

FICTION

Eleanor Hallowell Abbott

The Stingy Receiver

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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The girl in her Norse glow and blondness would have been a marked figure anywhere

THE STINGY RECEIVER

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

FANNY MUNSELL

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TO
KATHERINE K. ABBOTT
A GENEROUS GIVER
THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
THE GIRL IN HER NORSE GLOW AND BLONDNESS WOULD HAVE BEEN A MARKED FIGURE ANYWHERE	Frontispiece
"OH, DRAT YOU WOMEN!" HE GRINNED SHEEPISHLY. "WELL, GO AHEAD! ONE--TWO--THREE--FOUR--FIVE--SIX--SEVEN--EIGHT--NINE--TEN!"	9
BY CRANING HIS NECK AROUND THE CORNER OF THE PIANO, HE NOTED WITH INCREASING ASTONISHMENT THAT THE RIVULET SPRANG FROM THE BLACK FERULE OF AN UMBRELLA	87
"EXCUSE ME, MISS KJELLAND," HE SAID; "BUT THIS IS NOT A PICNIC--IT IS A CLINIC"	99
AS COOLLY AS IF SHE HAD BEEN APPRAISING A NEW DOG OR PUSSY, MRS. TOME GALLIEN NARROWED HER EYES TO BOTH THE VISION AND THE ANNOUNCEMENT	127

THE STINGY RECEIVER

I

"If I were fifty years old," said the Young Doctor quite bluntly, "and found myself suddenly stripped of practically all my motor powers except my pocketbook and my sense of humor; and was told that I could make one wish----"

"But I am fifty years old," admitted the Sick Woman. "And I do find myself stripped of practically all my motor powers, except my pocketbook and my sense of humor!"

"Then for Heaven's sake--wish!" snapped the Young Doctor.

"Oh, my goodness!" mocked the Sick Woman. "You're not by any chance a--a fairy god-doctor, are you?"

"Fairy god-doctor?" bristled the young man. "The phrase is an unfamiliar one to me," he confided with some hauteur.

Quizzically then for a moment among her hotel pillows the woman lay staring out through the open window into the indefinite slate-roofed vista of Beyond--and Beyond--and Beyond. Then so furtively that the whites of her eyes showed suddenly like a snarling dog's she glanced back at the Young Doctor's grimly inscrutable face.

"You're quite sure that it isn't a will you want me to make? Not a wish?" she asked.

"Quite sure," said the Young Doctor, without emotion.

As two antagonists searching desperately for some weak spot in each other's mental armor, the patient's eyes narrowed to the doctor's, the doctor's to the patient's.

It was the patient who fled first from the probe.

"How many years can you give me?" she surrendered dully.

"I can't give you any! I can't afford it!" slapped the Young Doctor's brisk, cool voice.

"How many years can you sell me, then?" roused the woman with the first faint red flare of vigor across her cheek bones.

"Oh, I don't know," admitted the Young Doctor. Sagging back a little wearily against the edge of the bureau, with his long arms folded loosely across his breast he stood staring tensely down through the woman's question into the actual case itself. "Oh, I don't know," he admitted. "Oh, of course, if you had some one brand-new interest to revitalize you? If the matter of congenial climate could be properly adjusted? With all your abundant financial resources? And all

the extra serenities and safeguards that financial resources can wrap a sick person in? Oh, I suppose one could almost positively guarantee you--guarantee you,--oh, years and years," he finished a trifle vaguely.

"Only that?" winced the woman. "Years and years?" she quoted mockingly. "It isn't enough! Not nearly enough!" she flared with sudden passion.

"Even so," smiled the Young Doctor. "That is a more definite estimate than I could, equally honestly, make for the youngest, friskiest child who prances to work or play every day through the tortuous traffic of our city streets."

"Oh," said the woman with a flicker of humor in her tears.

"Oh," smiled the doctor without an atom of humor in the smile.

With her handsome gray head cocked ever so slightly to one side, the woman's eyes seemed rather oddly intent on the Young Doctor for an instant.

"How--how thin you are--and how hungry-looking," she commented suddenly with quite irrelevant impudence.

"Thank you," bowed the Young Doctor.

"Ha!" chuckled the woman. "And I? 'How satiate-looking she is!' Is that what you'd like to say?"

"You are perfectly welcome to look any way you wish," said the Young Doctor with distinct coldness.

Indifferently then for a moment both doctor and patient seemed to relax into the centric personal hush of the sick-room itself, with its far outlying murmur of thudding feet, its occasional sharp, self-conscious click of remote elevator machinery.

Then the doctor snatched out his watch.

"Well, what is it you want me to do first?" roused the Sick Woman instantly.

"Make your wish!" said the doctor.

"Yes, I know," parried the woman. "But what do you want me to wish? What kind of a wish, I mean, do you want me to make?"

As though personally affronted by the question, the Young Doctor stepped suddenly forward.

"What kind of a wish do I want you to make?" he demanded. "Why, what kind of a wish should I want you to make except an honest wish? Not the second-hand, sanctimonious, reconsidered sort of wish that you think you ought to make. But the first glad, self-concerned, self-revitalizing whim that gushes up into your mind when anybody springs the word 'wish' at you!"

"Oh!" brightened the woman. "That ought to be easy enough." The sudden smile flooding into the very faintly distorted facial muscles gave a certain shrewd, waggish sort of humor to the assertion. "Why not?" she persisted speculatively. "Long life and happiness having been logically eliminated from my impulses, and both faith and fact having reasonably convinced me that all my loved ones are perfectly well provided for in either this world or the next, why shouldn't I wish for the one thing that will add most to my own personal diversion? Oh, very well," she began to consider. Whitely her eyelids drooped down across her turbid eyes. "Now you count ten, Doctor," she murmured quite casually. "And when you say ten I'll tell you the wish."

"This isn't a game, Mrs. Gallien!" bristled the Young Doctor.

Very languidly the woman opened her eyes wide.

"Oh, isn't it?" she asked. "Then I won't wish, thank you."

"What are you talking about?" scolded the Young Doctor.

"About getting well," conceded the woman. Languidly the white eyelids closed again. "And if getting well isn't a game--I won't get well, either," affirmed the woman.

With a gasp of irritation the Young Doctor snatched up his hat and left the room.

But outside the door, neither up the hall nor down the hall, nor across the hall, was the nurse waiting where he had told her to wait.



"Oh, drat you women!" he grinned sheepishly. "Well, go ahead! One--two--three--four--five--six--seven--eight--nine--TEN!"

With an audible imprecation he stalked back into the sick-room and threw himself down into the first chair he could reach.

"Oh, drat you women!" he grinned sheepishly. "Well, go ahead! One--two--three--four--five--six--seven--eight--nine--ten!"

As automatically almost as a mechanical doll the Sick Woman opened her eyes.

"Oh, all right!" she smiled. "Now I will tell you the wish. But first I must tell you that the thing I hate most in the world is an empty twilight. And the thing I love best is a crowded shop. Oh, the joy of shopping!" she quickened. "The fun, the fury of it! Buy, buy, buy, while the light lasts and the money shines! But as for the empty twilight?" she wilted again. "I wish--" her voice caught suddenly, "I wish that the last mail of the day may never leave me utterly letterless. And that I may always be expecting a package by express!"

"Do you really mean it?" asked the Young Doctor without the slightest trace of perturbation.

"Why, of course I mean it!" smiled the woman. "But do you dream for a moment that you can guarantee that?"

"I can at least prescribe it," said the Young Doctor.

"You have more subtlety than I thought," drawled the woman.

"You have more simplicity than I had dared to hope," bowed the Young Doctor.

Again, in shrewd half-mocking appraisal, the two measured each other.

Then with a great, busy frown the Young Doctor turned to his notebook.

"Let me see," he estimated. "It was four weeks ago yesterday-- that you fell on the street."

"Was it?" said the woman indifferently.

"Mrs. Gallien," asked the Young Doctor with some abruptness, "just exactly where is your home?"

"I have no home," said the woman.

"Yes, but you must live somewhere," bristled the Young Doctor.

"Only in my pocketbook and my sense of humor," quoted the woman with frank mockery.

"But why make such a mystery about your domicile?" persisted the Young Doctor.

"That's just it," said the woman. "I haven't any domicile to make a mystery of! It's seventeen years since I've lived in what you call a domicile.

"Where have you lived?" demanded the Young Doctor.

"Oh, on steamers mostly," conceded the woman. Very faintly the pallid nostrils dilated. "I've been to Australia five times," she acknowledged. "And China twice. And Japan,--" she quickened. "All the little vague outlying islands, all the great jostling eager seaports! By steam, by paddle wheels, by lax, loose-flapping rainbow-colored sails!" In sudden listlessness she turned her cheek to the pillow again. "Wherever the sea is salt," she murmured. "Wherever the sea is salt! Hunting, always and forever hunting,--yes, that's it,--always and forever hunting for lights and laughter and----"

"Pardon me," said the Young Doctor, quite abruptly. "But is your husband living?"

"No," said the woman. "He died two years ago."

Inquisitively for a moment the Young Doctor studied the nerve-ravaged face before him.

"Pardon me," he stammered. "But--but was it a great shock to you?"

"It was a great relief," said the woman, without emotion. "He had been hopelessly insane for seventeen years."

"Oh!" jumped the Young Doctor, as though the thought fairly tortured his senses.

"Oh!" speculated the woman quizzically, with the merciful outer callousness which the brain provides for those who are obliged to carry some one scorching thought for an indeterminate period of years.

As though in sheer nervous outlet the Young Doctor began almost at once to pace the room.

"Seeing that there are no--no personal ties, apparently, to hold you here--or drive you there," he said, "the matter of congenial climate ought to be one that we can easily arrange."

With half ironic amusement the Sick Woman lay and watched his worried, fluctuating face.

"The question of climate is all arranged!" she said. "The speed that was stripped from my body last week, has at least been put back into my brain. Just where I am going, just whom I am going to take with me, just what I am going to do to amuse me, every last infinitesimal detail of all the rest of my life," she smiled, "I have planned it all out while you have been dawdling there between the wardrobe and the bureau."

"Dawdling?" snapped the Young Doctor. Quite abruptly he stopped his nervous pacing. "Well, where is it that you want to go?" he asked.

Musingly the woman's eyes stared off again into the window- framed vista of the city roofs.

"On an island," she said. "Off the coast of South Carolina there is a house. It is really rather a dreadful old place. I have not seen it since I was a girl. It was old then. It must be almost a wreck now. And the island is not very large. And there is no other house on the island. Just this great rambling deserted shack. And six battered old live-oak trees half strangled with dangly gray moss. And there are blue jays always in the gray moss, and cardinal birds, and unestimable squirrels. And there is a bedroom in the house forty feet long. And in that bedroom there is a four-poster seven feet wide, and most weirdly devised of old ships' figureheads, a smirking, faded siren at one corner, a broken-nosed sailor at another,--I forget the others--but altogether in memory I see it as a rather unusually broad and amusing shelf to be laid aside on. And there, in the middle of that great ship-figured bed, in the middle of that great dingy sunken-cabin sort of room with its every ancient windowpane blearing grayly into the sea, through deck-like porches so broad, so dark, so glowering that no streak of cloud or sky will ever reach my eyes again, nor any strip of gray-brown earth--I shall lie, I say, in unutterable peace and tranquillity as other ghosts have lain before me, 'forty fathoms deep' below all their troubles. And always as I lie thus, there will be the sigh of the surf in my ears. And the swell of the tide in my eyes. Eternally across my windows fin-like wings shall soar and pass and gray mosses float and flare."

"Cheerful!" snapped the Young Doctor.

"Yes. Isn't it?" beamed the woman.

With a gasp of surprise the Young Doctor turned and stared at her.

"Why, I really believe that you think so!" he stammered.

"Why, of course I think so!" said the Woman. "Why not?" she queried. "A dimming candle glows brightest in a dark room!" Not a trace of morbidness was in her voice, not a flicker of sentimentality. "And besides," she smiled. "It is also my desire to remove myself as far as possible from the main thoroughfares of life."

"I don't see why!" protested the Young Doctor.

"This is the 'why,'" said the woman. "Just as I fell that day," she smiled. "In my last conscious moment, I mean--a hurrying child stumbled and stepped on me." Once again the smile twisted ever so slightly to one side. "And never any more while I live," said the woman, "do I care to repeat the sensation of being an impediment to traffic." Very idly for a moment she seemed to focus her entire interest on the flapping window curtain. "And I shall name my house--name my house--" she mused. With sudden impetuous conviction every lax muscle of her face tightened into action. "Once--once in New England," she hurried, "I saw a scarlet-gold tulip named 'Glare of the Garden'! For absolute antithesis I shall call my house 'Gloom of the Sea!'"

"Do you wish to take your present young nurse with you?" asked the doctor a bit abruptly.

The crooked smile on the woman's face straightened instantly into thin-lipped positiveness.

"I do not!" said the woman. "I detest novices! Their professional affectations drive me mad! I am born, weaned, educated, courted, married, widowed,--crippled, in the moppish time it takes them to wash my face, to straighten the simplest fork on my breakfast tray! Every gesture of their bodies, every impulse of their minds, fairly creak with the laborious, studied arrogance of an immature nature thrust suddenly into authority! If I've got to have personal service all the rest of my days for goodness' sake give me a big, experienced nature reduced by some untoward reason to the utmost terms of simplicity!" As quickly as it had come, the irritation vanished from her face. "There is a chambermaid here in this hotel--I love her!" said the woman. "She was a hospital superintendent somewhere, once, until her deafness smashed it." As ingenuously as a child's the tired, worldly-wise eyes lifted to the Young Doctor's face. "I like deaf people," said the woman. "They never chatter, I have noticed. Nor insist upon reading the newspapers to you. Being themselves protected from every vocal noise that does not directly concern them, they seem instinctively to accord you the same sacristy. And besides," smiled the woman, "this ex-superintendent's hair is as gray as mine. And I adore women whose hair is just exactly as gray as mine. And also," smiled the woman, "her name happens to be 'Martha'--and I have always craved the personal devotion of someone named 'Martha'. And I shall pay her an extra hundred dollars a month," smiled the woman, "to call me 'Elizabeth'. Never in my life," said the woman, "have I ever had any food cooked for my first name. Martha will do everything for me, you understand?" she added quickly.

"Yes, but how do you know that she'll go with you?" asked the Young Doctor dryly.

"How do I know that she'll go with me?" flared the woman. The imperious consciousness of money was in the flare, but also the subtler surety of a temperamental conviction. "Why, of course she'll go!" said the woman. As definitely as though she had assumed that sunshine would be sunshine, she dismissed the whole topic from their conversation.

"Oh, all right," smiled the Young Doctor a bit ironically. "I am to infer then that climate, locality, care, companionship, everything has been arranged except your wish for a chronic Package by Express?"

"Oh, that is all arranged too!" boasted the woman.

"I don't see it," said the Young Doctor.

"I saw it," said the woman, "while you were straightening your necktie! Oh, of course, the shops can never happen again." She winced with real emotion. "All the gay, covetous fingering of silk or bronze, the shrewd explorative sallies through aisles of treasure and tiers of tantalization! But just the package part?" She rallied instantly. "Oh, the package part I assure you is perfectly easy, as long as memory lasts and imagination holds. With a check book on one side of me and a few dollars worth of postage stamps on the other, all I'll have to do," she laughed, "is just to lie there on my back and study the advertising pages of all the magazines. Every fascinating gown that cries for help from a fashion catalogue! Every irresistible lawn mower that brags of its prowess from the columns of an agricultural journal! Ten cent packages of floral miracles, or ten dollar lotions from the beauty shops! Certainly never again till the end of time ought there to dawn a day when I haven't a reasonable right to expect that something will arrive!"

"And I shall have a wrangle boat, of course," babbled the woman impishly. "What is it? Oh, 'motor boat' you call it? Oh, any old kind of an engine,--I don't care, so long as it serves its purpose of keeping a man and a boy busy all day long quarreling as they always do just how to run it. And once a day, every late afternoon, I shall send the wrangle boat to the mainland--way--way out beyond the sky line of my piazza. And the instant that boat swings back into vision again, just between the droop of the roof and the lift of the railing, they will hoist a flag if there is anything for me. And if there isn't--if there isn't?" Across her whimsical prophecy indescribable irritation settled suddenly. "And if there isn't anything, they need never return!" snapped the woman.

"Oh, of course, that's all right at first," mocked the Young Doctor. "But in your original description of your island I remember no mention of large storehouses or empty warerooms. After a while you know, with things arriving every day or so. And the house, I infer, except for the one big room you speak of, sustains no special acreage."

"Stupid!" rallied the woman.

"Oh, I see," puzzled the Young Doctor. "You--you mean that you're going to give the things away? Hordes of young nieces, and poor relations and all that sort of thing? Why--why, of course!"

"Oh, no!" said the woman. With suddenly narrowing eyes her whole face turned incalculably shrewd and cold. "Oh, no! I am all through giving anything away!" Defiantly for an instant she challenged the Young Doctor's silence, then sank back with frank indifference into her pillows again. "Worldly as I am," she smiled very faintly, "and worldly as my father and mother were before me, and their father and mother, doubtless, before them, there is one little prayer that I shall never forget,--and I found it, if the fact interests you, inscribed painstakingly in faded violet ink in the back of my grandfather's first check book, before, evidently, either wealth or worldliness had quite begun to set in. And this is the little prayer:

"If fortune and finance should so ordain that I may never be any kind of a giver, Heaven grant that at least I may not be a stingy receiver but share unstintedly with such benefactor as may favor me the exceeding happiness which his benefaction has most surely conferred upon me!"

Once more the faint smile twisted into cynicism. "That's it," said the woman. "I'm tired of *stingy receivers!*"

"I--I'm afraid I don't get you," said the Young Doctor.

"Don't you ever get anything?" snapped the woman explosively.

It was the Young Doctor's turn to flare now. "Oh, yes," he said. "Sometimes I get awfully tired of the vagaries of women!"

Out of her nerves rather than her mirth the woman burst out laughing.

"You are so young!" she said.

"Not as juvenile as your vagaries," protested the Young Doctor.

"But my vagaries are not juvenile!" insisted the woman. "They are as old and ingrained as time itself. For seventeen years," quickened the woman, "I have been 'gathering gifts' from all over the world, ripping things out of impersonal wholesale, as it were, to apply them as best I might to this person's, or the other's, individual need. Say, if you want to, that I have had nothing else to do on my travels except to spend money, yet the fact remains that as far as my own personal satisfactions are concerned in the matter of giving, I have been pouring presents for seventeen years into a bottomless pit. Never once, I mean," smiled the woman, "never once, yearning over the abyss as the gift went down, have I ever heard the entrancing thud that a gift ought to make when it lands on real appreciation. Never!"

"Well, you are a cynic!" conceded the Young Doctor.

"I admit it," said the woman. "Yet even a cynic may be fair-minded." For the first time in her tired, sophisticated face, shrewdness and irony were equally routed by sheer perplexity. "I've thought it all out as decently as I could from the other person's point of view," she puzzled. "I see his side, I think. I have no legal, constitutional right, of course, to demand a person's gratitude for any gift which is purely voluntary on my part. Lots of people in all probability would infinitely rather not have a gift than be obliged thereby to write a 'Thank you' for it. Against such a person's wish and inclination, I mean, I've no right to pry 'Thank you's' out of him, even with gold-mounted golf sticks or first editions. I've no right to be a highwayman, I mean. Even if I'm literally dying for a 'Thank you' I've no more right, I mean, to hold up a person with a gift than I'd have to hold him up with a gun."

"Then what are you fussing about?" asked the Young Doctor.

"I'm fussing about the hatefulness of it," said the woman. All the shrewdness came suddenly back to her face. "This is what I mean!" she cried sharply. "When I stay in Paris three months, for instance, to collect a trousseau for the daughter of a man who meant something to me once in my youth, and receive in due time from that girl a single page of gothic handwriting thanking me no matter how gushingly for my 'magnificent gift,' I tell you I could fairly kill her for her stingy receiving! Not a word from her about hats, you understand? Not a comment on shoes! Not the vaguest, remotest mention of chiffon veils, silk stockings, evening gowns, street suits, mink furs, anything! Just the whole outfit, trunk after trunk of 'em, all lumped in together and dismissed perfectly casually under the lump word 'gift!' and it wasn't just a 'gift' that I gave her, you understand?" said the woman with a sudden real twinge of emotion. "Almost nobody, you know, ever gives just a 'gift.' What I really gave her, of course, was three whole months of my taste, time, temperament! Three whole months of my wanting-to-give! Three whole months of a woman's dreams for a young girl! What I really gave her, of course, was the plaudits of her elders, the envies of all her girl chums, the new,

unduplicatable pride and dignity of a consciously perfect equipment! What I really gave her, of course, was the light in her bridegroom's eyes when he first saw her merge a throb of mist and pearls through the gray gloom of the cathedral chancel! What I really gave her of course was the----"

"Yes, but you surely know that she appreciated the gift," deprecated the Young Doctor.

"Why, of course she appreciated the gift!" snapped the woman. "But what I'm trying to find is some one who'd appreciate the giver! Anybody can appreciate a gift," she added with unprecedented scorn. "Pleased?" snapped the woman. "Why, of course, she was pleased! The only thing I'm fussing about is that she was too stingy to share her pleasure with me! The fire I worked so hard to light, lit all right, but simply refused to warm me! That's it! Why! Did she note by one single extra flourish of her pen that the lining of her opera cloak was like the petalling of a pink Killarney rose? Or that the texture of her traveling suit would have made a princess strut with pride? When she lumped a dozen Paris hats into the one word 'nice' did she dream for one single instant that she had lulled my perfectly human hunger to know whether it was the red one or the green one or the gold which most became her ecstatic little face? Did it ever occur to her to tell me what her lover said about the gay little brown leather hunting suit? Six months hence, freezing to death in some half-heated palace on the Riviera, is there one chance in ten thousand, do you think, that she will write me to say, 'Oh, you darling, how did you ever happen to think of a moleskin breakfast coat and footies?' And again!" scolded the woman. "When a stodgy old missionary on his way back to Africa relaxes enough on a mid-ocean moonlight night so that it's fun a month later to send him a mule and cart just to keep his faithful, clumsy old feet off the African sands, do you think it's fun for him to send me eight smug laborious pages complimenting me--without a moon in them,--on 'the great opportunities for doing good which my enormous wealth must give me,' and commending me specially 'for this most recent account of my stewardship which I have just evidenced in my noble gift?'" For one single illuminating flash humor twitched back into the woman's eyebrow. "Stewardship--bosh!" she confided. "On a picture post card--with stubby, broken-nosed pencil--I would so infinitely rather he had scribbled, 'Bully for you, Old Girl! This is some mule!'"

With a little sigh of fatigue she sank back into her pillows. "'More blessed to give than to receive?' Quite evidently!" she said. "Everywhere it's the same! People love pictures and never note who painted them! People love stories and never remember who wrote them! Why, in any shop in this city," she roused, "I wager you could go in and present a hundred dollar bill to the seediest old clerk you saw--and go back in an hour and he wouldn't know you by sight! 'The gift without the giver is bare?'" she quoted savagely. "Ha! What they really meant was 'The giver added to the gift is a bore?'"

"Well, what do you propose to do about it?" quizzed the Young Doctor a bit impatiently.

"I propose to do this about it!" said the woman. "I propose to become a reformer!"

"A reformer?" jeered the Young Doctor.

"Well, then--an avenger! if you like the word better," conceded the woman. "Oh, I shall keep right on buying things, of course," she hastened mockingly to assure him. "And giving things, of course. One could hardly break so suddenly the habit and vice of a life time. Only I shan't scatter my shots all over the lot any more. But concentrate my deadliest aim on one single individual. Indeed, I think I shall advertise," mocked the woman. "In that amazing column of all daily papers so misleadingly labeled 'wants' instead of able-to-haves I shall insert some sort of a statement to the effect that:

"An eccentric middle-aged woman of fabulous wealth, lavish generosity, and no common sense whatsoever, will receive into her 'lovely Southern Home' one stingy receiver. Strictest reference required. Object: Reformation or--annihilation."

"It would be interesting to see the answers you'd get!" rallied the Young Doctor with unwonted playfulness.

Almost imperceptibly the woman twisted her eyebrows. "Oh, of course, I admit that most of them would be from asylums," she said. "Offering me special rates. But there's always a chance, of course, that--that--" Straight as a pencil--ruling both eyebrows dropped suddenly into line. "But I'm quite used to taking chances, thank you!" she finished with exaggerated brusqueness.

"What else do you propose to take?" asked the Young Doctor a bit dryly.

"*You!*" said the woman.

At the edge of the bureau the Young Doctor wheeled abruptly in his tracks.

"Well, you won't!" he said. His face was quite white with anger.

"Why not?" drawled the woman. As ruthlessly as a child she seemed to be estimating suddenly the faintly perceptible shine of the man's shoulder seams. Only the frankness of the stare relieved it of its insolence. "Why not?" she said. "Is your practice here so huge that you can totally afford to ignore a salary such as I would give you?"

"Nevertheless," winced the Young Doctor, "even *you* cannot buy everything!"

"Can't I?" smiled the woman. In passionate willfulness and pride her smile straightened out again into its thin-lipped line. "But I need you!" she asserted arrogantly. "I like you! If I had had my choice of every practitioner in the city, I-- I!" With a precipitous whimper of nerves the tears began suddenly to stream down her cheeks. "There is--there is something about you," she stammered. "In a--in a trolley car accident, in a steamer panic, out of a--out of a thousand," she sobbed, "I instinctively would have turned to you!" As abruptly as it had come, the flood of tears vanished from her face, leaving instead a gray-streaked flicker of incredulity. "Why, I don't even know how I did happen to get you!" she admitted aghast. "Out of all the doctors in the city--it must have been intended! It must! If there's any Providence at all it must arrange such details! How did I happen to get you?" she demanded imperiously.

For the first time across the Young Doctor's lean, ascetic face an expression of relaxation quickened.

"Well if you really want to know," he said. "As you were being lifted out of your carriage at the hotel door, I was just coming out of the Free Lunch----"

"Hunger or thirst?" scoffed the woman.

"None of your business," smiled the Young Doctor.

"Oh, and besides," rallied the woman instantly. "I thought, likely as not, that there might be some girl. Somebody you could coach! About my passion for shopping, I mean! I don't care who gets the things! If there's anybody you like, she might just as well be the one!"

"Thank you," rebristled the Young Doctor. "But I don't happen to know any girls!"

"Good enough!" said the woman. "Then there's nothing at all to complicate your coming!"

"But I'm not coming!" stared the Young Doctor. The pupils of his eyes were dilated like a deer's jacked suddenly with an infuriating light.

"But you are coming," said the woman without a flicker of emotion. "Day after tomorrow it is. At three-thirty from the Pennsylvania Station."

"I'm not!" said the Young Doctor.

"You are!" said the woman.

When it comes right down to the matter of statistics, just how many times in your life you've had your own way and just how many times you haven't, Mrs. Tome Gallien was not exaggerating when she boasted to the Young Doctor that she was quite in the habit of having her own way. She certainly was! In the majority of incidents she had, indeed, always had her own way. And in the majority of incidents she had her own way now. That is to say, that the South Carolina train did leave the Pennsylvania Station at just exactly the time she said it would. And Martha the deaf was on that train. And she, herself, was on that train.

But the Young Doctor was not.

"Not much! *Not much!*" was the way the Young Doctor said it, if you really want to know.

But he said very little else that afternoon. To be perfectly frank his luncheon had been very poor, and his breakfast, before that, and his dinner, before that. Further reiteration would be purely monotonous. Moreover, on this particular February day the weather was extravagantly Northern, his office, as cold and dark and bleak as some untenanted back alley, and his general professional prospects as dull as, if not indeed duller than, the last puff of ashes in his pipe. Yet even so he counted his situation ecstasy compared to the thought of being dragged South by the wrapper-strings of a gray-haired invalid-woman as headstrong as she was body-weak. "Not much!" Long after there was no tugging warm taste left in his pipe he was still tugging at the phrase. "Not much!"

But Mrs. Tome Gallien on her fine train scudding South was even more chary of words than he when it came to her own comment on his defection.

"Idjot!" she telegraphed back from Washington.

The operator who repeated the message over the telephone was frankly apologetic.

"Yes, Doctor," explained the metallic voice. "That's just exactly the way we received it. It isn't even 'idiot'" argued the voice. "Because we wired back for verification. 'I-d-j-o-t!' That's what it is. Maybe it's a--a code word," condoned the voice amiably.

It certainly was a "code" word. And the message that it sought to convey was plainly this:

"How any young struggling practitioner in a strange city, with not only his future to make but even his present, how such a one has got the nerve, the nerve, I say, to refuse a regular salaried position and all expenses, all expenses,

mind you, in a salubrious climate, and with a lady,--well, with a lady whom other men infinitely wiser and more sophisticated than he have not found utterly devoid perhaps of interest and charm?"

Talk about being packed "cram-jam?" Surely no week-end suitcase could ever have bulged more with significance than did this one tiny telegram "Idjot!" And equally surely its context "dressed" the Young Doctor's mind quite completely for almost a week.

But the great square white envelope that arrived in due time from Mrs. Tome Gallien had nothing in it at all except a check. No reproaches, I mean, no upbraidings, no convalescent rhapsodies of gratitude even. Just a plain straightforward unsentimental black and white check covering so many professional visits at so much a visit. A man might have sent it. A perfectly well man, I mean.

"And so the episode ends," mused the Young Doctor with distinct satisfaction.

But it didn't end so, of course. Women like Mrs. Tome Gallien were not created to end things but to start 'em. Of such is the kingdom of Leaven.

It was on the following Thursday that the grand piano arrived at the Young Doctor's office.

Now the Young Doctor's office might easily have accommodated more patients than it did. But piano movers are almost always so fat. Puffing, blowing, swearing, tugging,--the whole dingy room seemed suddenly packed with brawn.

"But it isn't my piano!" protested the Young Doctor from every chair, desk, table, of his ultimate retreat. "It *isn't* my piano!" he yelled from the doorway. "It isn't my piano!" he scolded through the window.

But it was his piano, of course! The piano movers swore that it was. The piano warerooms telephoned that it was. . . . Worst of all, the piano itself on one plump ankle flaunted a tag which proclaimed that it was. And the proclamation was most distinctly in Mrs. Tome Gallien's handwriting.

"For Dr. Sam Kendrue," it said. "As a slight token of my appreciation and esteem."

"Appreciation?" groaned the Young Doctor. "Esteem?" In the first venom of his emotion he sat right down and wrote Mrs. Gallien just exactly what he thought of her. And of it. "It" being of course the piano.

"Whatever in the world," he demanded, "would I do with a piano? Oh, of course it's very kind of you and all that," he conceded with crass sarcasm. "But I have no possible floor space, you understand, beyond my office and the very meager bedroom adjoining it. And with a quarter of a ton's worth of wood and wire plunked down thus in the exact center of my office it leaves me, I assure you, an extraordinarily limited amount of elbow-space unless it be a sort of running track that still survives around the extreme edges of the room. And moreover the piano is of rosewood, as you doubtless already know, and all inlaid with cherubim and seraphim snarled up in wreaths of lavender roses. Now Botany I admit, is distinctly out of my line. But the cherubim and seraphim are certainly very weird anatomically.

"And not knowing one note from another,--as indeed I remember telling you quite plainly at an earlier date, well,--excuse me if I seem harsh," he exploded all over again, "but whatever in the world would I do with a piano?"

As ingenuously insolent as a child's retort came Mrs. Tome Gallien's almost immediate reply.

"Yes! What would you do? That's just exactly it! I thought I'd get a rise out of you!" said Mrs. Tome Gallien. "Across my dulled horizon a whole heap of most diverting speculations have suddenly begun to flash and brighten. 'Whatever in the world' *would* you do with a piano?"

"I can at least return it to the warerooms," wrote the Young Doctor with significant brevity.

"Oh, no, you can't!" telegraphed Mrs. Tome Gallien. "Apropos slight defect and large mark-down merchandise rated non-returnable."

While he was yet fuming over this message Mrs. Tome Gallien's special delivery letter overtook her telegram.

"Don't struggle," urged Mrs. Tome Gallien. "After all, my dear young antagonist, when it comes right down to brass tacks, it isn't so much a question of just what you are going to do with the piano as it is of--just what the piano is going to do with you. Because of course, do something it certainly will! And the madder you get of course the more it will do! And the madder you get of course the sooner it will do it! And----

"Oh, lying here flat on my back in all this damp, salty, sea-green stillness,--tides coming, tides going,--sands shifting,--sea-weeds floating,--my whole wild heedless Past resolves itself into one single illuminating conviction. It's the giving people appropriate gifts that stultifies their characters so, pampering their vanities, and clogging alike both their impulses and their ink! Yes, sir!

"Why, goodness, Man! If I had crocheted you slippers would it have joggled you one iota out of the rut of your daily life? Or would even the latest design in operating tables have quickened one single heart-beat of your snug, self-sufficient young body? Or for forty stethoscopes do you imagine for one tiny instant that you would have written me

twice in five days?

"But if one can only make a person mad instead of glad! Now that's the real kindness! So invigorating! So educative! So poignantly reconstructive! Because if there's one shining mark in the world that Adventure loves it's a shining mad person. Even you, for instance! Having made no place in your particular rut for 'quarter of a ton of wood and wire' the advent of such a weightage is just plain naturally bound to crowd you out of your rut. And whoever side-steps his rut for even an instant? Well, truly, I think you deserved just a wee bit of crowding.

"So Heigho, Cross Laddie! And rustle round as fast as you can to get yourself a new necktie or a hair-cut or a shine! 'Cause something certainly is going to happen to you! Happen right off, I mean! Even now perhaps! Even----"

With a grunt of disgust the Young Doctor jumped up and began to pace his office,--what was left of his office, I mean, around the extreme edges of the room. And the faster he paced the madder he grew.

"Oh, the fantasia of women!" he stormed. "The--the exaggeration!"

He was perfectly right--Mrs. Tome Gallien was often fantastic, and certainly quite exaggerative anent the present situation.

The threatened "adventure" did not happen at once! It didn't happen indeed for at least two hours!

Yet the fact remains, of course, that the big piano was at the bottom of the adventure. Science no doubt would have refuted the connection. But Fancy is no such fool. Surely if there hadn't been a big piano the Young Doctor would never have worked himself up into such a bad temper on that particular afternoon. And if he hadn't worked himself up into such a bad temper he never would have flounced himself out into the dreary February streets to try and "walk it off." And if he hadn't tried so hard to "walk it off" he never would have developed such a perfectly ravenous hunger. And if he hadn't developed such a perfectly ravenous hunger he never would have bolted at just exactly six o'clock for the brightest lighted restaurant in sight. And it was on the street right in front of the brightest lighted restaurant that the adventure happened.

Even Fancy, though, would never have boasted that it was anything except a very little adventure. Skies didn't fall, I mean, nor walls topple, nor bags of gold roll gaily to the Young Doctor's feet. Just a car stopped,--a great plain, clumsy everyday electric car, and from the front platform of it a girl with a suitcase in one hand, a hat box in the other, and goodness-knows-what tucked under one elbow, jumped down into the mud.

Even so the adventure would never have started if the goodness-knows-what hadn't slipped suddenly from the girl's elbow and exploded all over the street into a goodness-knows-how-many! It would have been funny of course if it hadn't been so clumsy. But even while deprecating the digital clumsiness of women, the Young Doctor leaped instinctively to the rescue. There were certainly enough things that needed rescuing! Toys they proved to be. And such a scattering! A brown plush coon under the wheels of a stalled automobile! A flamboyant red-paper rose bush trampled to pulp beneath a cart horse's hoofs! A tin steam engine cackling across a hobbly brick sidewalk! A green-feathered parrot disappearing all too quickly in a fox terrier's mouth! A doll here! A paint box there! And the girl herself standing perfectly helpless in the midst of it all blushing twenty shades of pink and still hanging desperately tight to the leather suitcase in one hand and the big hat box in the other.

"And it isn't at all that I am so--so stupid!" she kept explaining hectically. "But it is that when an accident occurs so in English I cannot think in English what to do! If I put down my suitcase!" she screamed, "a dog will bite it! And if I drop my box a trample might get it!"

It was not until the Young Doctor had succeeded in reassembling owner and articles on the safe edge of the curbing that he noticed for the first time how tall the girl was and how shingly blonde. "Altogether too tall and too blonde to behave like such an idiot!" he argued perfectly illogically. With a last flare of courtesy he sought to end the incident. "Were you going to take another car?" He gestured toward her crowded hands.

"Oh, no," said the girl with a wave of her hat box. "I was going to that restaurant over there."

"Why so was I," said the Young Doctor very formally. "So if you wish I will take your suitcase for you. That will at least help a little."

Without further parleying they crossed the snowy street and still all a-blow and a-glow with the wintry night bore down upon the snug little restaurant like two young guests of the north wind. In fact as well as effect the room was brightly crowded and seemed to flare up like a furnace blast into their own chilled faces. A trifle dazzled by the glare perhaps they faltered suddenly in their tracks. For one single conspicuous instant,--blonde as the moon, swarth as a pine tree's shadow,--they stood staring helplessly here, there, everywhere into a blur of frankly upturned faces. Then without an atom's warning a lone woman at the small table just in front of them jumped to her feet.

"Why, of course, you poor dears!" she beamed. "You want to get seats together!" And fled, still beaming, to the one remaining vacant seat at a far table in the corner.

A graven image could scarcely have helped grinning at the absurdity of the incident. And the Young Doctor was by no means a graven image. As for the girl, she giggled out right, and with an impulse scarcely American pulled out the Young Doctor's chair for him before she, herself, darted down into the more crumpled place which the other woman had just vacated. "After all," she conceded shruggingly, "it is not of such a consequence!" Only the flaming color in her cheeks belied her nonchalance.

With his left hand reaching for the menu and his right hand exploring his pockets, the Young Doctor sought to show that he also was perfectly nonchalant.

"It--it's been a--a very cold day, hasn't it?" he essayed experimentally.

From her own frowning contemplation of the card before her the girl lifted her amazingly blue eyes.

"No-o," she said. "I think the chicken soup would be more of a taste than the bouillon."

"What I remarked," persisted the Young Doctor, "was that the weather--the weather--" With his right hand still in his pocket, a most curious expression of shock passed suddenly over his face. His pocketbook was gone! Quite desperately he studied the distance to the telephone booth, the quickest path to the door,--any direction, any excuse that would snatch him soonest out of the horrid predicament of finding himself penniless at a perfectly strange restaurant in the company of a perfectly strange girl. Yet if he did bolt thus without explanation, as was certainly his most immediate impulse, what possible inference could the girl draw, except something crudely harsh and derogatory to her own frankly guileless personality. With a quite unwonted flush at his cheek bones he decided to make explanations. "Excuse me," he grinned with a sharp edging back of his chair, "but it will not be my pleasure after all to--to sample the chicken soup with you. Some mutt back there--while I was picking up those cursed toys--" Quite frantically again he began to rummage through all his pockets. "Some mutt has pinched my pocketbook," he finished perfectly simply.

"What?" cried the girl. "What?" With her eyes still staring blue and wide, she reached out a slim, strong detaining hand to his sleeve. "You mean that you cannot thus have any supper?" she frowned. "And the night also so dark and so cold? Why, what nonsense!" she beamed suddenly. "I have moneys to drown! No? Is it 'to burn' that you say?" she corrected herself. And thrust her own purse at him. Chucklingly like a child she began to rock herself to and fro. "Certainly it is all of a very great fatedness!" she reveled. "First you pick up my shoppings for me! And now it is that I pick up your supper for you! What? No?" she stammered as the Young Doctor quite curtly refused the purse and rose very definitely to his feet. Across the translucent blondness of her upturned face astonishment, incredulity, glowered suddenly like a dark shadow. "What? No? Is it then so correct?" she protested. "Is it kind? Is it senselike? That for so small a trifle you should--'snub' is it that you say, a stranger in a strange land? Certainly it was not of my boldness," she quickened. "But of the boldness of that demented woman yonder, that I sit here!" Then as suddenly as it had come all the shadow vanished from her face leaving just laughter again and a vaguely provocative sort of challenge. "Oh, go if it seems most best to be of such a silliness!" she said. "But if you go I shall certainly laugh! Laugh with loudness, I mean! Right out! And like this, with the handles of my knife and fork," she threatened to illustrate, "I will beat upon the table while I laugh! Bah!" she gesticulated encouragingly towards the deserted chair, "What is the price of a supper between two gentlemen?"

"Oh, of course, if you feel like that!" conceded the Young Doctor as he slipped back into his seat. "Quite frankly," he admitted, "I should hate to be even the innocent cause of your beating upon the table with the handles of your knife and fork. So if you really and truly think I look honest," he confided with an exaggerated resumption of interest in the bill of fare. "Let me see. Sixty cents, is it? And the tip? And two cents for a postage stamp? Yes, I surely ought to be able to return that much by at least noon to-morrow." Without a flicker of expression he lifted his dark eyes to hers.

Without a flicker of expression she resumed the conversation at the exact point apparently where she had been most reluctant to leave it off.

"And so," she brightened. "After the chicken soup, would it not seem to you, for instance, that turkey would be infinitely more chic than--than corned beef?"

Quite regardless of his possible negative she turned quickly and summoned a heavy-faced waitress to her.

"Behold it is now a dinner party!" she confided blithely to the perfectly indifferent woman. "The soup, the turkey, the best of your salads, the blackest of your coffee! Everything very chic!"

"Very what?" queried the waitress.

"Very quick!" interposed the Young Doctor.

Once again without a flicker of expression the dark eyes and the blue challenged each other across the narrow width of white table cloth.

Then the owner of the blue eyes reached out and drained her glass of ice water at a single draught.

"Ah!" she shivered. "I also am in more hurry than you. But it would not seem to me polite to nag about it."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," stammered the Young Doctor, and retreated in turn to his own glass of ice water. It was not until the soup course was almost over that he succumbed to any further conversational impulse, and even then indeed it was formality rather than sociability that drove him to the effort. "Seeing that you are so kind," he succeeded in enunciating. "And so--so trusting," he relaxed ever so slightly, "the least I can do certainly is to identify myself. My name is Sam Kendrue. And I am a doctor."

"So-o?" conceded the girl without enthusiasm. Quite frankly she made it clear that the waitress approaching with the turkey was the only fact in the world that concerned her at that immediate moment. Yet as one who would conscientiously acknowledge on second thought that no honest bit of information was ever really to be scoffed at, she laid down her knife and fork presently and surveyed the Young Doctor with a slightly reviving interest. "Sam? Sam Kendrue?" she repeated painstakingly. "My name is Solvei Kjelland!" she announced with brisk matter-of-factness, and resumed her eating.

"Your name is--what?" puzzled the Young Doctor.

"Solvei Kjelland," she smiled ever so faintly. "S-o-l-v-e-i," she spelled out as one quite familiarly accustomed to such a task. "K-j-e-l-l-a-n-d. I am a Norwegian!" she flared up suddenly with the ecstatic breathlessness of one who confides a really significant surprise.

"A Norwegian?" rallied the Young Doctor. For the first time, behind the quick shield of his hand, a little teasing smile began to twitch. "Really, you--you surprise me!" he recovered with an almost instantly forced gravity. "From your accent now, I had supposed all along that you were--er--Celtic!"

"Celtic?" queried the girl. Then with one shrewd glance at the Young Doctor's immobile face she burst out laughing. It was not a loud laugh. It was indeed a very little laugh, and most distinctly musical. But in that instant the whole attention of the room seemed to focus itself suddenly on that one helpless little table.

"Is there anything specially peculiar looking about us, I wonder?" bristled the Young Doctor. "Or rather, about me, I should say?" he corrected himself quickly. "Even that--that philanthropic woman," he fumed, "who vacated this table for us! Well, of course I wouldn't say exactly that she was climbing up on the rungs of her chair, but----"

"Oh, that's nothing," said the girl with unruffled nonchalance. "She's been staring at us all of the evening. Everybody's been staring at us all of the evening," she added amiably. Very daintily, but none the less expeditiously, as she spoke, she began to turn her attention to the crisp green salad at her plate. "It is because we are both so tall and fine," she confided without an atom of self-consciousness.

"Oh, well, really, speak for yourself!" flushed the Young Doctor.

"For myself?" she repeated a bit speculatively. Once again, in a moment of temporary arrestment, she laid down her knife and fork to scrutinize the Young Doctor's face. "Oh, no," she reassured him almost at once. "You are most tall and fine too! And so brune to my blonde!" she confided as she took up her fork again. "Certainly it is most striking of us," she mused at last more to the lettuce than to the Young Doctor. "But that poor woman over there?" she rallied transiently. "Everywhere one goes it is the same. 'Old--old maid' is it that you call her? So sad! So neglected! So 'romanticks' is it that you say? Everybodys she sees she thinks it is young lovers! But personally," said the girl, "I am still very hungry. Let us take what dessert is proffered."

"Oh, of course," acquiesced the Young Doctor. "If I've got to be--if we've got to be--stared at, I mean, it would certainly be quite as comfortable to have something to do."

"Perfectly," smiled the girl. "So as we wait for the ices and the pies let us see what is survived of the toys." And before the Young Doctor could dissuade her she had lifted her awkwardly retied bundle to the level of the table, and was earnestly studying out the relative damages of the green-feathered parrot and the tiny tin railroad train. To confirm apparently what was her own suspicion in the matter she handed the railroad train to the Young Doctor for investigation.

And because the Young Doctor was naturally and sincerely inquisitive about anything that was broken he bent his dark head to the task with a sudden real gasp of relief, and for the next five minutes at least all possible awkwardness between them seemed merged, then and there, into the easy give-and-take argument of a thoroughly familiar and accustomed association.

Once again their small table became the cynosure of all eyes. The dark Young Doctor alone was quite sufficiently striking looking. And the girl in her Norse glow and blondness would have been a marked figure anywhere. But together? And now? At this very minute? So anxious, so painstaking, so brooding? If the room had thought them shy "young lovers" a scant half hour before, goodness knows what it thought them now!

The woman in the corner had most certainly reconstructed her original impressions. On the way out from her own

unsocial supper she stopped impulsively just behind the Young Doctor's chair to watch his rather surprising manipulation of the fractured toy engine wheel. Her face was by no means unpleasant, but almost exaggeratedly friendly in a plaintive, deprecating sort of way.

From their focus on the Young Doctor's hands her pale eyes lifted suddenly to the girl's glowing face, and she held out a small paper bagful of pink-frosted cakes.

"Take those home," she said, "instead of the poor broken toys!"

"Why--why, thank you!" laughed the girl.

"How--how old are your little ones?" asked the woman quite irrelevantly.

"Eh?" jerked the Young Doctor. From his joggled hands the little tin railroad train crashed down into his plate.

With her hands clapped playfully to her ears the girl looked thoughtfully up at her accoster.

"Why, Lisa is four," she said quite simply. "And Jonathan is six, and----"

"Oh, have you got a 'Jonathan'?" kindled the woman. Her sallow face was suddenly quite transfigured with light. "And does he look like you?" she cried. "Or," sweeping the table with another deprecating glance, "or does he take after his father?"

"Take after his father?" repeated the girl in frank perplexity. Her own sweeping glance of her companion's face did not seem somehow to elucidate the mystery. "Take? 'Take after his father?'" she flamed. "I do not know the idiot--the idio--the--idiom!" she corrected herself triumphantly.

A little bit perplexed herself, the amiable stranger began suddenly to button up her coat. "Well, good night!" she beamed. "Good night! Good night! I hope you may both live to enjoy to the uttermost the full merits of your little family!"

"Eh?" jumped the Young Doctor. White as a sheet he was suddenly on his feet, and for the first time that evening a real-looking smile had twisted itself across at least one side of his thin-lipped mouth.

"Madam!" he bowed, "neither this young lady here nor I have ever laid eyes on each other before! Nor is it remotely probable indeed that in the normal course of events we should ever lay eyes on each other again! But if you persist so," he bowed, with a purely nervous glance at his watch, "but if you persist so--in your--in your--" he floundered futilely. "We shall doubtless be lying in the same grave by midnight!"

Without even a gasp then he snatched up the girl's purse, her suitcase, her hat box, his own coat and hat, and bolted for the cashier's desk.

Close behind him, clasping her scattered toys as best she might to her breast, followed the blonde Norse girl.

Even when they had finally reached the electric light post on the farthest corner of the street, the color was only just beginning to flush back into the Young Doctor's cheek bones.

"If you will now give me the address," he said tersely, "to which I can forward the supper money, I will put you on a street car."

"Oh, the address of course is of perfect simplicity," conceded the girl. "But I do not care for you to put me on a street car, thank you!"

"Why, certainly I shall put you on a street car!" insisted the Young Doctor. He was really quite sharp about it. "Almost every thing goes by here--if you only wait long enough," he shifted a bit uneasily, as he set down both box and suitcase with a most decided thump.

Silently then for what seemed to him an interminable time they stood there on the icy, wind-swept curbstone staring out into the passing green, red, yellow, lights.

"Pretty, is it not!" commented the girl at last.

"Pretty?" shivered the Young Doctor. "Why, yes, of course, suppose so. But which car?" he laughed impatiently. "For Heaven's sake, don't you know where you want to go?"

"Of course I know where I want to go!" flared the girl. With a little light touch on his sleeve she pointed off to another electric light post on a side street. "There!" she said. "That little pleasant fifth house from the end! That is where I am at boarding!"

"Well, why didn't you say so!" flushed the Young Doctor. Very vehemently once more he snatched up her suitcase and her hat box.

With a shrug of her fine athletic shoulders the girl laughed right out loud into his frowning eyes.

"When a man is of such a positiveness as you are," she confided impishly, "it is a privilege to reduce his national characteristics. Ever for one single instant do you ask me, 'Have you finish your food?' or, 'Do you want to be put on a car?' But always at your first wish you hurry out and scoot, crying, 'I put you on a car! I put you on a car!'" With a little sniff of scorn she turned on her heel and started off at a fine stride toward the house to which she had just pointed.

It was the Young Doctor now who followed precipitously after.

The street was certainly a quaint, old-fashioned one, and the boarding house in question by no means lacking in a fine though dingy sort of dignity.

But the doorbell that the girl rang and rang brought no reassuring answer. Fumbling anxiously in her purse for a moment, she threw out her hands with a little gesture of dismay.

"It is that I must also have mislaid my key," she frowned. Then like a flash of pale sunshine her smile seemed to drive every possible shadow from her mind. "Oh, well," she cried. "It is after all only a scarce seven o'clock. Some one in not many minutes will surely come. And meanwhile," she glowed. "Of such a fine night! I will just sit down here very happy and take the air!"

"Take the air?" gasped the Young Doctor. Quite unconsciously as he spoke he reached up and drew his fur collar a little bit closer about his neck.

But already the girl had dropped casually down on the top step and opened the throat of her own dark-fur red coat as one who was fairly thirsting for air.

"Good night!" she said briskly.

"Good-by!" said the Young Doctor. Before he had even reached the lower step he was congratulating himself that the incident was now safely ended,--"comfortably ended," he meant, instead of awkwardly, as it might so easily have been. "Foreigners were often so irrational," he considered. Even as he considered, he turned in spite of himself to investigate the sudden unmistakable rustle of a paper bag. His suspicion was frankly confirmed.

"See!" brandished the girl triumphantly. "The little pink cake of the foolish woman!" With an unmistakable chuckle of joy her white teeth met through the treasure.

In the flash of a second, the perfectly idiotic impulse of a joke, the Young Doctor lifted a warning finger at her.

"You realize of course that you are eating a--a misapprehension?" he admonished her with really terrifying severity.

"A misapprehension?" jumped the girl. Very painstakingly then and there she began to explore the remaining piece of cake in her hand, tugging at its sponginess, peering under its frostedness. Then suddenly with a little quick gasp of relief she popped the sweet morsel into her mouth and smacked her lips upon it "Oh, no," she beamed. "It tastes perfectly all right to me!"

Like a word slipping hopelessly down a poem toward whatever chosen rhyme its Poet has already in mind, the Young Doctor suddenly found himself bumping rather perilously close to the one big wild hoot of laughter that had evidently been lurking for him in the situation even from the very first. In a really desperate effort to fend himself as long as possible from such an undignified disaster he hastened in all sincerity to rewrap himself in his stiffest professional manner.

"Well, what about this 'Lisa' and 'Jonathan' business?" he questioned with unmistakable reproach.

"Oh, shucks!" shrugged the girl. "This tiresome Lisa and Jonathan, their whole parents are bakers! But as for me," she lowered her voice, and thrust out her hands with a soft, appealing gesture. "But as for me, until to-night, for four whole weeks I cry such salt into my food I cannot eat! Homesickness, yes!" she nodded with a quick little catch of her breath. "In all the world no one to speak with except one fat lady and one thin lady and Lisa and Jonathan and Peter, and--" In an extra impulse of confidence not unmingled evidently with a certain flare of pride she slid forward a little on the step. "I am Montessori!" she said.

"What?" snapped the Young Doctor. "Why, what nonsense!" he said. "Why, what are you talking about? 'Montessori' is a--a system! And she's an Italian, too, I mean."

"Yes, truly so," conceded the girl. "And in time if the homeache can be assuaged I shall then learn the system--and remain yet a Norwegian."

"Oh, you mean you are a Montessori student?" brightened the Young Doctor.

"Even so," said the girl. "I cannot wait to learn everything. From here, after I have duly studied little Lisa, little Peter, and all the others, whose minds most happily are of a perfect brightness, I must then go on to the sadder schools, and to that most wonderful place in your Massachusetts where such first brain work of all was made on the little children. It is that in Norway," she winced, "I have a little brother. Our father makes much money," she added with

apparent irrelevance. "And spends much and gives much. And once he married him a new wife, and there are many new children. And one of them, this little little brother, so gold, so blue, so pinky, all day long he sits and--isn't," she finished perfectly simply.

"Why--why, that's too bad," said the Young Doctor.

"Yes, very bad," mused the girl. "But some of these ideas here are of a great cleverness. I do not of course get any of it right yet," she acknowledged. "But some of it is quite sporting like a game. With these toys, now," she pointed, "and all glad things like industries, and the live cat, and the dog, and grasses and the flowers, you leave the little child quite loose, it seems, only watching him, watching him very close, one day, two days, a hundred if it seems best. And wherever he shall in finality--in finality--'gravitate,' is it that you say? to the sweet flowers, or the wood blocks, or the gay, smoothen cat, *there* it is that the one big chance of his salvation will most surely be found. But the engine, or the blocks or the smoothen cat must not be forced on him, it is so you understand? Of such there would make no message to his development. But out of *everything*, it is, that he himself must gravitate to it!"

In the tense sweet earnestness of her up turned face, the eager, unconscious nearness of her occasional gesture, the far remoteness of her subject, the sting of the winter night, the glare of electric light over all, it dawned on the Young Doctor a bit startlingly that he was frowning down into the eyes of a particularly beautiful woman, and for some quite unreasonable reason his cheeks began suddenly to burn like fire. It was as though having all his life long for one conscientious reason or another denied himself "wine when it was red," he found himself now, most humiliatingly, with *ice* itself going to his head. And just because he was so thoroughly unaccustomed to having anything go to his head, it went quite uproariously in fact, changing for that one moment his whole facial expression. And the instant his facial expression was changed of course he looked like a different man. And the instant he looked like a different man of course he began to act like a different man.

"And does this wonderful theory of yours apply only to poor little children?" he asked with slightly narrowing eyes. "Or am I to infer?" he laughed. "Or am I to infer that after a whole year of flaunting city, a whole year of barren indifference to it, my amazing gravitation to you this evening is positive Montessori proof that with you and you only rests my life's best salvation?"

Then without the slightest intent of doing it, without even the slightest warning to himself that he was going to do it, he swooped down suddenly and kissed her on her lips.

With a little gasp of dismay the girl stumbled to her feet. There was nothing blonde now about her. Towering up on the step just above him she was like a young storm-cloud all flame and shadow!

"Oh, what have I done that you should act thus?" she demanded. With the tears streaming down her face she lashed him with furious accusations. "You are one of these devils!" she cried. "You are a wild persons! Was it my fault?" she demanded, "that my bundles burst from the car? Was it my fault," she demanded, "that restaurants cannot block foolish women from their food? Was it my fault that I paid for your stupid supper?"

Neither defending himself nor seeking relief in flight, but with a face fully if not indeed more shocked than hers the Young Doctor sank down on the step at her feet, and with his head in his hands sat rocking himself to and fro.

"No, it isn't your fault!" he assured her and reassured her. "Nor is it exactly my fault!" he insisted. "But the fault of that damned piano!"

"The fault of that damned what?" quoted the girl a bit stridently.

But the face that lifted to hers was frankly the face of a stricken man. Only a chill added to repentance could have altered so any human countenance.

"On the honor of a man freezing to death!" he attested. "There is no blame to be attached to anything in the world--except to a grand piano."

"What is it that you mean?" puzzled the girl. "I am more furious with you than devils. But I must hear everything."

"I mean," sneezed the poor Young Doctor, "that I am looking for a kind home for a grand piano!" Even to himself his words sounded far away and altogether the words of a stranger. It was indeed as though he had been thrust quite unrehearsed into the leading part of a roaring farce which was already halfway through its evening performance. A fearful spirit of bravado seemed really his one chance of making any possible "get-away" with the whole mad situation. But even an irate audience could not have misjudged for a moment the acute distress and anxiety behind the bravado.

"It is just this way," he began all over again. "A perfectly dreadful woman drove me out of my office to-night--with a grand piano!" From the stony expression, however, in the girl's face this did not seem to be just the cue that she was looking for. In the wisest impulse of his life he decided suddenly to throw himself upon her sense of mercy rather than upon her sense of humor. "Truly it is this way!" He jumped up and implored her to believe him. "I am as new as you almost, in this big city. Equally with you perhaps I suffer what you call homeacheness! It is very hard to get a good

start in a strange place. Lots of charity chances and all that. But very little money. I had a real patient once, though!" he bragged ironically. "A very rich woman, awfully nice and all that. But I hate her. Every chance that she gets she torments me. She has a sort of theory, I think, that tormenting is very stimulating to the nervous system. It certainly is. We fight like young cats and dogs! And yet as I say she is awfully nice. And when she went away she paid me not only justly but mightily generously for my brief services. It cancelled almost a year's debts. But she was horridly mad because I wouldn't go with her,--as a kind of a trained, tame attendant you know. But I told her I couldn't leave my office. So she sent me a grand piano, the wretch!" he finished with flaming anger.

To the step just below him the girl tripped down and turning about stood peering up into his face with a rather disconcerting intensity.

"Here am I," she gasped, "who suffer and languish for a 'grand piano' as you call it. And you?" As though in real pain she began to wring her slim hands together. "And you? A lady gives you a grand piano and you curse her as a wretchedness!"

"Yes, I know," deprecated the Young Doctor. "But you see there isn't room in my office for both the piano and myself! My office is too small, you see. And with the piano filling up the whole center of the room? Why, it's absurd!" he quickened. "It's rotten! Patients who come don't know whether they've come for a music lesson or to be lanced! And besides," he added as his most culminative grievance, "I don't know one note from another! And the woman knew that I didn't! And worse than anything there are hordes of the most indecent little cupids applied or something all over the front of the thing!"

"Surely, something could be done," suggested the girl with a vague sort of farawayness in her blue eyes.

"Yes, that's just it!" remarked the Young Doctor, flushing. "I've already done it!"

Abjectly with his bared head bowed before her he stood as one awaiting just sentence.

"Of a personally," said the girl with her own cheeks spotting bright red. "Of a personally--I do not quite see the connection."

"Why the connection is perfectly clear!" insisted the Young Doctor. "She sent me the piano on purpose to crowd me out of my office! She wanted to crowd me out of my own office! She dared to affirm even that I needed to be crowded out of my own office! She tried to make me mad! She wanted to make me mad! She had the cheek to suggest, I mean, that nothing really interesting ever would happen to me until I once did get good and mad!" As though temporarily exhausted by his tirade he sagged back for a moment against the railing of the steps. His face did look a bit white and his teeth were almost chattering. "Well, I certainly did get good and mad this afternoon," he affirmed with a wry sort of apology. "And because I was so blooming mad I dashed out for a tremendous walk. And because I took such a tremendous walk I developed an appetite like forty tigers. And because I developed an appetite like forty tigers I rushed for the first restaurant I could find. And because I rushed for the first restaurant I could find I happened to see you at the exact moment when----"

"Oh, stop, stop, stop!" laughed the girl with her hands clapped suddenly over her ears. "It is all too much like the--like 'The House that the Jack-Man built!'"

"Well, at least," grinned the Young Doctor, "it seems to be 'The Adventure that the Grand Piano Threatened.'"

"The--the Adventure?" puzzled the girl.

"Why, yes," insisted the Young Doctor. "That's what this Mrs. Tome Gallien prophesied you know, that the piano would bring me an adventure! So you, very evidently, are the----"

"What? I?" stammered the girl. A flush of real pleasure glowed suddenly in her face and faded again as quickly as it had come. "Oh, no!" she said with some hauteur, "You--you----"

"Oh, truly!" begged the Young Doctor. "I'm most awfully sorry for what I did! I can't think what possessed me! I must have gone quite mad for the moment! Why, really," he flushed, "I don't know whether you'll believe me or not--and maybe it's something anyway to be more ashamed of than to brag about,-- but truly now," he floundered, "I haven't kissed a girl before since--since I was very little!" With a sudden quick jerk of sheer awkwardness he snatched a card from his pocket and handed it to her. "There! There's my address!" he cried. "And to-morrow if you'll only send me the word I'll jump off the bridge or throw myself under a truck, or make any other sort of reparation whatever that happens to occur to you. But to-night," he grinned, "I've simply got to get warm!" And started down the steps.

But before he had quite reached the sidewalk the girl had overtaken him and placed a detaining hand on his coat sleeve.

"How old is she?" questioned the girl.

"Who?" said the Young Doctor. "Oh, the woman? She's old enough to be your mother."

"I'm twenty-one," conceded the girl.

"Well, she's fifty," affirmed the Young Doctor.

Across the girl's translucent face a dozen conflicting emotions seemed surging suddenly. "So?" she laughed. "So?" she repeated experimentally, "If only you had not been so--so *bad*," she sighed. "Well, about that piano," she ventured with a certain unwonted shyness. "In a world of so much racket is it not a pity that any harmonies should lie dumb? Is it--is it a good piano?" she asked quite abruptly.

"Why, for heaven's sake, how do I know?" demanded the Young Doctor. "It may be a--a Stradivarius!" he floundered wildly. "But it looks to me like the--like the devil!"

"If I could only see it," whispered the girl, "I could tell in a minute of course."

"If you could only see it?" scoffed the Young Doctor. Then, "Well--well--why not?" he acknowledged a trifle tardily, but with indisputable common sense.

"I have an aunt here," mused the girl, "who has a rheumatism in her elbow, I think it is. On Friday afternoon next--if the rheumatism perhaps should be sufficiently bad?" Flushed with the anticipatory ardor of a musician she lifted her eyes to his.

"Why, capital!" acquiesced the Young Doctor. For the instant the whole suggestion struck him as being extraordinarily apt. "Well, good-by then," he laughed, "until Friday afternoon!" And vanished into the night.

He was still a long, cold distance from home. But by the time he had finally reached there his pulses were ringing with fire rather than with frost. And as soon as he had started a bright roaring flame in his stove, and concocted for himself a most luscious and steamsome drink, and driven his frosted toes into the farthest corners of some moth-eaten old fur slippers, he sat right down in a great spirit of diablerie to tell Mrs. Tome Gallien just what he thought of her.

"I hope you're satisfied!" he began quite abruptly in a firm and emphatic black hand writing. "Driven out into the winter streets by your most charming gift, I have in four short hours walked eleven miles; supped in a conspicuous restaurant with a perfectly strange girl and at her expense; been branded publicly for all time, first as the girl's beau and later as her husband and the father of certain imaginary children; and have also in due time, still included in the original four hours, you understand, kissed said girl 'Good-night' on her own doorstep in the full glare of a city electric light,-- and am now at ten-thirty P. M. of the aforesaid Monday evening waiting patiently in my room until Friday afternoon next when, heavily chaperoned by some kind of a relative with rheumatism, the said Adventure will appear to investigate the piano--and myself.

"Once again, in the language of my opening sentence, and with all due respects, I repeat, 'I hope you're satisfied!'"

Then quite contented both in fancy and in fact he settled down to kill time and cure patients until Friday.

But the intervening days it seemed were not to be bereft entirely of sensations either confusing or bizarre.

On Wednesday night he heard from Mrs. Tome Gallien. And by telegram.

"Bungler!" wired Mrs. Tome Gallien. "What in creation have you done? The adventure intended for you does not arrive till Saturday, office, four o'clock."

The message happened to be delivered in writing this time, a flaunting yellow page, and, still clutching it tight by one twittering corner, the Young Doctor dropped down into the first chair he could reach, and with his chin dropped low like an old man's on his breast sat staring for an interminable time into his glowing fire.

Then quite suddenly at nine o'clock, with the funny new smile that he seemed to have acquired somewhere recently, he walked over to his telephone, fumbled a minute with the directory, experimented at least two minutes with Central's temper, located Miss Solvei Kjelland, and addressed her in his most formal manner.

"Miss Solvei Kjelland?" he questioned.

"S-o," said the familiar voice at the other end of the wire.

"This is Doctor Kendrue," he growled. "Dr. Sam Kendrue."

"So?" conceded the voice without a vestige of affright.

"It seems, Miss Kjelland," he stammered, "that there has been some sort of a--of a--well, misunderstanding about Friday afternoon. It is all a mistake, it seems, about your being The Adventure! Mrs. Gallien indeed has just telegraphed to that effect. The 'Real Adventure,' it appears, is not due at my office until four o'clock on Saturday!"

"S-o?" conceded Miss Solvei Kjelland. If she seemed to be swallowing rather extra hard once or twice the sound was not sharply discernible certainly from the little fluttering swallow of the telephone instrument. "So?" she repeated blithely. "Well, that is all right. The piano keeps! And the Saturday afternoon is just as good to me as the Friday! And I

am all as curious with joy as you to see what it is, this Adventure that is more nice than me! Good night!"

"Good--night!" admitted the Young Doctor.

II

THAT the Young Doctor bought himself a new blue serge suit for Saturday was no indication whatsoever that he looked forward to that day with any pleasurable anticipation. Lots of people "doll-up" for disaster who couldn't even be hired to brush their hair for joy.

Quite frankly if anybody had asked him about it, the Young Doctor would have rated Mrs. Tome Gallien as a disaster.

If pressed further for justification of such a rating he would have argued that any rich woman who couldn't sleep was a disaster!

"Oh, it's all well enough for poor people," he would have admitted, "to put in the long night watches mulling over the weird things that they'd like to do. But when a person is actually able to leap up at the first gay crack of dawn and finance the weirdest fancy of his night!

"Oh, of course," he was honest enough to acknowledge. "Poor Mrs. Tome Gallien would never again while life lasted be able to 'leap up' at *any* hour of the day or night! And she doubtless in her fifty eccentric years *had* given extravagantly to no end of people who had proved themselves the stingiest sort of receivers! And her sense of humor even in her remotest, happiest youth must have been of course essentially caustic!

"But how any woman could reach a point so sick, so vindictive, so caustic, so rich, that still unable to strip herself of her lifelong passion for giving she should evolve the perfectly diabolic idea of giving people only the things that they didn't want--only the things, indeed, that she was absolutely positive they didn't want? Such as pianos! Grand pianos! Huge rosewood chunks of intricate mechanism and ornate decoration and Heaven knows what expense--crammed down into the meager crowded office of some poor struggling young doctor who didn't know a note from a gnat! Himself of course being the young doctor!

"Thought it was funny, did she? Thought it would really drive him outdoors for sheer rage into some sort of an enlivening adventure? That was her theory, was it? Well it *was* funny. And it *had* driven him out to meet a rather particularly enlivening sort of adventure! Which adventure in the person of a Miss Solvei Kjelland was now due at his office by her own insistent appointment, on Saturday afternoon at four o'clock. But this Miss Solvei Kjelland, it seems, was not the Adventure which Mrs. Tome Gallien had already arranged for him for Saturday afternoon, same hour, same place?"

Into his muddled mind flashed transiently a half-forgotten line of a novel to the effect: "Heaven help the day when the mate you made for yourself and the mate God made for you happen to meet!"

"Well, if it really came to a show-down between his Adventure and Mrs. Tome Gallien's?"

Quite unexpectedly his mouth began suddenly to twitch at one corner. Speaking of "caustic humor" it was barely possible that the Young Doctor had just a tiny bit of caustic humor himself. When a man smiles suddenly on one side of his mouth it is proof at least that he sees the joke. Nobody ought to be expected to smile on both sides till he feels the joke as well as sees it.

Certainly the poor Young Doctor was not feeling very much of anything at just this time except a sense of impending doom.

But in this sense of impending doom flickered the one ray of light that at least he knew what his own Adventure was: she was young, lithe, blonde, why as tall as himself, almost! A trifle unconventional, perhaps? Yes, even a good bit amazing! But thoroughly wholesome! And human? Yes that was just it, so deliciously and indisputably human!

But Mrs. Tome Gallien's Adventure? A woman like Mrs. Tome Gallien wouldn't stop at anything! It might be a pair of llamas from Peru! Or a greasy witchy-gypsy to tell his fortune! Or a homeless little jet-black pickaninny with a banjo and--consumption! Or--or an invitation even to lecture on physiology at a girls school! But whatever it proved to be he might just as well realize now that it would be something that he hated. Mrs. Tome Gallien in her present mood would certainly never seek to lull him with a "glad" as long as she saw any possible chance to rouse him with a "mad"!

"Well, he wouldn't get mad yet, anyway!" he promised himself with unwonted whimsicality. "And if it *was* llamas--which perhaps on the whole would be his preference out of the various possibilities anticipated--they would at least, judging from the woolly pictures in the geographies, be free from any possible danger of barking their shins against the sharper edges of the piano. Whereas a committee of any size come to request a series of lectures on----"

Thus with one form or another of light mental exercise did he try to keep his brain clear and his pulse normal for the

approaching Saturday.

But Saturday itself dawned neither clear nor normal. Rain, snow, slush, wind, had changed the whole outdoor world into a blizzard.

It was one of those days when anything might blow in. But how in the world would it ever blow out again? With this threat of eternity added to uncertainty the Young Doctor decided quite impulsively to dust his desk, and investigate his ice-chest. To his infinite relief he found at least very little food in the ice-chest. Whatever happened it could not possibly prove a very long siege! A half pound of butter, a box of rusks, a can of coffee, six or seven eggs, divided up among any kind of a committee, or even between two llamas? At the increasing excitability of his fancies he determined very suddenly to sober himself with hard reading.

With this intent, as soon as he had finished his breakfast he took down from his bookcase a very erudite treatise on "The Bony Ankylosis of the Temporomandibular Joint" and proceeded to devote himself to it. "Now here was something serious. Thoroughly serious. Science! Heaven be praised for Science!"

By noon, indeed, he was so absorbed in "The Bony Ankylosis of the Temporomandibular Joint" that he quite forgot about luncheon. And at three o'clock he looked down with a glance of surprise to see that the toes of his boots were dipping into a tiny rivulet which seemed flowing to him from the farther side of the room. By craning his neck around the corner of the piano he noted with increasing astonishment that the rivulet sprang essentially from the black ferule of an umbrella, and that just beyond the dripping black ferule of that umbrella was the dripping black ferule of another umbrella, and beyond that, still an other!

Jumping joyously to his feet he made three apologies in one to the group that loomed up before him.

"Why, I beg your pardon," he began to the wheezy old man who sat nearest him. "Really I--I--had no idea," he explained painstakingly to the small freckled boy just beyond. "With all this wind and everything--and the way the rain rattles against the window," he stammered to the crape-swathed woman in the far corner. None of these was presumably Mrs. Tome Gallien's Adventure, but it was surely adventure enough of itself on the old oak settle, where almost no one ever sat even on pleasant days, to behold three patients sitting crowded--and in a blizzard! "I was so absorbed in my book!" he boasted with sudden nonchalance.

"Oh, that's all right, sir," wheezed the Old Man. "I was just waitin' for a car. And it looked drier in here than where I was standin' outdoors."



By craning his neck around the corner of the piano, he noted with increasing astonishment that the rivulet sprang from the black ferule of an umbrella

And "Say, Mister, do you pull teeth?" questioned the small freckled boy.

But the Crape-Swathed Lady was a real patient. Though goodness knows the Young Doctor would gladly have drawn either the old man or the small boy in her place. All his life long he had particularly disapproved of "mourning." It was false, spiritually, he thought. It was bad, psychologically. Everybody knew of course that it was unwise hygienically. But worst of anything perhaps the woman before him now made him think of a damp black cat.

It was perfectly evident, however, that the lady herself cherished no such unpleasant self-consciousness.

With perfect complacency at his request she came forward to the light, or at least to such light as the storm-lashed window allowed and, still swathed as blackly from view as any harem lady, stated her case.

"I have such a pain--here," she pointed with black-gloved hand toward her black-veiled face.

Did she also take him for a tooth puller? mused the Young Doctor. With all haste he sought to settle the matter at once. "If you will kindly remove your--er--bonnet--is it that you call it?" he asked.

Compliantly the unpleasant black-gloved hands busied themselves for a moment with pin or knot until emerging slowly from its dank black draperies there lifted at last to the Young Doctor's gasping stare the most exquisitely-featured, dreamy-eyed young brunette face that he had ever seen outside a Salon catalogue.

"Here! Just here is the pain!" pointed the black-gloved finger to a spot right in front of the most absurd little ear.

"Bony Ankylosis of the Temporomandibular Joint!" gasped the Young Doctor just like a swear. Even as scientifically as he touched the pain-spot he felt his own wrist wobble most unscientifically with the contact. It was no wonder perhaps that the dark eyes before him dilated with a vague sort of alarm.

"Is it--is it as bad as that?" faltered his patient.

"Why, it isn't that at all!" hastened the Young Doctor with a sudden resumption of sagacity. "It's probably just a sort of rheumatism. What made me cry out so was just a mere funny coincidence. This particular kind of pain being a subject that I--that I--if I may say so--have been giving rather special attention to lately."

"Oh, then I trust that I have come to just the right person," smiled the dark eyes with a kindling surface-sweetness that seemed nevertheless quite frankly bereft of any special inner enthusiasm.

"We will certainly hope so!" flushed the Young Doctor. "How about this pain--?" he began quite abruptly.

"It hurts me when I eat," said the girl. Her voice was very low and soft and drawling. "And when I drink. And when I talk," she confided. "But especially when I sing."

"Oh, you sing?" questioned the Young Doctor.

"Yes!" said the girl. For the first time her classic, immobile little face was quick with a very modern emotion.

"Personally," confessed the Young Doctor, "I should like very much to try a little experiment on you if you don't mind. It will help me, even if it hurts you."

"As you wish," acquiesced the girl with the same imperturbable little smile.

From his precipitous retreat into the other room he returned after due delay with a plate of rusks and a steaming hot cup of coffee.

"It's such a horrid day," he said. "And you look so wet and cold, perhaps a taste of coffee wouldn't come in altogether amiss. But it's these rusks that I'm really interested in. I want you to bite down hard on them. And then presently perhaps I will ask you to sing so that I may watch the--Oh, by the way," he interrupted himself irrelevantly. "I neglected, I think, to ask your name."

"My name," said the girl, "is Kendrue."

"What?" questioned the Young Doctor. "Why that is my name," he smiled.

"Yes, I know," murmured the girl. "Coincidences of that sort are certainly very strange. It was one of the first things my aunt spoke of when I asked her advice about what physician to go to. I am a comparative stranger in the city," she added a bit shiveringly. "But didn't my aunt tell you I was coming?" she quickened suddenly. "Didn't my aunt, Mrs. Tome Gallien, write you--or something--that I was coming?"

"Mrs. Tome Gallien?" jumped the Young Doctor. Chaotically through his senses quickened a dozen new angers, a dozen new resentments. A girl? So this was Mrs. Tome Gallien's threatened "Adventure," was it? Of all the spiteful possibilities in the world, now wasn't this just like the amiable lady in question to foist another girl into a situation quite sufficiently embarrassed with "girl" as it was! "Is--is Mrs. Tome Gallien your--aunt?" he demanded with such sudden stentorious sternness that even the most bona fide blood-relation would hardly have acquiesced without pausing an instant to reconsider the matter.

"Well, not of course, not exactly a real aunt," admitted the girl. "But I have always called her my aunt. We have always been very intimate. Or rather perhaps I should say she had always been very, very kind to me. And now, since my father--" With the unmistakable air of one who strives suddenly to suppress an almost overwhelming emotion she pointed irrelevantly to the piano and waved off the plate of rusks and the cup of coffee which the Young Doctor still stood proffering. "You must excuse me if I--if I--seem distrait," she stammered. "But in addition to the very real annoyance that this little pain in my jaw is giving me I am--I am so bewildered about that piano! Where did you get it?" she asked quite bluntly.

"Why it came from Such-and-Such warerooms I believe," admitted the Young Doctor with as much frankness as he could summon at the moment.

With a little soft sigh the girl reached out and touched the dark, gleaming woodwork.

"I thought so," she whispered. "And--oh, how you must love it! It is certainly the most beautiful instrument that I ever saw in my life! The most melodious, I mean! The most nearly perfect sounding-board! An utter miracle of tone and flexibility as an accompanist to the human voice!"

"U--m--mmm," said the Young Doctor.

"For two months," persisted the girl, "I have been haunting the warerooms you speak of! For two months I have been moving heaven and earth in an effort to possess it! But my means being temporarily tied up," she shivered again ever so slightly, "I was not able immediately to--" With that odd, inert little smile she reached out for the plate of rusks and took one as the Young Doctor had requested. "Yes, here is the pain," she explained conscientiously. "But only last week," she winced, "on my birthday it was! I had every reason in the world to believe that Mrs. Tome Gallien was going to give the piano to me! She has given me so many wonderful things! But she sent me instead the deed to a duck blind

down somewhere on the South Carolina coast,--shooting, you know? And dreadful guns! And dogs! And all that! I, who wouldn't even hurt a sparrow, or scare a kitten!"

With his hands clapped to his head the Young Doctor swung around suddenly and started for the window.

"Was this a comic opera? A farce? A phantasy of not enough work and too much worry? Was every mention of Mrs. Tome Gallien's name to be a *scream*? As long as life lasted? As long as--?" Startled by a tiny gasp he turned to find his little visitor convulsed with tears but still struggling bravely to regain her self-possession. "Oh, please don't think I'm always as--as weak as this," she pleaded through her sobs. "But with pain and disappointment and everything happening so all at once. And with my big loss so recent----"

"How long ago did you lose your father?" asked the Young Doctor, very gently.

"My father?" stammered the girl. White now as the death she mourned she lifted her stricken face to his. "Why it wasn't father I was talking about," she gasped. "It was my husband."

"Your husband?" cried the Young Doctor. Two minutes ago was *this* the situation that he had cursed out as a farce, a comic opera? This poor, stricken, exquisite, heartbroken little widow, tagged out by Mrs. Tome Gallien as an "Adventure" and foisted on his attention like some gay new kind of a practical joke? It was outrageous! he fumed. "Inexcusably brutal!"

"Colorado--is where it happened," he had to bend his head to hear. "Almost a year and a half ago," strangled the poor little voice, "and we hadn't been married a year. Lung trouble it was, something dreadfully acute. Mrs. Tome Gallien did everything. She's always done everything. It's something about my father I think. Oh, ages and ages ago they were lovers it seems. But--but she chose to make a worldier marriage. And later, my father--why she bought my whole trousseau for me!" suffered the sweet voice afresh. "Went to Paris herself for it, I mean!"

Across the Young Doctor's memory a single chance sentence came flashing back "The daughter of a man who once meant something to me in my youth." So this was the girl? The little "Stingy Receiver"? Among all Mrs. Tome Gallien's so-called "stingy receivers" the one unquenchable pang in an otherwise reasonably callous side? Precious undoubtedly, poignant, eternally significant, yet always and forever the flesh that was not of her flesh nor the spirit quite of her spirit. Familiar eyes--perhaps? An alien mouth? A dimple that had no right, possibly, haunting a lean, loved cheek line? Fire, flame, ice, ashes? A torch to memory, a scorch to hope! But whose smile was it, anyway? That maddeningly casual and inconsequent little "Thank You" smile searing its way apparently with equal impartiality across chiffon or crape,-- a proffered chair, or eagerest promise of relief from pain? Had Mrs. Tome Gallien's life, by chance, gone a-wreck on just that smile? And why in Heaven's name, if people loved each other, did they let anything wreck them? And back of that-- what did people want to love each other for anyway? What good was it? All this old loving-and-parting-and-marrying-some-one-else fretting its new path now all over again into chiffon-and-crape! "Bony-Ankylosis-of-the-Temporomandibular-Joint!" At the very taste of the phrase his mind jumped out of its reverie and back to the one real question at hand. "If you please, now!" he implored his visitor. "Just a little of the coffee! Just a crunch or two of the rusk!" Urgently as he spoke he began proffering first one and then the other. "And this crying?" he persisted. "Does this also hurt you?"

From the doorway beyond him he sensed suddenly the low sound of footsteps and looked up into Solvei Kjelland's laughing face. Blue as a larkspur in a summer hail-storm, crisp, shimmery, sparkling with frost, even her blonde hair tucked into a larkspur-blue storm hat, she stood there shaking a reproachful finger at both the Young Doctor and his patient.

"Oh, Ho! For what a pity!" she laughed. "If you had but told me that Mrs. Tome Gallien's adventure was to be a picnic then I also could have brought the food!"



"Excuse me, Miss Kjelland," he said; "but this is not a picnic—it is a clinic"

"Picnic?" frowned the Young Doctor. Before the plaintive bewilderment in the dark eyes that lifted at just that instant to his an unwonted severity crisped into his voice. "Excuse me, Miss Kjelland," he said; "but this is not a picnic—it is a clinic."

"So? Who is a clinic?" cried Solvei Kjelland perfectly undaunted, and swished bluely forward to join them. "It is not of course of a propriety, Doctor Kendrue," she laughed, "that I should come thus without the sick aunt! But in a storm so unwholesome for aunt is it not best that I buy some good medicine?" In a shimmer of melting snowflakes she perched herself on the arm of the first chair she could reach, and extracting the familiar little purse from her big blue pocket handed the Young Doctor a one-dollar bill. "Medicine for the sick aunt!" she commandeered gaily. Then with only the most casual glance at the piano she whirled around to scrutinize the desolate little figure before her. If she noticed the tears she certainly gave no sign of it.

"Ah! It is as I thought!" she triumphed. "Most surely in my mind did I say that you would be a girl!" In one sweeping blue-eyed glance she seemed to be appraising suddenly every individual tone and feature of the dark, exquisite little face that lifted so bewilderedly to hers. Then quite unexpectedly a most twinkling smile flickered across her own sharply contrasted bloneness and like a fine friendly child she held out her hand in greeting. "Most certainly," she conceded, "you are more cute than I! But also in some ways," she beamed, "I am of course more cute than you!"

While the Young Doctor waited for the skies to fall, he saw instead, to his infinite amazement, that the little brunette though still bewildered was returning the handshake with unquestionable cordiality. "Awfully well-bred women were like that," he reasoned quickly. "No matter how totally disorganized they might be by silly things like mice or toads you simply couldn't faze them when it came to a purely social emergency." And in a situation which had thus precipitously reached a point so hopelessly non-professional there seemed after all but one thing left for him to do.

"Miss Kjelland!" he essayed with a really terrifying formality, "This is Mrs. Kendrue!" The instant the phrase had left his lips his very ears were crimsoning with the one possible implication which Miss Solvei Kjelland would draw from such an announcement, and more panic-stricken than any woman would have been with a mouse he turned and fled for his medicine cabinet in the very farthest corner of the room.

"Your wife?" faltered Solvei Kjelland in frank astonishment. "S--o?" she laughed. "And I have only just come! Mix me a quarter's worth more of the good medicine, Mr. Doctor!" she called back over her shoulder, and dropped down on the low stool at the other girl's feet. "Now about this piano!" she began precipitously.

"I am not Doctor Kendrue's wife!" protested the little black figure bewilderedly. "Why--why I thought you were his wife," she confided with increasing confusion.

From the direction of the medicine cabinet the sound of some one choking was distinctly audible. Both girls rose instinctively to meet--only the Young Doctor's perfectly inscrutable face.

"Who now is eating a Miss--mis-apprehension?" beamed Solvei.

"Mrs. Kendrue is a patient of mine," affirmed the Young Doctor with some coldness.

"O-h," conceded the Norse girl with equal coldness. "A patient? That is most nice. But--" As though suddenly muddled all over again by this latest biographical announcement she threw out her hands with a frank gesture of despair. "If this should be a patient," she implored, "who then is the 'Other Adventure'?"

Behind the little black figure's back the Young Doctor lifted a quick warning finger to his lips.

"S-s-h!" he signaled beseechingly to her.

On Solvei Kjelland's forehead the incongruous frown deepened from perplexity into something very like impatience.

"Well certainly," she attested. "You are of a great sobriety in your office, but most wild on the doorstep. As for me," she confided, "it is of the piano and the piano only that I care!"

"That's just it," said the Young Doctor, "it is of the piano and the piano only that Mrs. Kendrue cares!"

With her finger-tips already touching the ivory keys the Norse girl swung sharply around.

"What is that?" she demanded.

With a sudden impish conviction that Mrs. Tome Gallien, being already responsible for so many awkward situations in the world, might just as well now be responsible for everything, the Young Doctor gathered breath for his latest announcement.

"Mrs. Kendrue," he smiled with studied calm, "is the niece,-- as it were, of the lady who gave me the piano."

"What," stammered both girls in a single breath.

But it was the little widow's turn this time to be the most dumfounded. "What," she repeated with a vague new sort of pain. "What? You mean that Mrs. Tome Gallien gave *you* the piano--when--when she knew how I had been longing for it all these months? Been haunting the warerooms day after day!" she explained plaintively over her black shoulder to the other girl. "Why--why do *you* love music so?" she demanded with sudden vehement passion of the Young Doctor. "Are you a real musician, I mean?"

"On the contrary," bowed the Young Doctor, "I am as tender-hearted about pianos as you are about ducks. Nothing under Heaven would induce me to lay my rough, desecrating hand upon a piano." In an impulse of common humanity he turned to allay the new bewilderment in Solvei Kjelland's face. "This allusion about ducks," he explained, "concerns another little idiosyncrasy of Mrs. Tome Gallien's."

"Yes!" quickened the little widow. "When she sent Doctor Kendrue this wonderful piano she sent me a--a dreadful duck blind--way down somewhere in South Carolina!"

"What is that?" puzzled Solvei Kjelland.

"Why a place to shoot!" snapped the Young Doctor. "Wild ducks, you know! 'Quack-Quack!' A--a sporting camp!" His whole face was suddenly alight.

"O-h! And this little Mrs. Kendrue does not sport," reflected Solvei. In another instant her own face was all alight too. "Oh, of what a nonsense!" she laughed. "Of what a silliness! It is of course a mistake, most funny, most conflictible! In some way it is that the gifts should get mixed in the mails!"

"Oh, no!" wagged the Young Doctor's head. "Oh, no!" he reiterated with some emphasis. "Careless as I assure you many of the post-offices are there is very little likelihood of a grand piano and a duck blind getting mixed in the mails."

"O-h," subsided the Norse girl, but only for an instant. "What my idea should be," she resumed cheerfully, "and what the idea of my aunt should be, is that if you would let us take the piano--one month, two months, three, we would in return give you some lessons in this music, either in the piano or of the vocal."

"U-m-m," said the Young Doctor, "Yes--yes, of course that would undoubtedly be very humanizing and all that, but with so much unexpected competition, as it were, one must move very,--er--slowly in the matter. Just what--just what would be your idea, Mrs. Kendrue?" he turned and asked quite abruptly.

"My idea?" flushed the little widow. "Why--why, of course I didn't have any idea because I didn't even know that you possessed the piano until just now. But if you are still willing to part with it after--after the estate is settled," she

hurried with evident emotion, "why, then--perhaps--I--" Yearningly as she spoke she stepped forward to the piano and fingered out one chord after another, soft, vibrant, experimental, achingly minor, a timid, delicate nature's whole unconscious appeal to life for help, love, tenderness.

"Dear me!" mused the Young Doctor.

"Oh! Do you play?" cried Solvei Kjelland ecstatically.

"Oh, no," deprecated the little widow. "I just sing. Do *you* sing?" she in turn demanded as though her very heart jumped with the question.

"Oh, no," said Solvei Kjelland, "I just play." Yearningly she in turn stepped forward and struck a single chord. But there was nothing soft or minor about this one chord. Sharp, clear, stirring as a clarion call it rang out through the dingy room.

"Oh, dear!" thought the Young Doctor.

And as though flaming then and there with the musical fervor so long suppressed the Norse girl swung impetuously round upon her companion. "You do not play! And I do not sing! So let us!" she cried excitedly and dropping down on the piano stool seemed literally melting her fluent finger-tips into ivory-key and melody.

Indefinitely for a brilliant, chaotic moment or two, chord heaped upon chord and harmony upon harmony, and then suddenly to the Young Doctor's musically untutored mind it seemed as though the crashing waves of sound were literally parting on either side to let a little tune come through. And such a "pleasant familiar tune" he rated it delightedly. He didn't remember that Verdi wrote it. He didn't stop to consider that it was from *Trovatore*. All he cared was that it was a tune, and a tune that said things, and a tune that always said the same things whether you heard it chopped through a hurdy-gurdy on an asphalt pavement or roared stentoriously by a band at the beach. "Home to our Mountains!" was what it said, and oh, other things too, undoubtedly, but that was all that really mattered, "Home to our Mountains!"

It was perfectly evident, though, that the little widow cared who wrote it, and what it was from, and where it was going to! With thrilling sweetness, astonishing technique, and most amazing volume, her rich contralto voice rang suddenly through the room. And in the precipitous jump of his heart was it any wonder that the poor Young Doctor couldn't have told for the life of him whether the mischief was all in one girl's voice or another girl's finger-tips, or partly in the voice and partly in the finger-tips--or--? "Home to our Mountains," soared the lovely voice, then quivered suddenly, like some wounded thing, and with her hands pressed tightly to her cheek, the little singer sank weakly down in the first chair she could reach.

"Why, what is it!" jumped the Young Doctor.

Through a haze of tears the dark eyes lifted to his. "Oh, nothing special," faltered the little singer. "Just everything!"

With an irrelevant crash of chords Solvei Kjelland swung sharply round from the piano.

"Who is this Mrs. Tome Gallien, anyways?" she demanded fiercely. "And where is her habit? And what good is she? To hold back from people thus the things they want and stuff them all choke-up with what they don't want,--it is a scandal I say! It is a monstrosity!" With a quick, jerky sort of defiance she rose to her feet and commenced straightening her blue hat and tightening up her blue collar. "I am a failure as *One Adventure*," she laughed. "And I also get nothing! Neither the piano, nor the medicine for the sick aunt. Give me the address of this woman," she demanded. "And I will write to her in my leisure and tell her what my thoughts of her should be!"

"Do!" urged the Young Doctor. "Nothing would please her more! When a woman has the ego that Mrs. Tome Gallien has there's nothing in the world that tickles her vanity so as to hear just what people think of her, be it good, bad, or indifferent." With deliberate malice he tore a leaf from his notebook, scribbled the desired address on it and handed it to the Norse girl. "If it doesn't do anything else," he commended her with mock gravity, "it may at least draw the fire!"

"Draw the fire?" repeated the Norse girl a bit perplexedly. Then as though to shrug all perplexity aside she turned suddenly to the young widow. "As for you--" she beamed. "You are a cunning little thing! And I loves you!" With unmistakable tenderness she stooped and kissed the astonished little singer on the forehead. "And I hope you will soon be of a perfect wellness," she coaxed. "And sing the perfectly whole songs to whatever piano it is that you should love the best! As for me?" she called briskly to the Young Doctor. "It is that you understand I am perfectly resigned?"

"Resigned to what?" frowned the Young Doctor.

"Oh, this language!" laughed Solvei. "Do you know your own words? To? Of? It is the *from* that I would say!"

Complete *from* the Adventure I am resigned!"

"S-s-h! S-sh!" warned the Young Doctor's frowning face once more. Almost anxiously he accompanied her to the door. "S-sh--s-s-h!" he implored her. "The poor little girl must never know of Mrs. Tome Gallien's audacity in sending her here as an 'Adventure.' With all the sorrow she's in just now, and the pain--"

"Yes, quite so," acquiesced Solvei Kjelland with perfect docility. Then all of a blue-blonde flutter in the open doorway she turned to call back her blithe "Good-by."

"Good-by, Doctor and Mrs. Kendrue!" she called. "What? *No*?" she flushed at the very evident consternation in both uplifted faces. "Good-by then, Mrs. and Doctor Kendrue!" she revised her adieus hastily. "*What? N-o*?" she flared with her first real sign of impatience. "Well then, good-by, Mrs. and *not* Doctor Kendrue!" she finished triumphantly, and vanished into the snowstorm. Turning back to his somber office and his sad little patient it seemed suddenly to the Young Doctor as though the first blue bird had fled, leaving only a single black iris bud to presage spring for the garden. "Blue birds were darlings!" quickened the Young Doctor. "And yet?" Poignantly to his memory revived a misty May time years and years ago when he had sat cross-legged in the grass a whole day through--to watch the unfolding miracle of a black iris bud!

In consideration of the particular speed and energy which Solvei Kjelland applied that afternoon to her homeward plunge through jostling traffic and resonant subways it is of interest to note that the first thing she did on reaching her room was to sit right down in her Larkspur-Blue coat and hat and investigate the word "leisure" in her English Dictionary. Out of all the various definitions given, "vacancy of mind" seemed to suit her fancy best. "In the vacancy of my mind is it that I have promised for this writing?" she questioned. "Of a very good wellness then! When else should my mind or my heart be more vacated than now?"

True to this impulse she sat down that very evening to tell Mrs. Tome Gallien just exactly what she thought of her. On some very pale, pale yellow note paper, with the blue ink which she adored, and in the spirited handwriting so characteristic of her nationality, the very page was a blonde flare of personality.

MRS. TOME GALLIEN,

DEAREST MADAM (she wrote):

How do you do's. And I know all! Do not do it, I say. Do not do it. They do not like it and if you so persist in thus teasing of them you will most certainly defeat the one object which I am of an inclination to suspect that you have tucked away in one side of the mind. Is it not so?

You are of course very clever and of much wealthiness and some pain. And, it is of course very diverting and most droll lying thus to plan how one may yet motivate the destinies, is it, that you say?

And it is doubtless as you well think--the little widow lady has mourned too long, and is too delicate of the indoors, and moons too much over the singing-voice. And this Young Doctor in his own turn he also is a mistake, so sarcasms, so severe, and hates all womans and all pianos both, except for minutes. And you have thought that if thus across the little pain in the lady's bone these two could be brought to scold about the pianos and the blind ducks much good might yet come and of a most loving adjustingment?

But no, Madam it is a great mistake! These people are not at all as bright as you think. And also in their hearts is there none of that most happy greed which makes all comical things as they come one joke! No! It is only that they see in your gifts one great make-them-mad which if you persist in so doing with other comics will make them cold with hate and humiliation for each other. And when you tag the poor little lady as an Adventure you have yet outraged complete the chivalries of the Young Doctor so that he cannot even see in his sense that even so little a widow may yet be a very great Adventure.

Do not do it, I say! Do not do it! It is cruel. And there is no law but your own honor that can stop it.

If the malice is so formed that you cannot stop it but must persist in this most foolish custom of giving people the things what they do not want I would respectfully suggest that you send them to me.

I am young. I am strong. And very laughing. If you can find anything in the world at just this time that I do not want *I dare you to send it to me!*

Yours very truly,

SOLVEI KJELLAND.

Being satiate then with justice and the English language Solvei reverted once more to the pursuit of juvenile pedagogics and the general discussion of human events with her own aunt and in her own tongue.

Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, nothing except pedagogics and the aunt even remotely threatened her

horizon. And by Thursday every gesture of her fine young body, every changing expression of her fine young face, seemed frankly indicative of some seething inner triumph that as yet remained unspoken. By Friday night, however, even this self-control slipped its leash, and she closed her eyes for sleep with a very distinct and definite expression of emotion. "Ah!" she laughed, "that Gallien lady down yonder is good and fixed! Yes!"

It was not until Saturday night, late, by special delivery, that Mrs. Tome Gallien's answer came.

Stumbling sleepily down the stairs just before midnight to answer the doorbell that no one else seemed awake to answer, Solvei Kjelland received the insignificant looking envelope into her own hands. Small as it was, heavily overshadowed by special delivery postage, and almost quaveringly directed in a pale, fine writing it might well have suggested to anybody a suppliant for mercy, or at least for pity.

With a first faint twinge of remorse Solvei tore it open to discover no contents whatever--except a railroad ticket to the little mainland town in South Carolina where Mrs. Tome Gallien had established her official address.

Scowlingly for a moment and in dumb perplexity the girl stood shifting from one slippered foot to another in a really desperate effort to decipher each word, phrase, comma, asterisk, in the momentous little document before her. Then quite suddenly a smile that was by no means mirthful flashed brilliantly across her blue eyes and her gleaming teeth.

"*Stinged!*" said Solvei Kjelland, and gathering her big gray blanket wrapper a little bit closer around her fled back precipitously to her bed.

With the first faint ray of morning light perhaps she might have waked to an instant's reassuring conviction that the whole ticket episode was a dream if only her subconscious deductions from that episode had not waked first on her lips like a wry taste. "The one things in the world that I did not want--at just this time? That lady is a witchess!" was the phrase that waked on her lips.

It was not until early the following week, however, that she called up the Young Doctor to tell him the news.

"How do you do?" she telephoned. "This is Solvei Kjelland. And I am to say good-by."

"Good-by? Why, what do you mean?" questioned the Young Doctor's frankly surprised voice.

"It is that I am going away," said Solvei, "on a little--what it is you would call a trip."

"Oh," said the Young Doctor. "Where?"

If the statement could ever be made that a Person "shrugged" his voice Solvei certainly "shrugged" hers.

"Oh, through the tunnel!" she said. "And then off!"

"Yes, but where?" persisted the Young Doctor.

"Oh, to the Southern Carolines to visit this Mrs. Tome Gallien," sing-songed the girl as one who had rehearsed the line even to the point of monotony.

"What?" cried the Young Doctor. "Why--why, what do you mean?"

"Mean?" bridled Solvei instantly. "For why should it be a meanness? Is not this Mrs. Tome Gallien as fine a lady as I? Am I not as fine a lady as Mrs. Tome Gallien? For why if two ladies like to visit it should not be so? Have I not explain it all to the sick aunt?"

"Yes, but do you really mean that you wrote to Mrs. Tome Gallien?" stammered the Young Doctor. "What did you say? For Heaven's sake what did you say?"

"What I did say should be sealed in my own heart," affirmed Solvei with some coldness.

"Yes, but my dear child!" protested the Young Doctor. "You don't seem to have any idea of just what you're going to! It's not at all a cheerful sort of place you understand. Why even its name you know is 'Gloom of the Sea.'"

"Even so," said Solvei, "there is no special pain in that. In my time have I not already seen several Glooms of the Land? Why then should I not, for sheer geography, start out to investigate a 'Gloom of the Sea?'"

"Yes, but it's a--it's a Desert Island, you know!" persisted the Young Doctor.

"So-o?" brightened Solvei. "And will there then be camels? N-o?" With a soft sigh of regret her whole personality seemed to fade for a moment into the indeterminate blur and buzz of crossed telephone wires. Then clear as a bell her voice rang out again. "And have you seen the little sad lady once more?" she asked.

"Why she's here in my office now," said the Young Doctor. "She has to come almost every day."

"So?" mused the Norse girl. "And will it take the long time perhaps to mend the little pain in the bone?"

"I certainly hope so!" laughed the Young Doctor. And for the first time since she had heard it there was no irony in

the laugh but sheer boyish happiness.

"You do not seem quite to get the ideas of this little trip that I should make," she reproached him briskly. "It is not just that I go! But that I stay! It is not just for the once it would seem but for the all time that this lady so desires me! The ticket that she so kindly sends is but one-sided. It does not return."

"Ticket?" exclaimed the Young Doctor. "Why, this is preposterous! You don't really mean it, surely? There's nothing that can make you go, you know!"

"So?" said Solvei. "Did I not make the dare to her? Should I not pay? Is it not then as you say? I have drawn the fire!" Across the astonishing gravity of her tone a most joyous laugh broke suddenly. "Your words are of such a mixedness," she laughed. "Drawn? Drawn? Is it not rather as the strong banks would say, Miss Solvei Kjelland by one lady from the South has been withdrawn from the circulations? But I adore this America!" she confided blithely. "Always around every corner there is something that you did not first expect when you curled that corner."

"Yes, I know," admitted the Young Doctor. "But what about all this Montessori study and everything? Are you going to chuck it? And the little brother? The little lad who isn't?" he asked with real regret.

"It will all keep," said Solvei. "It is only what is, it would seem, that should pass."

"Oh, but Miss Kjelland," insisted the Young Doctor, "this whole thing is absurd! I--I believe you're making it all up, just for a joke! If you're going to be home next Sunday afternoon couldn't I come around and--and laugh the thing out with you?"

"Next Sunday afternoon?" mused Solvei, with the manner of one who pauses for an instant to count the days on the fingers. "And this now, this minute, is a Tuesday?" she questioned, still speculatively.

"Yes," agreed the Young Doctor.

"No! It will not be possible!" said Solvei. "I leave!"

"Yes, but when?" asked the Young Doctor.

"Now," said Solvei. "Already it is that I can hear the taxicab adding at the door."

"What?" cried the Young Doctor.

"Under the river!" waved Solvei's clear young voice. "Under the river, Dr. Sam Kendrue!"

Like a gigantic gray-brown wonder bulb the northern winter is dumped down thus at will into the sunny, plushy forcing frame of a New York Pullman to bloom in perfect scent and glory only one day, two days, three days later in some welcoming Southland.

If Solvei Kjelland was astonished, however, at the first bland sights that met her blizzard-habituated eyes it is only fair to say that Mrs. Tome Gallien in all her years of experience in every kind of a Southland had never seen any thing that astonished her as much as the sight of Solvei Kjelland.

Fuming helplessly in her great mahogany bed with its weird-carven bed-posts of pirate and sailor and siren, the sick woman lay staring blankly from the ceiling to the piazza railing and from the piazza railing to the dull gray sea when the vision first burst upon her.

"Why--why--Martha!" she screamed to her deaf woman. "There is a bright blue girl in the wrangle boat! And nobody is wrangling! They are coming right along, I mean! Scudding! And the girl is running the engine!"

From her own quick glance at the scene the deaf woman's answering voice came back as calm, as remote, as demagnetized as the voice of an old letter.

"You sent for a girl to come, I believe," said the deaf woman.

"Yes, I know," fumed Mrs. Tome Gallien. "But I hardly dreamed for a moment that she really would!"

"What?" said the deaf woman.

"Never--dreamed--that--she--would!" repeated Mrs. Tome Gallien as economically as she could.

"Most things that you send for--seem to come," monotoned the deaf woman by no means unamiably. "There's no room left in the storeroom now for the last box of Japanese bric-a-brac, or the French wedding gown or the new-fangled fireless cooker. Where shall we put the girl?"

"In the fireless cooker!" snapped Mrs. Tome Gallien.

From the vague acquiescent smile on Martha's face it was evident that she sensed the spirit if not the words of the suggestion.

The next direction however was startlingly clear. With a quite unmistakable gesture Mrs. Tome Gallien pointed toward the stairs.

"Martha! Go to it!" she screamed.

To a person lying in bed voices travel so much quicker than do the owners of the voices. Through what seemed an eternity then of time and noise, boat-keels grounding, men grumbling, boys shouting, women chattering, the sick woman waited in the lonely hush of her immediate surroundings with a very perceptible shiver of nervousness flashing from moment to moment across her spine.



As coolly as if she had been appraising a new dog or pussy, Mrs. Tome Gallien narrowed her eyes to both the vision and the announcement

Then all a-glow and a-blow and theatrically incongruous like some splendid young Viking of Old rigged out in a girl's blue and ultramodern rain-coat, the stranger loomed up suddenly at the foot of the bed with Martha's portly white figure backgrounding every radiant flutter and line of the blue and gold silhouette.

"I am come!" said Solvei Kjelland.

As coolly as if she had been appraising a new dog or pussy Mrs. Tome Gallien narrowed her eyes to both the vision and the announcement.

"Certainly you are a very good-looking young person!" she conceded at last. "But of such an ungodly name! Is there no way to overcome it?"

"Over--come it?" puzzled Solvei for a single shadowed instant. "Oh, that is most easy," she brightened, almost at once. "Solway it is as though it was. And Ch-Chelland."

"You may call me 'Elizabeth,'" said Mrs. Tome Gallien without the flicker of an eyelash.

"E-lee-sa-buth?" repeated the girl painstakingly.

"Oh, I suppose that will do," sighed Mrs. Tome Gallien, struggling up a little bit higher on her pillows. "But whatever in the world made you come?" she demanded tartly.

But if the question was like a dash of cold water, Solvei's reaction to it was at least the reaction of a duck's back.

"You mean you did not really want me?" she preened and fluttered. Her voice was ecstasy, her eyes like stars.

"I certainly did not," sliced Mrs. Tome Gallien's clear incisive voice.

"Oh, of what a joyousness and retribution!" beamed Solvei. "Of what a gloriosity! As the shooting camping is to the sad little lady, and the piano to the Young Doctor,--so thus am I to you! What then shall happen to everyone of us is yet on the lap of the gods! Let us kiss!" she suggested as one prize fighter might proffer his hand to another.

"I am not a kisser, thank you," said Mrs. Tome Gallien with some coldness.

"So-o?" acquiesced the girl softly. If her spirit faltered for an instant, her blue eyes fortunately faltered no lower than the great clutter of boxes that flanked Mrs. Gallien's bed in every direction. "For why are there so many boxes?" she looked up suddenly to ask with a smile that would have disarmed a Tartar.

"Why--why those are just some things I've been buying lately," relaxed Mrs. Tome Gallien ever so slightly. "There isn't so very much to do here, some days, except just to read the advertisements in the back of the magazines--and send for things. Martha hates it!" she added with a sudden wry glance at Martha's impassive face.

"O-h!" said Solvei. And the word was divided absolutely evenly between praise of the boxes and disparagement of Martha.

The boxes seemed to have heard their part of it anyway. The string on a huge brown paper package burst suddenly as though for sheer excitement.

"Martha will show you to your room," said Mrs. Tome Gallien quite imperviously. "And whatever else you try to jar, pray don't waste your energies trying to jar Martha. By a most merciful dispensation of Providence her sensibilities have been wrapped in a cotton batting silence for the past twenty years. You may in time learn to understand me," she smiled faintly with her first kindness. "But you will never understand Martha. Come back to me after supper, if you wish. And wear something blue if you have it. I like you in blue."

It was long after supper when Solvei returned. But at least she was in blue, and a very neat and trim blue it was and essentially boyish with its soft collar rolling back sailor-wise from her slender throat. Like one fairly consumed with the winter novelty of boats and beaches, too full of a hundred new excitements to speak, she dropped down on the low footstool by Mrs. Tome Gallien's pungent, smoky, lightwood fire, and with her blue elbows on her blue knees and her white chin cupped in her white hands, sat staring wide-eyed at her hostess. The whole breathless significance of youth was in her face. Youth struggled eternally for its own best self-expression. But when she spoke, a single sentence only burst from her lips.

"What was in that big brown bundle-box that should burst so?" she asked with a sudden elfish impudence.

But instead of being annoyed by the question, Mrs. Tome Gallien seemed on the contrary to be rather amused with it.

"You like boxes?" she asked with a faintly quizzical lift of her eyebrows.

"Boxes?" flamed Solvei. "It is like the new day! When the string breaks--it is the dawn! 'What should there then be in it?' jumps the heart. What is there yet that will come?"

"Oh, dear me," smiled Mrs. Tome Gallien. "If you feel like that about it by all means come and open it. I forget myself what is in it, there are so many. Nuts maybe," she laughed, "or a new carpet sweeper. Or a sable muff even!"

With all the frank eagerness of a child Solvei Kjelland jumped up to investigate the mystery, and like a kitten snarling itself into worsteds disappeared for the moment into interminable pale-colored tissue papers, only to emerge at last brandishing on high the plumpest, gaudiest, altogether most hideous hand-embroidered sofa pillow that human eyes were ever forced to contemplate.

"It is not nuts," said Solvei Kjelland. In another moment she had clasped the pillow to her breast. "Oh, of what a horror!" she laughed. "And how beloved! Is it the work then," she demanded, "of a blind one? Or of one crazy? Or of one both blind and crazy?" Back of the laughter and the question was a sincere and unmistakable concern.

"A clergyman's widow makes them," confided Mrs. Tome Gallien. "Somebody over in Alabama,--I saw the advertisement in a country newspaper. I take a whole lot of country newspapers for just that sort of amusement," she added a bit drily. "There seems to be such an everlasting number of bunglers in the world who are trying so desperately hard to make a little money. This woman I believe is trying to send her boy to college."

With the pillow extended precipitously to full arm's length Solvei sat for a moment staring from the chaotic embroidery to Mrs. Tome Gallien's perfectly composed face.

"Could a boy come to any of the good that should go to college on a pillow like that?" she demanded uproariously, while all the laughing curves of her mouth seemed reaching suddenly up to fend off the threat of tears in her eyes.

Once again she clasped the pillow to her breast. "Oh, the bridge that it does make into the other's life!" she cried. "Can you not see all at once, the house, the desolation, the no store anywhere with fine goods to compare with! The boy so thin, so white, so eager perhaps, so watching of every stitch! That most dreadful magenta? Will there be by the grace of the good God a chance perhaps for the Latin? That screaming oranges? Should it be humanly possible that so much joys as histories and boots might yet be in the same world with the Latin. And the mother? So pricked with needles? So consumed with hopings----"

"You--you see it, do you?" drawled Mrs. Tome Gallien.

"See it?" flamed Solvei. "I *am* it!" With the gesture of one who sought suddenly to hide her emotion she swung around abruptly toward the other side of the room. "What else is there then?" she asked, all laughter and mischief again. "That box so wooden, so busted at the top? Is that also a bridge to some other livings?"

"If you choose to call it so," nodded Mrs. Tome Gallien. A frankly quizzical invitation to explore was in the nod.

Solvei certainly needed no urging. In another instant down on her knees before the great wooden box, she was slowly extracting from wads of excelsior, piece after piece of the most exquisitely delicate and transparent turquoise blue china beaded in gold and airily overwrought with soaring sea gulls. There was a big breakfast cup, and a middle-sized breakfast cup, and a big plate, and a middle-sized plate, and a cereal saucer and another cereal saucer, and a most stately little coffee pot and all the other attendants and attendants to attendants which Fashion assigns to just that sort of a service.

"Oh, it is for the fairies then?" gasped Solvei. "Or a Princess?" Deftly as she spoke she pulled a great white sheet of paper to her and spread it on the floor as a cloth. "No!" she quickened. "It is for lovers! See? The first breakfast of the new home?" As cautiously as though she had been handling butterfly wings she began to dramatize the scene, the big plate there, the middle-sized plate here, a man's elbow-room, thus, a woman's daintiness, so! In the ingenuousness of her own visualization she lifted the bride's cup to her lips and sipped an ecstatic draught from it.

"Mocha or Java?" mocked Mrs. Tome Gallien.

"Joy!" said Solvei Kjelland.

In a sudden fit of abstraction then the girl struggled slowly to her knees and knelt thus staring very thoughtfully all around her.

"So is it then with all these boxes?" she asked. "That from this desert island lying so you would make constantly such little bridges across to other people's livings? In time, it is, I mean, as soon as you should bear to part with them you would build even these most Heavenly dishes across to some young happiness? But will such a young happiness ever take the troubles to cross back to you?" she demanded with sudden fierceness. "That is it, I say! That is it! A prattling note perhaps? A praise-you for being so rich? But do they ever yet write more late to tell that the gift is still well, that it has made new joy that very morning perhaps, that even yet after one month, six months, twenty, it is still so dear?"

"They never have," admitted Mrs. Tome Gallien.

In utter irrelevance the girl sank back on her heels and crossing her arms on her breast began to rock herself joyously to and fro.

"Oh, I do love this place so!" she confided. "I do love it so! And if you should then keep me," she beamed. "And I should be quite pleasant,--there is a lawn mower I read in yesterday's paper! Most wonderful it is, and runs by the gasoline, so that all one needs to do is to follow singing gaily. Could you send for such?"

"A lawn mower?" sniffed Mrs. Tome Gallien. "You noticed, I trust, that there was no nice grass whatsoever on this island?"

"Yes, that is most so," admitted Solvei. "Neither equally is there any young happinesses or bare-toed boys making for Latin. But if we were possessed of such a lawn mower and its wonderfulness we could at least make the fine green lawns in the mind."

"Solvei!" snapped Mrs. Tome Gallien, "I am dreadfully afraid that I am going to like you! But before I actually commit myself," she frowned, "I want to ask you one question. Are you in the habit of letting strange young men kiss you?"

"What?" jumped Solvei.

Very significantly Mrs. Tome Gallien repeated the question. "Strange young men?" she revised it. "Are you in the habit of letting strange young men kiss you?"

"Oh!" flushed Solvei. "It is then the Young Doctor that you mean? Was it so that he thus confessed it to you?" she

questioned a bit bewilderedly. "So shamed he was, so worried, I had not just thought that he should tell. Yes, it is as you say he is one most strange young man."

"Yes, but you?" persisted Mrs. Tome Gallien. "How did you feel about it? That's what I want to know!"

"How should I feel?" laughed Solvei. "Why it was so mad I was, so strong, I could have crushed him on the steps! And then suddenly I see his face! Bah!" shrugged Solvei. "I have one father and nine brothers and all the world is most full of men! It is not from such a face as the Young Doctor's that any evil should come. It is just as I have said, one very sad accident!"

"It does not seem to be just the sadness of the accident that lingers longest in your mind," drawled Mrs. Tome Gallien.

With her chin tip-tilted and her eyes like stars the girl met the sarcasm without a flicker of resentment.

"No!" she laughed. "It is not the sadness of the accident that remains longest in the mind!"

"U-m-mmmm," mused Mrs. Tome Gallien. "All the same," she resumed with sharpness, "I certainly think it was most cruel, most brutal of him, not to make the trip down here with me! It would have done him good," she insisted. "Just the mere balmy change of it! He is so grim!"

"Oh, but he cannot help the being grim," flared Solvei. "He is so poor and so wanting things! How should he yet achieve them except by sticking close to that most saddest of all truths that the only ways to get ahead is to stay behind and attend to one's business?"

"Solvei!" asked Mrs. Tome Gallien quite abruptly. "Have you gotten the impression in any way that the Young Doctor was-- was attracted at all to my little widow friend?"

"Oh, of a surety!" attested Solvei. "He is I think what one would say 'crazy' of her."

"Oh, I hardly dare to hope that," mused Mrs. Tome Gallien. "But of course--" In some far-away speculation the sentence faded suddenly off into silence. "She will of course be very rich some day, I suppose," she resumed a bit haughtily. "I shall, I suppose, make her my heir."

"S-o?" said Solvei Kjelland.

"Solvei!" snapped Mrs. Tome Gallien with another spurt of abruptness. "Speaking of 'attending to one's business,' if *you* should decide to stay here and make *me* your business, what do you think you could do for me?"

"Oh, I could do the reading aloud," brightened Solvei instantly. "And I could thus open the boxes! And I could run the wrangle boat!" she quickened and glowed. "And also if it should so seem best I could scrub the blue flannel crockings from the Wrangle Boy's neck!"

"On the whole--as a really steady employment," conceded Mrs. Tome Gallien, "suppose we begin on the reading aloud. I adore being read to."

"Oh, I am very fine on this reading aloud!" preened Solvei. "So dramatic is it that you say? So intensed?" With absolute self-assurance she picked up the only book in reach, it happened to be the "Golden Treasury," and just out of sheer temperamental eagerness selected the biggest-looking poem she could find. "It should be an 'Ode,' is it that you call it?" she confided. "And it is about--about--? I do not know such words," she faltered for a single second only and passed the page to Mrs. Tome Gallien.

"Oh," said Mrs. Tome Gallien, "Wordsworth, you mean. 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.'"

"S-o?" conceded Solvei. "All that? It is not certainly of a poetry sound but more--later perhaps it will tell. All the rest is most easy looking.

"There was--some time" (she began) "when--when

meadows, groves, also streams,

"The earth and all things perfectly--ordinary

"To me did--did seems

"Ap-pareled--" I do not know that word and

here is another--" in ce--les--tial lightings,

"The----"

"Yes--anybody could see at once that you are a remarkable reader!" slashed Mrs. Tome Gallien's coolest, thinnest voice. "The picture it suggests of our long spring evenings together is----"

With a startled glance upward Solvei detected for the first time the actual glinting mockery in the older woman's

eyes. "What is it?" she stammered. "What?" Still like some one more bewildered than hurt she struggled to her feet. "Even as from the first," she questioned, "is it that you are making the sport of me when I wish so hard to do the things that would please you? Through and through, is your heart then so cruel?" she demanded, "that it must make mockings of the confused and the far-from-homes?"

"Oh, Solvei!" cried the older woman suddenly. "Smile again! Laugh again! I can't bear it! It's as though the sun had died! It's as though the moon had gone! If you are angry and leave me, I shall be left all alone again with just the fog and the sea! I am a brute, and I know it! But oh, if you will only just smile again! Even just once, I mean! Oh, my poor dear little girl," she implored her. "Oh, my poor dear touchy little blonde girl!"

"I am not a 'poor--poor little blonde girl,'" asserted Solvei with some spirit. "I am indeed as I said, very young, very strong. And very laughing," she insisted without even the remotest flicker of a smile.

"Are you young enough and strong enough and laughing enough to come over here and sit on my bed?" rallied Mrs. Tome Gallien.

"I am young enough and strong enough and laughing enough to do anything!" said Solvei Kjelland.

Stiff and stern as a ramrod she went over and sat on the side of the Sick Woman's bed.

Without an atom of self-consciousness or embarrassment both women began all over again to study each other's faces.

"Could I put my hand on your yellow hair?" asked Mrs. Gallien at last quite surprisingly.

"You could put your hand on my yellow hair," said Solvei.

"If I should apologize fairly decently for existing at all," experimented Mrs. Tome Gallien a little further, "would you be willing to kiss now?"

"I should never be willing," sighed Solvei, "to kiss any lips that tasted of mockings."

"What would you be willing to do?" ventured Mrs. Tome Gallien.

"What would you want me to do?" relaxed Solvei ever so slightly.

Through Mrs. Tome Gallien's busy brain a dozen possible answers tested themselves one against the other.

"Well, would you be willing to--to tell me a little story?" she chose as the most promising one.

"Tell you a little story?" queried Solvei. Once again her whole face darkened with suspicion.

"Yes, about my little island," hurried Mrs. Tome Gallien. "It was dark when I came and they put me right into this bed. I do not leave my bed, you know."

"What?" quivered Solvei. "This most beautiful little island, you have not seen it--since you came?" In the very tenseness of the question all the blue seemed to surge back suddenly to her eyes, all the pink to her cheeks. "Why of a sureness," she cried, "will I tell you about this little island!" Softly then for a moment she patted her skirts and recrossed her slippered feet and fumbled with the big silk tie that closed her collar. Then quite geographically she began her narrative. "First of all," she explained, "it is a round little island."

"Really, you surprise me," said Mrs. Tome Gallien purely automatically. "So many islands are square."

"And there are fish upon it!" glowed the narrator.

"Oh, surely not upon it?" shivered Mrs. Tome Gallien.

"And there are seven monstrous what you call 'live-oak' trees dripping with gray beards,--it is most terrible," gloated the narrator. "And in one tree alone have I seen with my own eyes seven most scarlet birds and two blue birds. And in yet another tree there is a fine snake.--And all along by what you should call the edge of the porch blue violets are coming. And on the roof where the wrangle boat sleeps there is an green vine that shall yet be yellow and sweet, Martha tells. And--and--" Around the corners of the girl's red lips a faint little smile showed suddenly. "And there is one little black pig, so grunting!" she announced with rapture. "And--and----"

So the sweet, eager, revitalizing young voice ran on till Martha herself appeared to announce Sleeping Time, and Mrs. Tome Gallien whose "sleeping time" for years had been a farce of ghost and specter dozed off before she was even half undressed to dream like a child of budding violets and flitting birds and a glow that should be of jessamine instead of gold.

Hours fall so easily out of a day, days out of a week, weeks out of a month!

The jessamine glow did come in its own good time as did also various other things which Nature had ordained, March winds, March rains, March tides, March sunshine.

Other wonders came too that were of course Mrs. Tome Gallien's ordaining rather than Nature's fabulous shoppings from all the big marts of the world, and little pitiful, home made products from backwoods settlement or lonely prairie.

Once and for all time relieved of the hazardous task of reading aloud to a capricious invalid, Solvei came and went like a young Sea Breeze, whistling through the halls, singing through the rooms, sweeping across the island, frolicking on the water. If it was fair to rate her as a rather exceptionally clever and daring young navigator on the sea of fact it was only fair to acknowledge her equally clever, equally daring in the realms of fancy. Smiling knowingly into Martha's silences, laughing at the wrangle boat man or boy, waving a slim hand in and out of Mrs. Tome Gallien's narrow sea-blue vista, scudding to and from the mainland on interminable errands, or curled up for long cozy evenings on the foot of Mrs. Tome Gallien's bed to visualize their mutual magic path across one new box or another into "other people's livings," Solvei Kjelland as a companion was frankly a success.

Then one day very late in March, or even the first of April, something came which was partly of Nature's ordaining and partly of Mrs. Tome Gallien's, though most thoroughly a surprise to the latter one concerned.

It was a letter from Dr. Sam Kendrue. And very Northern. Whatever the New York winter had been it was plainly evident that the New York spring was still exceedingly cold.

MRS. TOME GALLIEN,

DEAR MADAM (said the letter):

As it seems best to me at just this time that Mrs. Kendrue should supplement her treatment with a trip South, it is my intention to accompany her. In view of this fact I will take the liberty of calling upon you on Tuesday next. Trusting that your island experience has proved beneficial to your health,

I am, Yours truly, etc., etc.

"U-m-mmmm," smiled Mrs. Tome Gallien. But before the dull, fretted bewilderment in Solvei Kjelland's face, her smile sharpened suddenly into impatience. "Why surely, Solvei," she scolded. "With all your English you might at least understand that."

"N-o," shifted Solvei from one slim ankle to the other. "It does not seem to me of any understanding whatever--whether it should be Dr. Sam Kendrue's Mrs. Kendrue who comes or just Mrs. Kendrue's Mrs. Kendrue?"

"O-h, of course," rallied Mrs. Tome Gallien's good nature. "One could hardly expect them to be married by now, or even engaged perhaps. But at least they must be awfully interested! How about your poor hardworking young doctor *now*?" she gloated; "couldn't take the tiniest holiday for a poor old gray-haired, crippled creature like me! But has got time to burn when it comes to some little soft dark-eyed thing with a creak in her singing-voice!"

"Love is sure some pranks," admitted Solvei.

"A prank," corrected Mrs. Tome Gallien.

"A prank," repeated Solvei with perfect docility.

From the increasing sweetness of her day dreams Mrs. Tome Gallien turned idly to the calendar on the table by her bedside. The week's page had not been torn off, nor the week before that, if the whole truth must be known.

"Why, Good Lack!" she jerked suddenly. "To-day is Tuesday!"

"So?" jumped Solvei.

Both women turned simultaneously toward the clock.

"It will take you half an hour to make the mainland and that train!" cried Mrs. Tome Gallien. "And for goodness sake, brush your hair! And change those old sea-faring clothes."

"I will not brush the hair," tossed Solvei's bright wind-blown head. "Always it is my preference to wear it thus hither-and-hang! Nor will I part ever from my friend this old blue jersey! And even so--if the sun does not fade between the here and the mainland I may yet achieve three new freckles on my nose!"

"Don't argue!" fumed Mrs. Tome Gallien. "Just hurry!"

"It is only when one hurries that one has time to argue," persisted the girl.

"Oh, stop your nonsense!" ordered Mrs. Tome Gallien.

"Whose nonsense will then be left to us?" flared Solvei. "But do not thus make all this extra worrisome," she admonished with sudden gentleness. "Time is always more fat than you think! But for two such fancy fine packages as I go now to fetch," she flared again ever so slightly, "there will not be room also in the boat for the face of the wrangle boat man nor yet for the legs of the boy. It is alone I insist that I should go!"

"For mercy's sake!" fretted Mrs. Tome Gallien. "I don't care how you go, if you'll only go!"

Without further parleying, Solvei started for the stairs. In another minute with a few jumps and slides she had reached the front door. Once outside, it took but a fraction more of time to settle the wrangle boat man and boy.

"Sitting here in perfect peace on the shore," she admonished them, "watch thus how one isolated person with no words but oil can make a boat prance on the waves! All aboard!" she called back exultantly to them.

With a chug like a great, pounding heartthrob the wrangle boat sprang for the sea. Just for a moment then at the last signaling point Solvei lifted her hand in unflinching cheeriness to the sick woman and the deaf woman left behind, and turned her own inordinately sharpened young senses toward the mainland.

But when the ructious little wrangle boat drew up a half hour later alongside the dilapidated mainland wharf before an admiring audience of jet black pickaninnies and mangy hounds there was only one passenger waiting impatiently there, and that passenger was Dr. Sam Kendrue.

"How do you do, Dr. Sam Kendrue?" said Solvei.

"How do *you* do, Miss Solvei Kjelland?" grinned Doctor Kendrue.

With more agility than one might have dared to hope for from one who boasted so much winter in his blood, the Young Doctor snatched up his valise, jumped down into the wrangle boat and pushed off.

To avoid running into a sunken rowboat and a floating snag, Solvei was compelled to start her engine, and turn sharply out to sea.

"Where then is your Mrs. Kendrue?" she called a bit breathlessly above the lap of wind and water.

"It is my Mrs. Kendrue that I have come to get!" said the Young Doctor.

With a little oil can poised abruptly in midair, Solvei opened the same old bewildered blue eyes at him.

"Oh, no," she hastened to disillusion him. "Your Mrs. Kendrue is not yet on our island."

"No, of course she isn't," laughed the Young Doctor. "And there's a jolly good reason why, and the reason is--because she's right here in the boat!"

"What?" stammered Solvei. With frenzied haste she began very suddenly to oil everything in reach. "What?" she repeated vaguely.

"I mean just what I say," said the Young Doctor, and made a slight move as of one who would cross one cramped knee over the other.

With all the joy of a foreigner easing his dictional panic with an idiom, Solvei snatched out at the first phrase she could think of that had a familiar word in it.

"Sit down! You're rocking the boat!" she screamed.

"Silly!" said the Young Doctor. "I was once in a boat before!" Quite wretchedly he began then and there to try and recover his old manner, the irony, the mocking. "Really, Miss Kjelland," he ducked as a great cloud of spray went by him. "Really Miss Kjelland, you're awfully rough with boats! Oh, but Solvei," he broke through again in spite of himself. "You understand what I'm trying to say, now don't you?"

"No, I don't," said Solvei Kjelland with her great blue eyes staring straight ahead through the veil of her windblown hair at some far focal point just over the wrangle boat's prancing bow.

Once again a great cloud of spray missed the Young Doctor by the width only of his dodge.

"And how is it then about Mrs. Kendrue's Mrs. Kendrue?" asked Solvei quite suddenly out of the gusty sky.

"Oh!" said the Young Doctor with the most surprising revival of cheerfulness. "Why--why she's gone on down to investigate her new duck blind with the rest of her party. There's a tenor, it seems, who is rather--well, contenting. You could hardly use any other word with her, she's so awfully inexpressive. Anyway it's a diverting friendship for her, though whether the tenor can hit a high duck as niftily as he can hit a high note, remains of course to be seen."

"S-o?" said Solvei with indifferent interest. "And is the piano well?"

"Oh, fairly well," conceded the Young Doctor. "But if ever I saw a piano that needed a mother's care! I had to board it out, you know?"

"S-o?" crooned Solvei's sweet low voice.

It was astonishing though how soon the sea calmed down after that. At least there was no more spray.

Skirting round at last along the sunny sheltered side of the little island instead of splashing boldly up to the regular

landing as was her usual custom, it seemed indeed as though Solvei was suddenly trying to feed out serenity to the man before her. The floating gray moss of the live-oak trees was certainly serene, the twitter of birds, the soft, warm drone of insect. Without an interrupting word she drove the boat's nose into a roughly improvised harbor of floating logs and a raft, jumped out upon the raft and beckoned the Young Doctor to follow her.

But at the first soft-padded thud of his foot on the turf it was the Young Doctor himself who broke the vocal silence.

"Oh, but Solvei!" he protested. "You've got to know that you are the only Mrs. Kendrue that I want!"

"S-o?" queried Solvei, glancing back with a vaguely skeptical smile across her blue jersey shoulder.

"Oh, of course," admitted the Young Doctor, "just right away at the very first I didn't know it perhaps. You were so--so,-- well, so sort of unusual," he flushed, "and so awfully independent! About the Adventure and the Little Widow and everything, you made it so perfectly plain you didn't need me that it wasn't till you'd actually gone that I half woke up to the fact how much I needed you! Why, Solvei, after you ran away the city was like a gray fog with no light in it, no laughter, no anything! The days were a week long, the nights, a month! Is it any wonder that I should feel as though I'd loved you for almost ever and ever? Why, if it hadn't been for my work, and the knowledge that work and work only could bring me to you--? Oh, I know it's awfully sudden and everything!" he persisted desperately. "But why people prate so everlastingly about 'Love at first sight' and never make any talk at all about 'Love at first absence'! Solvei you've simply got to understand!" he cried out.

In her few steps lead of him the girl stopped suddenly and turned around.

"But of what good is it that I should understand?" she asked with a little appealing gesture of her hands. "In my far Norway is it not that I have still the cause of the little brother? And here?" she puzzled, "How could I yet leave Elizabeth?"

"Elizabeth?" questioned the Young Doctor.

"Mrs. Tome Gallien," explained the girl.

"Elizabeth?" repeated the Young Doctor with increasing astonishment. "You mean you are such friends as that?"

"Yes," nodded the girl. "I am such friends as that."

Across the lovely earnestness of her face sun and shadow flickered intermittently. Softly her blue eyes brooded. Her bright gold hair was like a flame. In all that sunny, singing island there was no radiance like her unless perhaps it was the blue bird who flashed through the gray moss just beyond her.

"I cannot leave the little brother," she said. "Nor can I leave the Elizabeth." As though kindled by the spring's own sweet her whole musing face flamed suddenly with joy. "Nor yet.--I am so greedy!" she cried, "*nor yet can I leave you!*"

All unbeknown then to Mrs. Tome Gallien or even to Martha, they crept up the stairs at last to Mrs. Tome Gallien's room, where with the poor Young Doctor relegated ignominiously behind her, Solvei chose for her own whimsical purposes to make her dramatic entrance.

"Good afternoon to you, then, Elizabeth!" she hailed casually to the impatient Sick Woman on the bed. "This of a surety is

'One time when meadows, groves, also streams,
To me--did seem
A--apparelled in celestial lightings!'"

"What?" gasped Mrs. Tome Gallien. "Why, what makes your cheeks so red?" she demanded suddenly.

"I got kissed again," said Solvei.

"What?" snapped Mrs. Tom Gallien.

"They did not come," said Solvei. "No such Kendrues combination as you suggested. Nothing came!" said Solvei. "Except just one big package for me!"

"For you?" frowned Mrs. Tome Gallien.

"For me!" shrugged Solvei. "And though it should be hard yet to tell just what livings it shall lead to--it shall at least lead to much lovings."

"What?" puzzled Mrs. Tome Gallien.

"This is it!" said Solvei, and dragged the Young Doctor into the room.

"*What?*" screamed Mrs. Tome Gallien.

"It is for *me!* You understand?" beamed the girl.

In the convulsive laughter that overtook the Young Doctor he did not at the moment notice Mrs. Tome Gallien's face.

But there was no laughter of any kind in Mrs. Tome Gallien's face, only shock, and a most furious rage.

"So it is thus you have been deceiving me?" she cried out to Solvei. "All this time that you knew what my heart was fixed on, my hopes, my everything! All this time that you have been here a guest in my house! And quite safe I supposed from any such----"

"Oh, now really, Mrs. Gallien!" interposed the Young Doctor's grimmest, sternest voice.

"Oh, of what a nonsense!" laughed Solvei. "There is no blames anywhere--unless it should be to this Montessori theory! Out of the whole wide world is it not that a child must gravitate to his own wantings? It cannot be chosen for him?"

Then with all the young laughter gone from her face she reached out her slim brown hand to the Young Doctor's reassuring clasp and led him to the bed.

"Elizabeth," she said. "You are rich and you are sick and you are sometimes very cross. But you cannot buy the loving! Here then are two children who would love you all your life long-- all their lives long. If you thus furiously so refuse the gift, who then is the stingy receiver?"

"What?" stammered Mrs. Tome Gallien. "What?" Across her haggard, rage-stricken face a smile of incredulous enlightenment flickered suddenly. "What?" she surrendered. "You--you--*rascals!*!" And held out her aching arms to them.