the room in her busy way, her voice soon coming in a faint murmur from the far end of the hall.

Lydia walked to the window to call Ariadne in to put on a wrap, the thought and action automatic. She had buttoned the garment about the child's slender body before she responded again to the little living presence. Then she took her in a close embrace. With the child's breath on her face, with her curls exhaling the fresh outdoor air, there came to pass

for poor Lydia one of the strange, happy mysteries of the contradictory tangle that is human nature. She had felt it often with Paul after one of their long separations--how mere physical presence can sometimes bring a consolation to the distressed spirit.

As she held her child to her heart, things seemed for a moment quite plain and possible. Why, Paul was Ariadne's father! As soon as he was with her again, all would be well. It must be. Nothing could separate her from the father of her baby! They were one flesh now. There was still all their lifetime to grow to be one in spirit. She had only to try harder. They had simply started on a false track. They were so young. So many years lay before them. There was plenty of time to turn back and start all over again--there was plenty of time to--

"Oh, my dear! my dear!" Miss Burgess faltered weakly into the room and sank upon a chair.

Lydia sprang up, Ariadne still in her arms, and faced her for a long silent instant, searching her face with passion. Then she set the little girl down gently. "Run out and play, dear," she said, and until the door had shut on the child she did not stir. Her hand at her throat, "Well?" she asked.

Miss Burgess began to cry into her handkerchief.

"It's Paul!" said Lydia with certainty. She sat down.

The weeping woman nodded.

"He has left me," Lydia continued in the same dry tone of affirmation. "I know. We had a quarrel, and he has left me."

Miss Burgess looked up, quite wild with surprise, her sobs cut short, her face twisted. "Oh, no--no--no!" she cried, running across the room and putting her arms about the other. "No; it's not that! He--he--the man who telephoned said they were testing the dynamo, and your husband insisted on--"

Lydia came to life like a swimmer emerging into the air after a long dive. "Oh, he's hurt! He's hurt!" she cried, bounding to her feet. "I must go to him. I must go to him!"

She tore herself away from the reporter and darted toward the door. The older woman ran after her, stumbling, sobbing, putting hands of imploring pity on her.

Although no word was spoken, Lydia suddenly screamed out as though she had been stabbed. "*NO! Not that!*" she cried.

"Yes, yes, my poor darling!" said the other.

Lydia turned slowly around. "Then it is too late. We never can do better," she said.

Miss Burgess tried helplessly to unburden her kind heart of its aching sympathy. "You spoke of a little disagreement, but, oh, my dear, don't let that be the last thought. Think of the years of perfect love and knowledge you had together."

"We never knew each other," said Lydia. Her voice did not tremble.

"Oh, don't! don't!" pleaded Miss Burgess, alarmed. "You mustn't let it unhinge you so! Such a perfect marriage!"

"We were never married," said Lydia. She leaned against the wall and closed her eyes.

"Oh, help! Someone!" called the poor reporter. "Somebody come quick."

Lydia opened her eyes. She spoke still in a low, steady voice, but in it now was a shocking quality from which the other shrank back terrified. "*I could have loved him!*" she said.

"Quick--'Stashie--hurry--keep the baby out of the room! Your mistress has fainted!"

BOOK IV

"BUT IT IS NOT TOO LATE FOR ARIADNE"

CHAPTER XXXI

PROTECTION FROM THE MINOTAUR

Dr. Melton burst open the door of the house in the Black Rock woods, and running to the owner caught hold of his

bared brown arm. "Paul Hollister is dead!" he cried.

"I read the papers," said Rankin, looking down at him without stirring.

"The damn fool!" cried the doctor, his face working. "Just now! There's another child expected."

Rankin's inscrutable gravity did not waver at this speech. He felt the hand that rested on his arm tremble, and he was thinking, as Judge Emery had so often thought, that perhaps one reason for the doctor's success in treating women was a certain community of too-responsive nerves. "You can hardly blame a man because the date of his death is inconvenient," he said reasonably. He drew up one of his deep chairs and pushed the doctor into it. "Sit down and get your breath. You look sick. How do you happen to be up so early? It's hardly daylight."

"Up! You don't suppose I've been to bed! Lydia--" His voice halted.

Rankin's quiet face stirred. "She feels it--terribly?"

"I can't make her out! I can't make her out!" The doctor flung this confession of failure before him excitedly. "I don't know what's in her mind, but she's evidently dangerously near--women in her condition never have a very settled mental poise, anyhow, and this sudden shock--they *telephoned* it--and there was nobody there but that fool Flora--"

"Do you mean that Mrs. Hollister is out of her mind?" asked Rankin squarely.

"I don't know! I don't know, I tell you! She says strange things--strange things. When I got there yesterday afternoon, she was holding Ariadne--you knew, didn't you? that she called their little girl Ariadne--?"

Rankin sat down, white to the lips. "No," he said, "I didn't know that. I never heard anything about--about her married life."

"Well, she was holding Ariadne as close as though she was expecting kidnapers. I came in and she looked up--God! Rankin, with what a face of fear! It wasn't grief. It was terror! She said: 'I must save the children--I mustn't let it get the children, too.' I asked her what she meant, and she went on in a whisper that fairly turned the blood backward in my veins, 'The Minotaur! He got Paul--I must hide the children from him!' And that's all she would say. I managed to put Ariadne to bed, though Lydia screamed at the idea of having her out of her sight, and I gave Lydia a bromide and made her lie down. I think she knew me--oh, yes, I'm sure she did--why, she seemed like herself in every way but that one--but all night long she has wakened at intervals with a shriek and would not be quieted until she had felt of Ariadne. Nothing I said has had the slightest effect. I'm at my wits' end! If she doesn't get quieted soon--I finally gave her an opiate--enough to drug her senseless for a time--I don't know what to do! I don't know what to do!" He dropped his head into his hands and sat silent, shivering.

Rankin was looking at him, motionless, his powerful hands gripping his knees. He did not seem to breathe at all.

The doctor sprang up and began to trot about, kicking at the legs of the furniture and biting his nails. "Yes, I can, too! I do blame him for the date of his death!" He went back angrily to an earlier remark. "Hollister killed himself as gratuitously as if he had taken a pistol! And he did it out of sheer, devilish vanity--ambition! He had worked himself almost insane, anyhow. I'd warned him that he must take it easy, get all the rest he could. His nerves were like fiddle-strings. And what did he do? Made a night trip to Evanston to superintend a job entirely outside his work. The inspector gave the machines the regular test; but Paul wasn't satisfied. Said they hadn't come up to what he'd guaranteed to get the contract; took charge of the test himself, ran the speed up goodness knows how high. The inspector said he warned him, but Paul had got going and nothing could stop him--speed-mad--efficiency-mad--whatever you call it. And at last the fly-wheel on the engine couldn't stand it. It went through four floors and tore a hole in the roof--they say, in their ghastly phrase, there isn't enough left of him for a funeral! The other men left widows and children, too, I suppose--Oh, damn! damn! damn!" He stopped short in the middle of the floor, his teeth chattering, his hand at his mouth.

Rankin's face showed that he was making a great effort to speak. "Would I be allowed to see her?" he asked finally.

The doctor spun round on him, amazed. "You? Lydia? Why in the world?"

"Perhaps I could quiet her. I have been able to quiet several delirious sick people when others couldn't."

"I don't even know she's delirious--that's what puzzles me. She seems--"

"Will you let me try?" asked Rankin again.

When they reached the house in Bellevue, Lydia was still in a heavy stupor, so Mrs. Sandworth told them, showing no surprise at Rankin's appearance. The two men sat down outside the door of her room to wait. It was a long hour they passed there. Rankin sat silent, holding on his knee little Ariadne, who amused herself quietly with his watch and the leather strap that held it. He took the back off, and let her see the little wheel whirring back and forth. His eyes never left the child's serious, rosy face. Once or twice he laid his large, work-roughened hand gently on her dark hair.

Dr. Melton fidgeted about, making excursions into the sick room and downstairs to look after his business by telephone, and, when he sat by the door, relieving his overburdened heart from time to time in some sudden exclamation. "Paul hasn't left a penny, of course," one of these ran, "and he hadn't finished paying for the house. But she'll come naturally to live with Julia and me." At these last words, in spite of his painful preoccupation, a tender look of anticipation lighted his face.

Again, he said: "What crazy notion can it be about the whatever-it-was getting Paul?" Later, "Was there ever such a characteristic death?" Finally, with a long sigh: "Poor Paul! Poor Paul! It doesn't seem more than yesterday that he was a little boy. He was a brave little boy!"

Mrs. Sandworth came to the door. "She's beginning to come to herself, I think. She stirs, and moves her hands about."

As she spoke, there was a scream from the bedroom: "My baby! My baby!"

Rankin sprang to his feet, holding Ariadne on one arm, and stepped quickly inside. "Here is the baby," he said in a quiet voice. "I was holding her all the time you slept. I will not let the Minotaur come near her."

Lydia looked at him long, with no sign of recognition. The room was intensely silent. A drop of blood showed on Dr. Melton's lower lip where his teeth gripped it.

"Nobody else sees it," said Lydia in a hurried, frightened tone. "They won't believe me when I say it is there. They won't take care of Ariadne. They can't--"

"I see it," Rankin broke in. He went on steadily: "I will take care that it does not hurt Ariadne."

"Do you promise?" asked Lydia solemnly.

"I promise," said Rankin.

Lydia looked about her wonderingly, with blank eyes. "I think, then, I will lie down and rest a little," she said, in a thin, weak voice. "I feel very tired. I can't seem to remember what makes me so tired." She sank back on the pillows and closed her eyes. Her face was like a sick child's in its appealing, patient look of suffering. She looked up at Rankin again. "You will not go far?" she asked.

"I shall be close at hand," he answered.

"You are very kind," murmured Lydia, closing her eyes again. "I am sorry to be so much trouble to you--but it is so important about Ariadne. I am sorry to be so--you are--very--"

Melton touched the other man's arm and motioned him to the door.

CHAPTER XXXII

AS ARIADNE SAW IT

All that day, the tall, ruddy-haired man in working clothes sat in the hall, within sight, though not within hearing, of the sick room, playing with the rosy child, and exerting all his ingenuity to invent quiet games that they could play there "where Muvver tan see us"; Ariadne soon learned the reason for staying in one place so constantly. She was very happy that day. Never in her life had she had so enchanting a playfellow. He showed her a game to play with clothespins and tin plates from the kitchen--why, it was so much fun that 'Stashie herself had to join in as she went past. And he told one story after another without a sign of the usual grown-up fatigue. They had their lunch there at the end of the hall, on the little sewing-table with two dolls beside them and the new man made Ariadne laugh by making believe feed the dolls out of her doll's tea-set.

It was a little queer, of course, to stay right there all the time, and to have Muvver staring at them from the bedroom at the other end of the hall, and not to be allowed to do more than tiptoe in once or twice and kiss her without saying a word; but when Ariadne grew confused with trying to think this out, and the little eyes drooped heavily, the new man picked her up and tucked her away in his arms so comfortably that, though she meant to reach up and feel if his beard felt as red as it looked, she fell asleep before she could raise her hand.

When she woke up it was twilight, but she was still in his arms. She stirred sleepily, and he looked down and smiled at her. His face looked like an old friend's--as though she had always known it. He had a friendly smile. She was very happy. Uncle Marius came toward them, teetering on his toes, the way he always did. "I think it's safe to leave now,

Rankin," he said. "She has fallen into a natural sleep."

The new man stood up, still holding Ariadne. How tall he was! She kept going up and up, and when she peered over his shoulder she found herself looking down on Uncle Marius' white head.

"How about to-morrow?" asked the new man.

"We'll see. We'll see," said Dr. Melton; and then they all went downstairs and had toast and boiled eggs for supper. Ariadne informed her companions, looking up from her egg with a yolky smile, "Daddy told Muvver the other day that 'Stashie had certainly learned to boil eggs something *fine*! And he laughed, but Muvver didn't. Was it a joke?"

"They are very good eggs indeed, and well boiled," the new man answered. She loved the way in which he conversed with her.

"Ought we to give her some idea?" asked the doctor in a low voice.

"I would wait until she asks," said the other.

But Paul's child never asked. Once or twice she remarked that Daddy was away longer than usual "*vis* time," but he had never been a very steadily recurrent phenomenon in her life, and soon her little brain, filled with new impressions, had forgotten that he ever used to come back.

There were many new impressions. A great deal was happening nowadays. Every morning something different, every day new people going and coming. Aunt Marietta, Auntie Madeleine, Uncle George from Cleveland, whom she'd seen only once or twice before, and Great-Aunt Hollister, whom she knew very well and feared as well as she knew her. After a time even the husbands began to appear, the husbands she had seen so rarely; Aunt Marietta's husband, and Aunt Madeleine's--fat, bald Mr. Lowder, who smelled of tobacco and soap and took her up on his lap--as much as he had--and gave her a big round dollar and kissed her behind her ear and smiled at her very kindly and held her very close. He said he liked little girls, and he wished Auntie Madeleine would get him one some day for a Christmas present. She informed him, filled with admiration at the extent of her own knowledge, that he couldn't get a Christmas present some day, but only just Christmas Day.

Mostly, however, they paid no attention to her, these many aunts and uncles who came and went. And, oddly enough, Uncle Marius always shut the door to Muvver's room when they came, and wouldn't let them, no matter how much they wanted to, go in and see Muvver, who was, she gathered, very sick. Ariadne didn't see, really, why they came at all, since they couldn't see Muvver and they certainly never so much as looked at 'Stashie, dear darling 'Stashie--more of a comfort these queer days than ever before--and they never, never spoke to the new man, who came and went as though nobody knew he was there. They would look right at him and never see him. Everything was very hard for a little girl to understand, and she dared ask no questions.

Everybody seemed to be very angry, and yet not at her. Indeed, she took the most prodigious care to avoid doing anything naughty lest she concentrate on herself this now widely diffused disapprobation. Never in her life had she tried so hard to be good, but nobody paid the least attention to her--nobody but the new man and 'Stashie, and they weren't the angry ones. The others stood about in groups in corners, talking in voices that started in to be low and always got loud before they stopped. Ariadne added several new words to her vocabulary at this time, from hearing them so constantly repeated. When her dolls were bad now, she shook them and called them "Indecent! indecent!" and asked them, with as close an imitation as she could manage, of Great-Aunt Hollister's tone, "What *do* you suppose people are thinking! What *do* you suppose people are thinking!" Or she knocked them into a corner and said "Shocking! Shocking!"

One day she stopped Uncle Marius, hurrying past her up the stairs, and asked him: "What are you thinking of, Uncle Marius?"

"What am I thinking of? What do you mean?" he repeated, his face and eyes twitching the way they did when he couldn't understand something right off.

"Why, Auntie Madeleine keeps asking everybody all the time, 'What *can* the doctor be thinking of?' I just wondered."

He bent to kiss her raspingly--there were stiff little stubby white hairs coming out all over his face--and he said, as he trotted on up the stairs, "I am thinking of making sure that you have a mother, my poor dear."

And then there was a bigger change one day. She went to bed in her own little crib, and when she woke up she wasn't there at all, but in a big bed in a room at Aunt Julia's; and Aunt Julia was smiling at her, and hugging her, and saying she was so glad she had come to live with her and Uncle Marius for a while. Ariadne found out that Uncle Marius had brought her and Muvver the night before in a carriage all the way from Bellevue. She regretted excessively that she had not been awake to enjoy the adventure.

At Aunt Julia's, things were quieter. All at once the other people, the other uncles and aunts, had disappeared. That, of

course, was because she and Muvver were at Aunt Julia's. She conceived of the house in Bellevue as still filled with their angry faces and voices, still echoing to "Indecent! indecent!" and "What *do* you suppose people are saying?"

There was a long, long time after this when nothing special happened. The new man continued to come here, and his visits were the only events in Ariadne's quiet days. Apparently he came to see Ariadne, for he never went to see Muvver at all, as he used to do in Bellevue. He took Ariadne out in the back yard as the weather began to get warmer, and showed her lots of outdoor plays. He was as nice as ever, only a good deal whiter; and that was odd, for they were now in May, and from playing outdoors all the time Ariadne herself was as brown as a berry. At least, that was what Aunt Julia said. Ariadne accepted it with her usual patient indulgence of grown-ups' mistakes. There was not, of course, a single berry that was anything but red or black, or at least a sort of blue, like huckleberries in milk. She and 'Stashie had gone over them, one by one; they knew.

Uncle Marius remembered to shave himself nowadays. In fact, everything was more normal. Ariadne began to forget about the exciting time in Bellevue. Muvver wasn't in bed all the time now, but sat up in a chair for part of the day and even, if one were ever so quiet, could listen to accounts of what happened in Ariadne's world and could be told how Aunt Julia said that 'Stashie was quite a help as second girl if you just remembered to put away the best china, and that they had had eight new cooks since Ariadne had been there, but the second *would* have stayed, only her mother got sick. The others just left. But Aunt Julia didn't mind. When there wasn't any cook, if it happened to be 'Stashie's day off, they all had bread and milk for supper, just as she had, and they let her set the table, and she could do it ever so well only she forgot *some* things, of course, and Uncle Marius never got mad. He just said he hoped eating bread and milk like her would make him as good as she was--and she *was* good--oh, Muvver, she was trying ever so hard to be good--

"Come, dear," said Aunt Julia, "Mother's getting tired. We'd better go."

It was only after she went away, sometimes only when she lay awake in her strange big bed, that Ariadne remembered that Muvver never said a word, but only smoothed her hair and kissed her.

She and the new man used to play out in the old grape-arbor in the back yard, and it was there, one day in mid-May, that Uncle Marius came teetering out and called the new man to one side, only Ariadne could hear what they said. Uncle Marius said: "It's no use, Rankin. It's a fixed idea with her. She isn't violent any more, but she hasn't changed. She is certainly a little deranged, but not enough for legal restraint. She could take Ariadne and disappear any day. I'm in terror lest she do that. I've no authority to prevent her. She won't talk to me freely about what she is afraid of. She doesn't seem to trust me--*me!*"

Ariadne found the conversation as dull as all overheard grown-ups' talk, and tried to busy herself with a corn-cob house the new man had been showing her how to build. Two or three times lately he had taken her out to his little house in the woods and showed her a lot of tools, and told her what they were for, and said if she were older he would teach her how to use them. Ariadne's head was full of the happy excitement of those visits. Corn-cob houses were for babies, she thought now.

After a time, Uncle Marius went away, slamming the front gate after him and stamping away up the street as though he were angry, only he did all kinds of queer things without being angry. In fact, she had never seen him angry. Perhaps he and Muvver were different from other people and never were.

She looked up with a start. The new man had come back to the arbor, but he did not look like play. He looked queer, so queer that Ariadne's sensitive lower lip began to tremble and the corners of her mouth to draw down. She could *not* remember having done anything naughty. She was frightened by the way he looked. And yet, he picked her up quite gently, and held her on his knee, and asked her if Muvver could walk about the house yet.

"Oh, yes," she told him, "and came down to dinner last night."

The new man put her down, and asked her with a "please" and "I'd be much obliged" as though she were a grown-up herself, if she would do something for him--go to Muvver and ask her if she felt strong enough to come down into the grape-arbor to see him. Tell her he had something very special to say to her.

Ariadne went, skipping and hopping in pleasurable excitement at her own importance, and returned triumphantly to say that Muvver said she would come. She wondered if he felt too grown-up for cob houses himself. He hadn't built it any higher when she was gone. He looked as if he hadn't even winked. While she stood wondering at his silence, his face got very white. He stood up looking toward the house. Muvver was coming out, very slowly, leaning on the railing to the steps--Muvver in the nightgown dress Aunt Julia had made her, only it wasn't really nightgown, because it was all over lace--Muvver with her hair in two braids over her shoulders and all mussed up where she'd been lying down. Ariadne wondered that she hadn't smoothed it a little. She knew what people would say to *her* if she came around with her hair looking like that.

The man went forward to meet Muvver, and gave her his hand, and they neither of them smiled or said how do you do,

but came back together toward the arbor. And when they got there Muvver sat down quick, as though she were tired, and laid her head back against the chair. The man lifted Ariadne up and kissed her--he had never done that before. Now she knew how his beard felt--very soft. She felt it against her face for a long time. And he told her to go into the house to 'Stashie.

So she went. Ariadne always did as she was told. 'Stashie was trying to make some ginger cookies, and the oven "jist would *not* bake thim," she said. They were all doughy when they came out, very much as they were when they went in; but the dough was deliciously sweet and spicy. 'Stashie and Ariadne ate a great deal of it, because 'Stashie knew very well from experience that the grown-ups have an ineradicable prejudice against food that comes out of the oven "prezackly" the way it went in.

After that they had to wash their hands, all sticky with dough, and after that 'Stashie took Ariadne on her lap and told her Irish fairy stories, all about Cap O'Rushes and the Leprechaun, till they were startled by the boiling over of the milk 'Stashie had put on the stove to start a pudding. 'Stashie certainly did have bad luck with her cooking, as she herself frequently sadly admitted.

But, oh! wasn't she darling to Ariadne! It made the lonely little girl warm all over to be loved the way 'Stashie loved her. Sometimes when Ariadne woke up with a bad dream it was 'Stashie who came to quiet her, and she just hugged her up close, close, so that she could feel her heart go thump, thump, thump. And she always, always had time to explain things. It was wonderful how much time 'Stashie had for that--or anything else Ariadne needed.

She was putting more milk on the stove when in dashed Uncle Marius, his mouth wide open and his hands jumping around. "Where's your mother? Where's Mrs. Hollister?" he cried.

"Out in the arbor," said Ariadne.

"Alone?"

"Oh, no--" Ariadne began to explain, but the doctor had darted to the window. You could see the grape-arbor plainly from there--Muvver sitting with her hair all mussed up around her face, listening to the new man, who sat across the table from her and talked and talked and talked, and never moved a finger. Uncle Marius put his hand up quick to his side and said something Ariadne couldn't catch. She looked up, saw his face, and ran away, terrified, to hide her face in 'Stashie's dirty apron. Now she knew how Uncle Marius looked when he was angry. She heard him go out and down the steps, and went fearfully to watch him. He went across the grass to the arbor. The others looked toward him without moving, and when he came close and leaned against the table, Muvver looked up at him and said something, and then leaned back again, her head resting against the chair, her eyes closed, her hands dropped down. How tired Muvver always looked!

And just then 'Stashie spilled all the cocoa she was going to use to flavor the pudding with. She spilled it on the stove, and it smoked and stinked--there was nobody nowadays to forbid Ariadne to use 'Stashie's words--and 'Stashie said there wasn't any more and they'd have to go off to the grocery-store to get some, and if Ariadne knew where that nickel was Mis' Sandworth give her, they could get a soda-water on the way, and with two straws it would do for both.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHAT IS BEST FOR THE CHILDREN?

Lydia lifted her face, white under the shadow of her disordered hair, and said: "It is Mr. Rankin who must take care of the children--Ariadne, and the baby if it lives."

She spoke in a low, expressionless voice, as though she had no strength to spare. Dr. Melton's hand on the table began to shake. He answered: "I have told you before, my dear, that there is no reason for your fixed belief that you will not live after the baby's birth. You must not dwell on that so steadily."

Lydia raised her heavy eyes once more to his. "I want him to have the children," she said.

The doctor took a step or two away from the table. He was now shaking from head to foot, and when he came back to the silent couple and took a chair between them he made two or three attempts at speech before he could command his voice. "It is very hard on me, Lydia, to--to have you turn from me to a--to a stranger." His voice had grotesque quavers.

Lydia raised a thin, trembling hand, and laid it on her godfather's sinewy fingers. She tried to smile into his face. "Dear Godfather," she said wistfully, "if it were only myself--but the children--"

"What do you mean, Lydia? What do you mean?" he demanded with tremulous indignation.

She dropped her eyes again and drew a long, sighing breath. "I haven't strength to explain to you all I mean," she said gently, "and I think you know without my telling you. You have always known what is in my heart."

"I had thought there was some affection for me in your heart," said the doctor, thrusting out his lips to keep them from trembling.

Lydia's drooping position changed slightly. She lifted her hands and folded them together on the table, leaning forward, and bending full on the doctor the somber intensity of her dark, deep-sunken eyes. "Dear Godfather, I have no time or strength to waste." The slowness with which she chose her words gave them a solemn weight. "I cannot choose. If it hurts you to have me speak truth, you must be hurt. You know what a failure I have made of my life, how I have missed everything worth having--"

Dr. Melton, driven hard by some overmastering emotion, drew back, and threw aside precipitately the tacit understanding he and Lydia had always kept. "Lydia, what are you talking about! You have been more than usually favored--you have been loved and cherished as few women--" His voice died away under Lydia's honest, tragic eyes.

She went on as though he had not spoken. "My children must know something different. My children must have a chance at the real things. If I die, who can give it to them? Even if I live, shall I be wise enough to give them what I had not wisdom or strength enough to get for myself?"

"You speak as though I were not in the world, Lydia," the doctor broke in bitterly, "or as though you hated and mistrusted me. Why do you look to a stranger to--"

"Could you do for my children what you have not done for yourself?" she asked him earnestly. "How much would you see of them? How much would you know of them? How much of your time would you be willing to sacrifice to learn patiently the inner lives of two little children? You would be busy all day, like the other people I know, making money for them to dress like other well-to-do children, for them to live in this fine, big house, for them to go to expensive private schools with the children of the people you know socially--for them to be as much as possible like the fatherless child I was."

Lydia clenched her thin hands and went on passionately: "I would rather my children went ragged and hungry than to be starved of real companionship."

The doctor made a shocked gesture. "But, Lydia, someone must earn the livings. You are--"

Lydia broke in fiercely: "They are not earning livings--they are earning more dresses and furniture and delicate food than their families need. They are earning a satisfaction for their own ambitions. They are willing to give their families anything but time and themselves."

"Lydia! Lydia! I never knew you to be cruel before! They can not help it--the way their lives are run. It's not that they wish to--they can not help it! It is against an economic law you are protesting."

"That economic law has been broken by *one* person I know," said Lydia, "and that is the reason I--"

The doctor flushed darkly. The tears rose to his eyes. "Lydia, oh, my dear! trust me--trust me! I, too, will--I swear I will do all that you wish--don't turn away from me--trust me--!"

Lydia's mouth began to quiver. "Ah! don't make me say what must sound so cruel!"

The doctor stared at her hard. "Make you say, you mean, that you *don't* trust me."

She drew a little, pitiful breath, and turned away her head. "Yes; that is what I mean," she said. She went on hurriedly, putting up appealing hands to soften her words, "You see--it's the children--I *must* do what is best for them. It must be done once for all. Suppose you found you couldn't now, after all these years, turn about and be different? Suppose you found you couldn't arrange a life that the children could be a part of, and help in, and really do their share and live with you. You *mean* to--I'm sure you mean to! But you never *have* yet! How dare I let you try if you are not sure? I can't come back if I am dead, you know, and make a new arrangement. Mr. Rankin has proved that he can--"

At the name, the doctor's face darkened. He shot a black look at the younger man sitting beside him in his strange silence. "What has Rankin done?" he asked bitterly. "I should say the very point about him is that he has done nothing."

"He has tried, he has tried, he is trying," cried Lydia, beating her hands on the table. "Think! Of all the people I know, he is the only one who is even trying. That was all I wanted myself. That is all I dare ask for my children--a chance to try."

"To try what?" asked the doctor challengingly.

"To try not to have life make them worse instead of better. That's not much to ask--but nobody I know, but one only

has--"

"Simplicity and right living don't come from camping out in a shed," said the doctor angrily. "Externals are nothing. If the heart is right and simple--"

"If the heart is right and simple, nothing else matters. That is what I say," answered Lydia.

Dr. Melton gave a gesture of cutting the question short. "Well, of course it's quite impossible! Rankin can't possibly have any claim on your children in the event of your death. Think of all your family, who would be--"

"*I think of them,*" said Lydia with an accent so strange that the doctor was halted. "Oh, I have thought of them!" she said again. She put her hands over her eyes. "Could I not make a will, and appoint as guardian--" she began to ask.

Dr. Melton cut her short with a sound like a laugh, although his face was savage. "Did you never hear of wills being contested? How long do you suppose a will you make under the present circumstances would stand against an attack on it by your family and the Hollisters, with their money and influence!"

"Oh! Oh!" moaned Lydia, "and I shall not be here to--"

Rankin stirred throughout all his great height and broke his silence. He said to Lydia: "There is some way--there must be some way. I will find it."

Lydia took down her hands and showed a face so ravaged by the emotions of the colloquy that the physician in her godfather sprang up through the wounded jealousy of the man. "Lydia, my dear, you must stop--this is idiotic of me to allow you--not another word. You must go into the house this instant and lie down and rest--"

He bent over her with his old, anxious, exasperated, protecting air. Lydia seized his hands. Her own were hot and burning. "Rest! I can't rest with all this unsettled! I go over and over it--how can I sleep! How can you think that your little opiates will make me forget that my children may be helpless, with no one to protect them--" She looked about her wildly. "Why, little Ariadne may be given to *Madeleine!*" Her horrified eyes rested again on her godfather. She drew him to her. "Oh, help me! You've always been kind to me. Help me now!"

There was a silence, the two exchanging a long gaze. The man's forehead was glistening wet. Finally, his breath coming short, he said: "Yes; I will help you," and, his eyes still on hers, put out a hand toward Rankin.

The younger man was beside them in a stride. He took the hand offered him, but his gaze also was on the white face of the woman between them. "We will do it together," he told her. "Rest assured. It shall be done."

The corners of Lydia's mouth twitched nervously. "You are a good man," she said to her godfather. She looked at Rankin for a moment without speaking, and then turned toward the house, wavering. "Will you help me back?" she said to the doctor, her voice quite flat and toneless; "I am horribly tired."

When the doctor came back again to the arbor, Mrs. Sandworth was with him, her bearing, like his, that of a person in the midst of some cataclysmic upheaval. It was evident that her brother had told her. Without greeting Rankin, she sat down and fixed her eyes on his face. She did not remove them during the talk that followed.

The doctor stood by the table, drumming with his fingers and grimacing. "You must know," he finally made a beginning with difficulty, "I don't know whether you realize, not being a physician, that she is really not herself. She has for the present a mania for providing as she thinks best for her children's future. Of course no one not a monomaniac would so entirely ignore your side, would conceive so strange an idea. She is so absorbed in her own need that she does not realize what an unheard-of request she is making. To burden yourself with two young children--to mortgage all your future--"

Rankin broke in with a shaking voice and a face of exultation: "Good God, Doctor! Don't grudge me this one chance of my life!"

The doctor stared, bewildered. "What are you talking about?" he asked.

"About myself. I don't do it often--let me now. Do you think I haven't realized all along that what you said of me is true--that I have done nothing? Done nothing but succeed smugly in keeping myself in comfort outside the modern economic treadmill! What else could I do? I'm no orator, to convince other people. I haven't any universal panacea to offer! I'm only an inarticulate countryman, a farmer's son, with the education the state gives everyone--who am I, to try to lead? Apparently there was nothing for me to do but ignobly to take care of myself--but now, God be thanked! I have my chance. Someone has been hurt in their infernal squirrel-cage, and I can help--"

The older man was looking at him piercingly, as though struck by a sudden thought. He now cut him short with, "You're not deceiving yourself with any notion that she--"

The other answered quickly, with a smile of bitter humility: "You have seen her look at me. She does not know whether I

am a human being or not--I am to her any strong animal, a horse, an ox--any force that can carry Ariadne safely!" He added, in another tone, his infinitely gentle tone: "I see in that the extremity of her anxiety."

The doctor put his hand on the other man's powerful arm. "Do you realize what you are proposing to yourself? You are human. You are a young man. Are you strong enough to keep to it?"

Rankin looked at him. Mrs. Sandworth leaned forward.

"I am," said Rankin finally.

The words echoed in a long silence.

The younger man stood up. "I am going to see a lawyer," he announced in a quiet voice of return to an everyday level. "Until then, we have all more to think over than to talk about, it seems to me."

After he had left them the brother and sister did not speak for a time. Then the doctor said, irritably: "Julia, say something, for Heaven's sake. What did you think of what he said?"

"I didn't hear what he said," answered Mrs. Sandworth; "I was looking at him."

"Well?" urged her brother.

"He is a good man," she said.

A sense that she was holding something in reserve kept him silent, gazing expectantly at her.

"How awfully he's in love with her!" she brought out finally. "That's the whole point. He's in love with her! All this talk about 'ways of living' and theories and things that they make so much of--it just amounts to nothing but that he's in love with her."

"Oh, you sentimental idiot!" cried the doctor. "I hoped to get some sense out of you."

"That's sense," said Mrs. Sandworth.

"It hasn't anything to do with the point! Why, as for that, Paul was in love with--"

"He was *not*!" cried Mrs. Sandworth, with a sudden loud certainty.

The doctor caught her meaning and considered it frowningly. When he spoke, it was to burst out pathetically: "*I have loved her all her life.*"

"Oh, you!" retorted his sister, with a sad conclusiveness.

Ariadne came running out to them. "I just went to look into Muvver's room, and she was sound asleep! Honest! She was!"

The child had heard enough of the doctor's long futile struggles with the horrors of Lydia's sleepless nights to divine that her news was important. She was rewarded with a startled look from her elders. "Come!" said the doctor.

They went into the house, and silently to Lydia's half-open door. She lay across the bed as she had dropped down when she came in, one long dark braid hanging to the floor. They stood looking at her almost with awe, as though they were observing for the first time the merciful miracle of sleep. Her bosom rose and fell in long, regular breaths. The drawn, haggard mask that had overlain her face so many months was dissolved away in an utter unconsciousness. Her eyelashes lay on a cheek like a child's; her mouth, relaxed and drooping, fell again into the lines they had loved in her when she was a little girl. She looked like a little girl again to them.

Mrs. Sandworth's hand went to her throat. She looked at her brother through misty eyes. He closed the door gently, and drew her away, making the gesture of a man who admits his own ignorance of a mystery.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THROUGH THE LONG NIGHT

"They must have gone crazy, simply crazy!" said Madeleine, making quick, excited gestures. "Mrs. Sandworth, of course--a person can hardly blame her for anything! She's a cipher with the rim off when the doctor has made up his mind. But, even so, shouldn't you think in common decency she'd have let us know what they were up to in time to

prevent it? *I* never heard a word of this sickening business of Ariadne's adoption till day before yesterday. Did *you*?" she ended half-suspiciously.

Mrs. Mortimer stopped her restless pace up and down the old-fashioned, high-ceilinged room, and made a gesture for silence. "I thought I heard something--up there," she explained, motioning to the upper part of the house. "I wonder what made Lydia so sure beforehand that she wouldn't live through this?"

"Well, I guess from what the nurse told me there *isn't* much chance for her," said Madeleine in a hard voice. Her color was not so high as usual, her beautiful face looked grim, and she spoke in a bitter tone of seriousness that made her seem quite another person. Marietta's thin, dark countenance gave less indication of her mood, whatever it was. She looked sallow and worn, and only her black eyes, hot and gloomy, showed emotion.

Both women were silent a moment, listening to the sound of footsteps overhead. "It seems as though it *must* be over soon now!" cried the childless one of the two, drawing in her breath sharply. "It makes me furious to think of women suffering so. Bertha Williamson was telling me the other day about when her little Walter was born--it made me *sick*!"

The matron looked at her and shivered a little, but made no response.

"The nurse says Lydia is mostly unconscious now. Perhaps the worst is over for her! Poor Lyd! What do you suppose made her act so?" went on Madeleine, moving about restlessly, her voice uncertain. She went to the window, and drew aside the shade to look out into the blackness. "Oh, I wish the men would come! What time is it, do you suppose? Yes, I see; half-past three. Oh, it *must* be over soon! I wish they'd come! You telegraphed George, didn't you? Heavens! how it rains!"

"He was to come on the midnight train. Is your husband--"

"Oh, he was horrid about it--wanted me to do it all myself. He's in the midst of some big deal or other. But I told him he'd *have* to come and help out, or I'd--I'd *kill* him! He'll bring the lawyer."

"Where do you suppose?" began Marietta, looking over her shoulder.

"Out in his shanty in the Black Rock woods," said Madeleine harshly, "with no idea of what's going on. Just before you came, the doctor sent out for a messenger to take him word, and you'd better believe I got hold of that messenger!"

"Of course that'll make things easier," said Marietta.

"Oh, it won't be hard at all," Madeleine assured her; "the lawyer'll be right at hand; it'll be over in a minute."

Marietta's face altered. She drew back from the other woman. "Oh, Madeleine! you act as though--you were counting on Lydia's--"

"No; I'm not. I used to think a lot of Lydia before she disgraced poor Paul's memory in this way! But you see it'll be easy to do, one way or the other. If she--if she doesn't--why, Marietta, you know Lydia! She never can hold out against you and George, the nearest she has in the world. I should think you'd feel awfully about what people are saying--her letting Ariadne be adopted in that scandalous way when she had brothers and sisters. I should think you'd feel like asserting yourselves. *I* do, certainly! I'm just as near to Ariadne as you are! And I know George is perfectly furious about the whole business!"

"But maybe the doctor won't let us go in, right in to her--"

A long-cherished grudge rose to the surface in Mrs. Lowder's energetic reply: "Well, I guess this is one time when the high-and-mighty Dr. Melton'll have to be shoved on one side, and if necessary I'll do the shoving!"

"You feel justified?"

"Justified! I should think I do! Justified in keeping my brother's child out of the clutches of that--and if my husband and your brother together can't raise the cash and the pull to get Ariadne away from him, too, I miss my guess. They will; of course they will, or what's the use of having money when you go to law!"

Marietta was silent. Madeleine took her lack of responsiveness as due to the resentment of a poor person to her remarks as to the value of wealth in a democracy. She frowned, regretting a false step, and went on conciliatorily: "Of course we're only doing what any decent family is bound to do--protecting the children. It's what Lydia herself would want if she were in her right mind."

She fell silent now, restless, fidgeting about, picking up small objects and setting them down unseeingly, and occasionally going to the window to look out at the hot, rainy night. She was in mourning for Paul, and above her black draperies her face was now like marble.

Mrs. Mortimer, also in black, sat in a determinedly passive silence.

Finally, the younger woman broke out: "Oh, I'll go crazy if I just stay here! I'm going upstairs to see the nurse again."

In an instant she was back, her face whiter than before.

"It's a boy--alive, all right--half an hour ago. Would you think they'd let us sit here and never tell us--" Her voice changed. "A little boy--" She sat down.

"How is Lydia?" asked Lydia's sister.

"--a little boy," said Madeleine. She addressed the other woman peremptorily. "I want him! You can have Ariadne!" She flushed as she spoke, and added defiantly: "I know I always said I didn't want children!"

"How is Lydia?" Marietta broke in with an angry impatience.

"Very low, the nurse said; Dr. Melton wouldn't give any hope."

Marietta's face twitched. Her large white hands clasped each other hard.

"I'm going into the doctor's office to telephone my husband," went on Madeleine; "there's not a minute to lose."

After she was alone, Mrs. Mortimer's thin, dark face settled into tragic repose. She leaned back her head and closed her eyes, from which a slow tear ran down over her sallow cheeks. There was no sound but the patter of summer rain on the porch roof outside.

Firm, light steps came hastily to the outer door, the door clicked open and shut, the steps came down the hall. Mrs. Mortimer sat up and opened her eyes. She saw a tall man in rough clothes, hatless, with raindrops glistening on his bright, close-cropped hair and beard. He was hesitating at the foot of the stairs, but at her slight movement he caught sight of her and rushed toward her. "Has she--is there--" he began.

Mrs. Mortimer gazed intently into his quivering face. "My sister has given birth to a son, and lies at the point of death," she said with her unsparing conciseness, but not harshly.

The man she addressed threw up one hand as though she had struck him, and took an aimless, unsteady step. Mrs. Mortimer did not turn away her eyes from the revelation of his face. Her own grew sterner. She was trying to bring herself to speak again. She put her hand on his arm to attract his attention, and looked with a fierce earnestness into his face. "Listen," she said. "We were wrong, all of us, about Lydia. We were wrong about everything. You were right. I wanted to tell you. If my sister had lived--she is so young--I hoped--" She turned away to hide the sudden break-up of her rigid calm. "Little Lydia!" she cried. "Oh, misery! misery!"

Behind them was the sound of a shutting door and a key turned in the lock. They both spun about and saw Mrs. Lowder slip the key into the bosom of her dress. Her aspect of white determination suited this theatrical gesture, as she placed herself quickly before the door. "If you will promise me solemnly that you will leave the house at once, I will let you out," she said, in a high, shaking voice.

Rankin did not answer. He looked at her as though he did not see her.

"What business have you here, anyhow?" she went on fiercely.

"I am here to adopt Mrs. Hollister's second child," stated Rankin, collecting himself with an effort.

Mrs. Lowder's pale face flushed. "You'll do nothing of the sort. I shall adopt my brother's child myself! How *dare* you--a perfect stranger--"

"Mrs. Hollister wishes it," said Rankin.

"Lydia is out of her mind--if she is alive!" said Madeleine, trembling excitedly, "and the child's own relatives are the proper--you needn't think you are going to keep Ariadne, either! It can be proved in any court that Lydia was crazy, and that her family are the ones that ought to--"

"That will be decided in the future," said Rankin. "For the present I have a legal right to Ariadne, and I shall have to the boy!"

"Do you mean you would dare to lay hands on a woman?" cried Madeleine, extending her arms across the door.

Rankin turned, and in one stride had reached the window, which stood open to the hot, rainy summer night. He was gone in an instant.

"Quick! quick! Lock the front door!" cried Madeleine, fumbling with the key. She turned it and darted into the hallway, and fell back, crying angrily: "Oh, no! there's the back door--and the doctor's office and all the windows. It's no use! It's no use!" She broke into a storm of sobs. "You didn't help a bit!" she cried furiously to the other woman. "You didn't even try to help!"

It was an accusation against which Marietta did not attempt to defend herself.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE SWAYING BALANCE

Dr. Melton was at the top of the stairs as the other man came bounding up. "Where in God's name have you been?" he demanded. "Did you start as soon as my messenger--"

"No messenger came--only 'Stashie just now. I started the instant she--"

"Have you the paper--the contract--whatever it--"

Rankin showed a flash of white in his pocket. "Is she able to sign it?"

"Oh, she *must!* She won't have an instant's peace until she does. She has been wild because you were so late in--"

Their hurried, broken colloquy was cut short by a nurse who came to Dr. Melton, saying, "The patient is always asking if the gentleman who is to--"

"Yes, yes; he is here." The doctor motioned her to precede them. "Go in; you're needed as a witness."

He held Rankin back an instant at the door. "Remember! No heroics! Just have the signing done as quickly as possible and get out!" His little wizened face looked ghastly in the dim light of the hall, but his voice was firm, and his hand did not tremble.

Rankin followed him into the bedroom, which was filled with a strong odor of antiseptics. The nurse turned on the electric light, shading it with her hand so that the light fell only on the lower part of the bed, leaving Lydia's head in the shadow.

She lay very straight and stark, as though, thought Rankin despairingly, she were already dead. Her right arm was out over the sheet, her thin hand nerveless. Her face was very white, her lips swollen and bleeding as though she had bitten them repeatedly. She was absolutely motionless, lying on her back with closed eyes. At the slight sound made by the men in entering, she opened her eyes and looked at them. Every vestige of color dropped out of Rankin's face. Her eyes were alive, sane, exalted--Lydia's own eyes again.

He was holding the paper open in his hand, and without a word knelt down by the bed, offering it to her mutely. Their eyes met in a long gaze. The doctor and nurse looked away from this mute communion. Rankin put a pen in Lydia's fingers and held up the paper. With, a faint, sighing breath, loud in the silent room, she raised her hand. It fell to the bed again. Dr. Melton then knelt beside her, put his own sinewy, corded fingers around it and guided it to the paper. The few lines were traced. Lydia's hand dropped and her eyes closed. Rankin stood up to go.

The nurse turned off the light and the room was again in a half obscurity, the deep, steady voice of the rain coming in through the open windows, the sweet summer-night smells mingling with the acrid odor of chemicals, Lydia lying straight and stark under the sheet--but now her eyes were open, shining, fixed on Rankin. Their light was the last he saw as he closed the door behind him.

After a time the doctor came out and joined Rankin waiting at the head of the stairs. He looked very old and tired, but the ghastly expression of strain was replaced with a flickering restlessness. He came up to Rankin, blinking rapidly, and touched him on the arm. "Look here!" he whispered. "Her pulse has gone down from a hundred and fifty to a hundred and thirty."

He sat down on the top step, clasped his hands about his knees, and leaned his white head against the balustrade. He looked like some small, weary, excited old child. "Lord, Rankin! Sit down when you get a chance!" he whispered. "If you'd been through what I have! And you needn't try to get me to add another word to what I've just told you. I don't dare! It may mean nothing, you know. It may very likely mean nothing. Good Heavens! The mental sensitiveness of women at this time! It's beyond belief. I never get used to the miracle of it. Everything turns on it--everything! If the pulse should go down ten more now, I should--Oh, Heaven bless that crazy Celt for getting you here! Good Lord! If you hadn't come when you did! I don't see what could have become of the messenger I sent--why, hours ago--I knew that nothing could go right if you weren't--is that the door?" He sprang up and sank back again--"I told the nurse to report as soon as there was any change--I was afraid if I stayed in the room she would feel the twitching of my damned nerves--yes, really--it's so--she's in a state when a feather's weight--suppose 'Stashie hadn't brought you! I couldn't have kept Madeleine off much longer--God! if *Madeleine* had gone into that room, I--Lydia--but nobody told 'Stashie to go! It must have been an inspiration. I thought of course my messenger--I was expecting you every instant. She's been crouching out here in the hall all night, not venturing even to ask a question, until I caught sight of her eyes--she loves Lydia too! I told her then the baby had come and that her mistress had no chance unless you were here. She must have--when did she--"

Rankin gave a sound like a sob, and leaned against the wall. He had not stirred before since the doctor's first words. "You don't mean there's *hope*?" he whispered, "any hope at all?"

The doctor sprang at him and clapped his hand over his mouth. "I didn't say it! I didn't say it!"

The door behind them opened, and the nurse stepped out with a noiseless briskness. The doctor walked toward her steadily and listened to her quick, low-toned report. Then he nodded, and she stepped back into the bedroom and shut the door. He stood staring at the floor, one hand at his lips.

Rankin made an inarticulate murmur of appeal. His face glared white through the obscurity of the hall.

The older man went back to him, and looked up earnestly into his eyes. "Yes; there's every hope," he said. He added, with a brave smile: "For you and Lydia there's every hope in the world. For me, there's the usual lot of fathers."

CHAPTER XXXVI

ANOTHER DAY BEGINS

They started. From below came a wail of fright. As they listened the sound came nearer and nearer. "That's Ariadne--a bad dream--get her quiet, for the Lord's sake."

"Where is she sleeping?"

"In the room next the parlor."

Rankin gave an exclamation, and leaped down the stairs. At the foot he was met by a little figure in sleeping-drawers. "Favver! Favver!" she sobbed, holding up her arms.

Rankin caught her up and held her close. "You promised you wouldn't get so afraid of dreams, little daughter," he said in a low, tender voice of reproach.

"But this was a nawful one!" wept Ariadne. "I fought I heard a lot of voices, men's and ladies' as mad--Oh! awful mad--and loud!" She went on incoherently that she had been too frightened to stir, even though after a while she dreamed that the front door slammed and they all went away. But then she was *too* frightened, and came out to find Favver.

Rankin took her back to her bed, and sat down beside it, keeping one big hand about the trembling child's cold little fingers. "It was only a bad dream, Ariadne. Just go to sleep now. Father'll sit here till you do."

"You won't let them come back?" asked the child, drawing long, shaken breaths.

"No," he said quietly.

"You'll always be close, to take care of me?"

"Yes, dear."

"And of Muvver and 'Stashie?"

There was a pause.

Ariadne spoke in grieved astonishment. "Why, of *course* of Muvver and 'Stashie, Favver."

Rankin took a sudden great breath. "I hope so, Ariadne."

"Well, you *can* if you want to," the child gravely gave her assent.

She said no more for a time, clutching tightly to his hand. Then, "Favver:"

"Yes, dear."

"I fink I could go to sleep better if I had my bunny."

"Yes, dear," said the man patiently; "where is he?"

"I fink he's under ve chair where my clothes are--ve *big* chair. 'Stashie lets me put my clothes on ve biggest chair."

The man fumbled about in the dark. Then, "Here's your bunny, Ariadne."

The child murmured something drowsily unintelligible. The man took his seat again by the bed. There was a pause. The child's breathing grew long and regular. The rain sounded loud in the silence.

In the distance a street-car rattled noisily by. Ariadne started up with a scream: "Favver! Favver!"

"Right here, dear. Just the trolley-car."

"It 'minded me of ve mad ladies' voices," explained Ariadne apologetically, breathing quickly. She added: "Vat was such a *nawful* dream, Favver. I wonder could I have your watch to hear tick in my hand to go me to sleep."

"Yes, dear; but only for to-night because of the bad dream."

There were little nestling noises, gradually quieting down. Then, sleepily:

"Favver, please."

"Yes, dear."

"I fink I could go *all* to sleep if you'd pit your head down on my pillow next my bunny."

A stir in the darkness, and an instant's quiet, followed by, "Why, Favver, what makes your face all over water?"

There was no answer.

"And your beard is as wet as--" She broke off to explain to herself: "Oh, it's rain, of tourse. I forgot it's raining. *Now* I remember how to *really* go all to sleep. I did before. I listen to it going patter, patter, patter, patter--" The little voice died away.

There was no sound at all in the room but the swift, light voice of the watch calling out that Time, Time, Time can cure all, can cure all, can cure all--and outside the brooding murmur of the rain.

A faint, clear gray began to show at the windows.

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