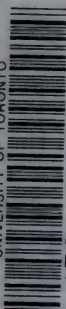


The SHADOW RIDERS

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BY
ISABEL PATERSON

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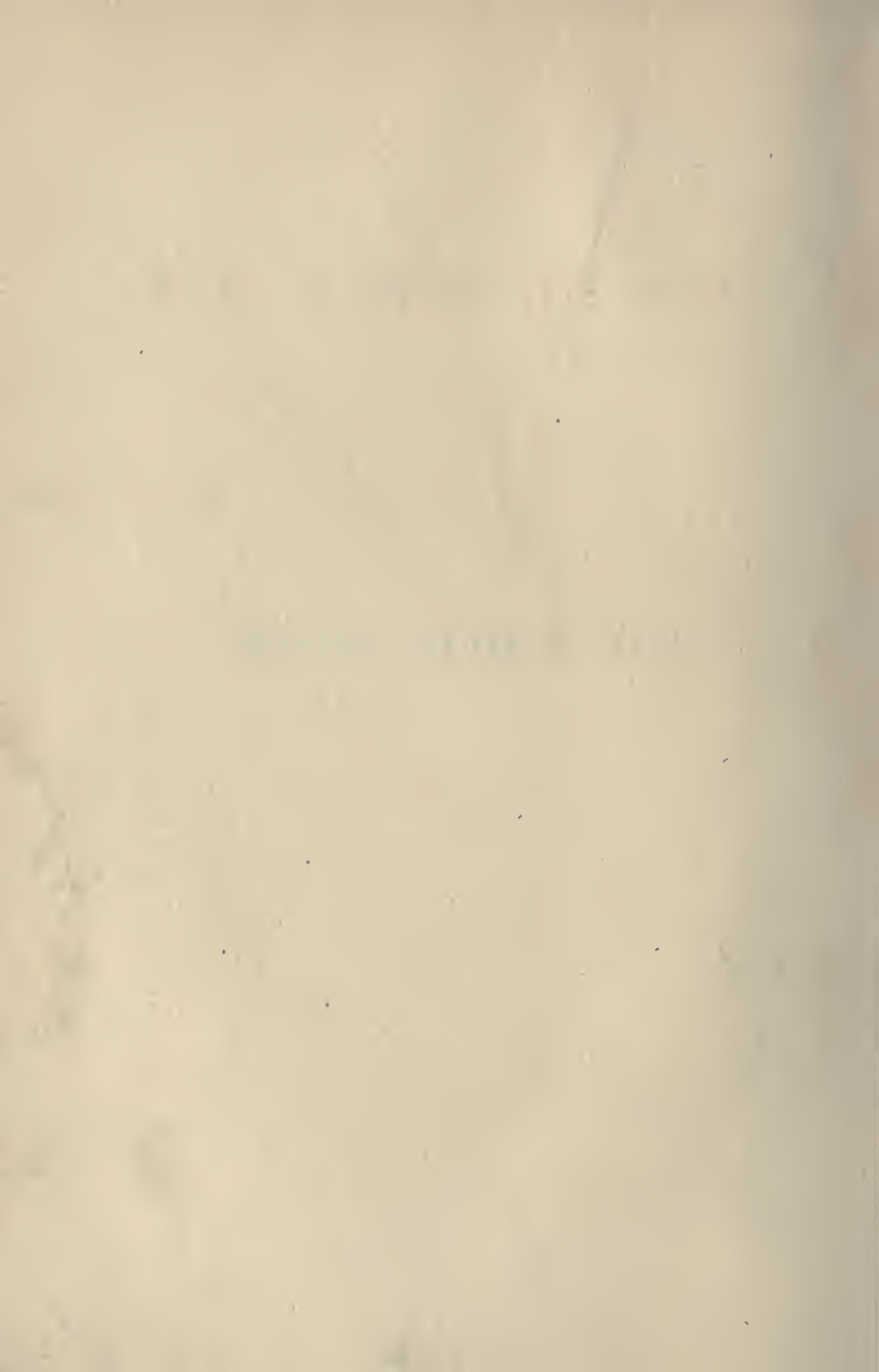
There is an old proverb which says that one can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. It is doubtless a true saying; I only wonder what one does with the flies after having caught them.

THE AUTHOR



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CHAPTER I

THREE short warning blasts of a locomotive whistle floated out of the Eastward darkness like an echo from the unseen hills; a pinprick of light appeared, grew to the size of a candle flame and then to a great white hot moon. With a clamour of bells and thunderous iron wheels the Imperial Limited—the Canadian Transcontinental Express—drew in, and lay alongside the long wooden platform puffing vaingloriously and glaring ahead at a switchman who crossed a black waste of cinders netted with shining rails to throw the semaphore, swinging his red lantern.

The Pullman windows were mostly dark; through travellers had already gone to their berths. The small crowd of people who had been waiting in disgusted patience moved forward with a sigh of relief, questing among the disembarking passengers, each for his own.

Whittemore, emerging leisurely from the smoker and avoiding a hurrying baggage truck still leisurely, saw no one he knew. He dismissed the porter who followed him with suitcase and greatcoat, dropped both by a lamp pillar, and lit a cigarette to consider. He had expected to be met, and decided to wait for five minutes grace before going on his unattended way.

The pale harsh light revealed him as a man near forty, yet not middle-aged in the stodgy, prosy sense the term has come to connote. Neither his clothes

nor his manner indicated that he had been travelling for four days. His dark tweeds, soft hat and English boots were all of a careless correctness which is the perfection of sartorial art; but Nature more than his tailor had given him his indubitable decorative quality. His slight, sinewy figure was topped by a head of classic contour, with grey hair that mercifully did not curl. His profile might have graced the bright disc of an old coin. The sole impress of a too fortunate youth was discoverable in some quality of his manner which made plain that he was no longer interested in himself. Life had been too kind to him in every material way; he was politely perplexed with a profusion so great, and ambition lay dead of satiety. In keeping was the unexpectant survey he gave his surroundings, a look which unfailingly betrays one past the meridian of life, when change and adventure are no longer synonymous. Yet he had the eyes and mouth of a man of great powers of enjoyment; hazel eyes, with occasional gold lights in them, and lips both close and mobile. But his hair was more than grey, it was almost white.

"Sorry we've kept you waiting; awfully sorry . . ." Walter Burrage, coming on the scene suddenly through the swing doors of the ticket office, seemed to have emerged, still gasping, from some flood tide of affairs. His round, ruddy face was the more comical for being of a gloomy favour, and he had the general air of dishevelment of a fat man in a hurry. A younger man, whom Whittemore did not know, accompanied Burrage. "I telephoned half an hour ago," the recreant one continued, "and they said your train wouldn't be in till twelve; 'phoned again just five minutes ago, and it was in."

"Yes, we made up time this side of Regina," said Whittemore, in a husky, uninflected voice that was

yet not devoid of character. "I can hardly say I've been waiting; what is five minutes when one is already thirty-six hours late?"

"That's right. Well, say, I brought Jack here with me—Mr. Whittemore, Mr. Addison——" They shook hands. "We were down at Folsom's committee rooms," Burrage resumed, picking up Whittemore's luggage.

"Check them in here," the owner suggested. "I'll have them sent for from the hotel." But Burrage clung to his booty tenaciously, meanwhile piloting the other two through the station and starting full stride across the dim cinder paths of the railway gardens before he again essayed his explanation. His manner implied that a too long absence might be fraught with incalculable disaster to some project too vast for explicit statement.

"How are you, anyway?" he began, in a perfunctory tone that would not have deceived an egomaniac. "You look fine—fine. I was about to say, I couldn't get a room for you at the hotel. The town's full; you should have wired earlier. Besides, I was out in the country campaigning till this morning. But Addison wants to put you up. He has rooms down in the Carhart Block. His roommate——"

"But that is an imposition," Whittemore began.

Addison waved the protest aside. "Glad if you'll honour me," he said heartily. He was somewhat vehement in manner, with dark, intent eyes and a touch of the South in his look. "The room's there, empty; and I doubt if you'll find another in town," he added. "Between the spring rush of landseekers, and the election. . . ."

"I am afraid I had forgotten about the election," Whittemore acknowledged. Only the most sensitive perception could have caught his inward laughter. In Montreal, where his journey had begun, this bye-

election for the return of a western provincial legislator was not even a ripple on the surface of the public mind; here it was a most frothy whirlpool. He understood Burrage's preoccupation. "I suppose the returns are not in yet? I used to know Folsom quite well. Has he any chance?"

They were turning onto Stephen Avenue already, where a crowd blocked the pavement beneath a huge white bulletin board whose changing legends, announcing the varying political temperature of the district, Burrage paused to read before answering.

"Folsom's safe enough, I guess," he said at last, wiping his brow with a gesture of relief.

It was earliest spring, but the night was capriciously warm, with occasional puffs of a chinook wind. There was a smell of dust in the air. There is always a smell of dust in the air; it is the characteristic scent of Alberta.

"Perhaps you'd like to come round and see the finish, after we've dropped your dunnage?" Burrage continued. They were edging around the packed section of the street, and from force of habit still gazing at the big white square overhead. Whittemore, withdrawing his attention to reply, heard Burrage still speaking, but to Addison, with a strange guarded air. "Where is Garth, anyway?"

"Banff," said Addison shortly. "If he takes my advice, he won't come back."

"Who?" asked Whittemore involuntarily, and immediately felt excessively tactless. But they replied eagerly, almost guiltily.

"Garth—Harry Garth—my bunkie. He's out of town," they chorused.

"I'm not putting you out?"

"Not a bit; not a bit. Delighted—honoured," Addison reassured him. Whittemore protested no more,

and Burrage lapsed into an elucidation of some fresh cabbala of the bulletin board. But when a few minutes later they turned away decisively, Jack Addison had deserted them. Burrage, gazing back, muttered something under his breath.

"A skirt, of course," he said disgustedly. In the glaring light they could not fail to see the delinquent, talking to a tall girl in a blue serge suit, a few paces distant. The girl's head was turned; only the pale curve of her cheek and a smooth sweep of black hair were visible below her broad hat. Addison's hot, dark-browed gaze was fixed under the depths of the dashing hat and he was talking eagerly. The girl stepped back lightly half a pace, as if in hesitation; even her shoulders were eloquent of undecided mischief.

"Jack!" Burrage called, adding another smothered "damn" when he got no answer. He went back; Whittemore saw Addison take something from his pocket—a key—and hand it to Burrage, turning again to arrest the lady, now poised for flight.

"He'll come pretty soon—maybe," said Burrage, rejoining Whittemore. "Apologies; says it's highly important. I wonder where he met Lesley Johns? I didn't think she was that kind—wonder if she knows. . . . None of my business. Excuse me; yes, this way. It's just down the street here. Jack said to make you comfortable, and I can show you everything about his dump."

Addison's rooms were in a business building. They climbed an unlighted stairway, on rubber treads that gave no sound; and a door on the third floor yielded to Burrage's touch while he fumbled with the key. Whittemore saw the lighted rectangle of another door beyond a short entrance hall; then he heard Burrage draw a quick short breath through his teeth like a

man who receives an unexpected blow. He moved until he was looking over Burrage's shoulder. There he too stopped and felt the breath go out of him, while his eyes riveted themselves on a wide mirror over a chiffonier that obliquely faced the intervening door. The Medusa's head could scarcely have been more potent.

Yet it was only a man and a woman they saw in the mirror, against the inevitable red and brown background of a man's tasteless, comfortable apartment. Indeed, these were hardly more than boy and girl. They stood not a pace apart, eye to eye, seeing only each other, as rapt in hatred as they might have been in love. He was not very tall, but he overtopped her. It was his only advantage; for in appearance he was like a thousand of his kind. One sees them in groups—the fairly regular, negative features, the forehead sloping to the edge of the brushed back hair, the mouth soft and selfish, the chin narrow—a “dancing man,” in drawingroom slang.

But there were not two in the world like her. She was slight, with the delicate, strong figure of the Dancing Mænad; a creature of fine, vital, vivid colouring. Eyes like a smoky sapphire, cheeks the live clear crimson of a poppy, lips redder still; all intensified as if an inner fire burned through them; and she leaned forward, her hands locked behind her.

It was the young man's voice drowned the creak of the opening door and some word that Burrage gulped down—“Garth”—which Whitemore heard and did not hear.

“But, Eileen, for Heaven's sake, listen. . . . Be sensible—you know I can't. . . . You always knew. It would finish me, spoil all my chances. . . .” So much from him, before she seemed to snatch his unfinished plea and tear it to scornful rags. Shaken with fury,

choked with a very passion of despair, her words struck Whittemore's ears and stayed with him like arrows quivering in his brain, to be withdrawn and comprehended later.

"You can't—what?" They could see her burning mouth form the words, in the cold mirror, her eyes narrowed to two glittering lines, and her disordered hair, of the colour of old copper, seemed to flutter like flame. She held their gaze painfully, dominated the scene. . . . Yet it was evident she had lost. The fair, pleasant, futile face of the young man had already paled and set into the obstinacy of his weakness. Her voice broke on a word; she paused, and spoke again. "Did you think *I* wanted you to—marry me—now? Because my father does—I despise you!" Now she was horribly quiet, and it hurt one's nerves. She should have shrieked . . . with that look.

With singular fatuity, the man put his hand on her shoulder, a cajoling gesture, characteristic even to one who had never seen him before. She stiffened and swayed back; her hands were clasped behind her.

"Then what *can* I do?" he said. "Let me take you home now; to-morrow we'll talk it over——"

"Oh, to-morrow!" The word struck some deep vibrating note from her fair throat, that rang and lingered in the air strangely, so that there seemed to rush into view a procession of endless to-morrows, too terrible to contemplate, impossible to live through. "There won't be any to-morrow," she cried, "not for us!" And she flung off his clasp and whipped her hands from behind her.

Yet not quickly enough; a woman's muscles will hardly match a man's in decision, for lack of training. He clipped her in his arms like a lover; there was no time to think of irony then, even had he possessed the hard mind necessary for that; for she had

the revolver, that she had been concealing in her skirt, at his very breast. It was his face she hated at that moment, and would have aimed for, else she had certainly killed him. She would have spoiled it for another woman's kisses, no doubt of that. But he had her fast, strained to him in an embrace of hatred, her own face upturned, thirsty for death. A beautiful face, even in that ugly moment. Then he forced the gun from her resisting fingers. Her mouth quivered; with a baffled expression she drooped and hung over his arm, crimson, suffocating with shame.

Whittemore, for all his poised experience, felt his own heart contract and was suddenly aware that he was gripping Burrage's arm so hard his hand was cramped.

"God!" said Burrage, in a harsh whisper.

"Come away!" muttered Whittemore imperatively, and drew him back through the door. It slammed violently, escaping from his nerveless grasp. He fancied he heard a brief sharp cry from within in answer.

In the street they looked at each other with that feeling of shame one knows who has seen another's soul too intimately. Burrage wiped his moist brow once more.

"Ought to go back," he said hoarsely. "She'll kill him—or something——"

"Not now," said Whittemore. He too was unable to speak lucidly. His mind had turned back nearly twenty years, and he felt like a man in a nightmare, who knows he sleeps and yet cannot awaken. "Who——"

The soft, stirring sound of feminine garments, that curiously agitating, fluttered *swish* of a woman in flight, smothered his voice in his throat. Out of the entrance they had hardly quitted a girl darted past them. For a few paces she ran, lightly but a little

unsteadily, her figure giving the impression of being buffeted by heady gusts. She did not turn to observe them, but Whittemore felt the swift sidelong glance that swept and passed them by, and under her flying veil caught sight of a strand of her rich hair. Her running pace slowed to a rapid walk just beyond, but she went straight ahead.

The two men again stood staring until she was out of eyeshot, lost among other pedestrians beyond Center Street.

"If it's a fair question——" Whittemore began once more.

"Fair enough," said Burrage. "That—that was Eileen Conway. Prettiest girl in Alberta, I guess. Lord, what's the matter with girls these days?" He paused, as if overcome by an insoluble problem.

"Sometimes, no doubt, they are quite human," said Whittemore abstractedly. Burrage looked startled.

"Eileen is," he said. "It's a damned shame. Her parents are nice people, but the good strict old-fashioned kind, hardshell religion, all that. Ever notice that if you try to tie any one down they go twice as far when they do cut loose? I remember it just broke their hearts when Eileen began going to dances; I know one time I took her to a dance at the Barracks myself, and she told me she had sneaked out of the window and borrowed her gown from Esther Purington. . . . You see, it was all like that; she had to fight to get a little harmless fun, and it probably looked all alike to her, outside of the window you know." Burrage did not recognise himself as a philosopher, but Whittemore thought he did very well. He could reconstruct the whole life of a wilful, high-spirited, beautiful creature from just that fragment. Her parents' standards she found unbearably rigid, and she was not yet old enough to make her own.

"Say, there's no need for this to go any further," added Burrage, "though I suppose every one will know; they always do."

"Ah, well, don't tell me any more," said Whittemore.

"Oh, you've seen it all, really. Maybe you know her father—Judge Conway? Plenty of principle, very little money." He seemed to be getting hopelessly involved in details.

"And the man?" Whittemore did wonder, a little, what kind of man it might be; Eileen was so lovely to look on.

"That was him, of course; Harry Garth. Been living with Addison. They're breaking up now; he told Jack about this, and it's not quite Jack's way. But then Jack knew Eileen came up there. Fellow hates to interfere, though. And half the girls in town have been up there on the sly," he jerked his head backward, "they think it's kind of devilish and all that. Harry's engaged to a girl back East; can't afford to break it off. He's getting his start in business here in one of her father's concerns. Maybe he's in love with her anyway; she looks like a sweet girl. Well—last week Judge Conway found it all out. I think he played the fool, but he was pretty much upset, and I suppose he did think a lot of Eileen. . . . He came to Harry, told him he'd got to—marry her. That was when Harry told Jack, and Jack told him to do it—or get to hell out of here. Harry went to Banff, to think it over. I wonder how Eileen got him to come back?"

Whittemore could easily imagine. "Found out what?" he asked, harking back a moment.

Burrage told him, in unequivocal words. Whittemore turned his head away; in the dimness his companion could not see his drawn face, but heard some speech of "a cad."

"No doubt," said Burrage, and yet his tone was doubtful. He could hardly help seeing things from a man's standpoint. Whittemore—once—had had the other viewpoint branded into his soul. He merely made a little gesture that said: "Go on."

"You see, Harry wasn't the only . . ."

"Do you think so?" said Whittemore. His tone made Burrage unaccountably uncomfortable.

"Well, hang it, of course I don't know. . . . Harry said so himself. He *is* a pup. I wonder if he said the same thing to Eileen?"

"What will happen to her?" said Whittemore, but rather as if he were talking to himself.

"What does happen to 'em?" said Burrage. "Say, excuse me, old man, I never meant to keep you out here all night. You'd better come and bunk with me." Perceiving his words had no immediate effect, he touched Whittemore on the arm. The other lifted his head with a start.

"I beg your pardon? Oh, yes, just as you say."

Burrage had a very dismal sense of failure as a host; he wanted to retrieve the occasion somehow. "My car is over at the committee rooms. It will take us out to my place in less than ten minutes. Will you stop in and see Folsom first? You're on the other side though, ain't you?"

"Theoretically," Whittemore reassured him, "but I am not exactly a rabid partisan. Yes, let's go and congratulate Folsom." He too wanted a saving anticlimax for the evening; almost anything to overlay that vivid and painful scene so fresh in his mind. And while he did not care greatly whether he saw Folsom or not, still he was a little interested in him, as he was in most things.

There are a few people in the world who, while admitting the dictum that all the world's a stage, yet

find themselves with more of a taste for looking on than for strutting the boards in person. Ross Whittemore counted himself as of that category. He had even cultivated the attitude to some extent, for reasons of his own; and in that direction Fate had chosen to be his handmaid. For that he might not have quarrelled with Fate, since it afforded him a box for the great drama; but he would have stipulated for high comedy. He had had his own tragedy. Now when he exerted himself he preferred merely to help set the scene or give a cue, with an impersonal cynicism that was seldom less than kind. In a theatre of ideas—which the world is not and never will be while emotion is the driving force of intellect—he was all that could be asked as an audience. Cultivated, nicely appreciative, ready to applaud gracefully when he might, a concealed yawn was the worst he would permit himself in disapproval. But for once even the perfect audience had failed of his occasion. He only wanted to forget.

They turned briskly up the street together, past the still lingering crowd once more, and elbowed through to a door which admitted them into a cloud of cigar smoke and the presence of a couple of rat-eyed youths in shirt sleeves, who sat at a table and scrutinised all comers with an air of strange sagacity. The door opened constantly, to admit other cigars, with human attachments. Burrage led through to an inner room, where the centre of the commotion remained calm, portentously calm.

This was the Conservative candidate, Edward Folsom. Tall and narrow, with a figure designed by an all-wise Providence for the exigencies of a statesman's frock coat, he had a clever, repellent face, round and bearing some resemblance to an alert pug, which assorted oddly with his high-domed head. Needless

to add, he was invariably photographed with a finger pressed to his brow.

Folsom and Whittemore had attended the same college. It was remarkable how logically each had developed from the promise of his youth. They had never been intimates, but neither had they ever quite lost sight of each other. Folsom recognised Whittemore with surprised cordiality.

"Ross Whittemore! In the name of wonder, where did you spring from? Have you been here helping the other side? You're too late."

"Elected, are you?" asked Whittemore good-naturedly. "Well, what will you do up there in Edmon-ton with your three fellow sufferers? I suppose you think that where the Macgregor sits is the head of the table?"

"This is merely the first wave of the flood," retorted Folsom, in the orotund tones wherewith an orator sometimes finds himself too permanently saddled. "Wait till the next general election—no, the returns aren't all in yet, but I believe it's reasonably certain. What are you doing here? Going back into active politics? I haven't heard a hint of it."

Whittemore shook his head. Once, more than ten years before, he had been considered a rising star politically, though in his inmost heart he knew he had played the game only for diversion. He had been a Liberal, owning that he could never have resisted the word itself. It was there that Fate, always curiously consistent in her dealings with him, had gently put him aside, just in time to save him from yielding to the inherent fascination of the arena. A weakness of the throat, which could not be permanently cured, had incapacitated him from speechmaking. And a politician who could not talk, Whittemore had himself said, would be more than an anomaly—he would

be a miracle. One might be deaf and blind, but not dumb. So he had stepped back gracefully, with no perceptible heartburnings.

"Rest easy," Whittemore said, his husky, toneless voice faintly mocking, "your new laurels are safe from me. And they sit very well. No, I came West on business, and to broaden my mind, and because I have a nephew of sorts somewhere here in your No-Man's Land——"

A group of excited men surged in noisily, clamouring of "a sure thing" and "a landslide," and began an indiscriminate shaking of hands. Folsom rose to the occasion; indeed, he swelled to it.

Whittemore would have felt free to smile, but that there was not even the grimace of irony left in him. He had failed of his object, got no diversion. Too much of this would bore him hopelessly, and he considered that at least he might be able to sleep. He needed sleep. Burrage caught his eye presently.

"Want to go? I'm about all in myself."

"In that case, yes," said Whittemore. "It is too late now to rout out Chan; besides, I've locked up his address in my luggage. If we had got in earlier, I might have gone over to the Liberal headquarters, but they won't be welcoming visitors now, I dare say."

"That's right," agreed Burrage. "Crape on the door. Well, let's beat it." They went out.

CHAPTER II

IT was afternoon of the following day before Whittemore finally found himself at the address his nephew's letter had given. He had been unable to escape his business associates during the morning; they had seized him and imprisoned him in a motor car immediately after breakfast and kept him till luncheon, a very mediocre luncheon at the Round Up Club. In the interval he had been taken up on all the high hills in the neighbourhood and shown the town, and had also exhaustively investigated the power plant, owned by the Belle Claire Company, which was in part himself.

Whittemore had seen the town once before, though not the power plant. There had been no power plant then. That was fifteen years earlier, and Whittemore had stopped over an idle day on his way to the Orient. The town is on the direct line of Europe's travel to the East by the Western route. He had first seen it as little more than a cowcamp modified by the coming of a railway. He might have forgotten the very name of it but for having somewhat later taken over those Belle Claire shares for the financial relief of an old friend. Later his interests had ramified and extended themselves, still at long distance. He had enough of a seeing eye to gamble on the Canadian West, if only for the sheer bigness of it. He could draw a parallel, without prompting, from the lesson across the boundary written by the last half century. Several times since he had meant to come back for a look, the more because a number of men he had

known in his youth, men with far less to begin on than he, had come out to Alberta and risen to sufficient prominence to send an echo back East. Folsom, for instance—and Geers, whose retirement had brought on the election, whom Folsom succeeded, who was a brother of a girl Whittemore had once admired, and grandson of an old friend of his father's, a grey old fox of a politician from Montreal. So he felt a curious familiarity with the place as he walked down Fourth Avenue West, past the oldest residence section of tiny grey houses hiding behind tangled grey scrubby trees—this, at such season, was a world of grey and dun—and, half a dozen blocks beyond, discovered the number of the house he sought. Only the number would have identified it; there were six houses exactly alike, square two-story boxes with tiny upper balconies and naked-looking porches below, all painted a depressing yellow. It looked exceedingly dreadful to Whittemore, but Chan had written that he was entirely comfortable. Chan was his nephew—Channing Herrick.

It was Whittemore and the doctor combined who had sent Chan out here. He was convalescing very slowly from typhoid-pneumonia, and had come West, in an I-don't-care mood and the charge of a trained nurse, a month before. The nurse had gone back East already, and Chan would have been glad to go with her, though by no means for the sake of her beautiful eyes. She was forty, and knew it. Whittemore had chosen her himself, at a time when Chan was in no condition to object. Chan had got pneumonia from playing hockey with too much enthusiasm. Every hockey player gets it sooner or later. The typhoid had sidled in coyly without any especial invitation. When it became reasonably certain that the boy would survive—Ross thought of him as a

boy, though he was twenty-eight—the doctor said that if he were to do more than survive he should spend a year or two in a high, dry altitude. Davos, or Colorado. Or Banff, suggested Whittemore; he knew Banff was high anyway. The other places sounded so far away. But Banff was too cold in winter; Quebec would be no worse. It was then that Whittemore suggested this alternative; he was often obliged to think of the place in the course of business. Some one had told him the winters were peculiarly mild and salubrious. He was quite ready to believe it as he walked through the February sunshine down the dusty streets. The distant mountains were whitecapped against the far blue rim of sky, but here was not even a lingering spring drift. Yet his train had been blocked by snow in Manitoba for over a day. At the hotel they told him casually there had been a foot of snow on the ground four days before; he merely asked for a whiskbroom and smiled politely.

On the whole, he felt relieved and satisfied. He had had a secret second thought about sending Chan here, he owned to himself. Chan was the only son of Whittemore's only sister, and an orphan since his teens. He admired his uncle extravagantly, and that alone disquieted the older man, recognising in himself a temperament ill-suited as a model for such a naturally energetic youth. Whittemore suspected Chan of intelligence, discounting certainty because of kinship and kindliness. And he knew the imperative need of an outlet for combined energy and intelligence. So he had fallen back on Horace Greeley and exerted the authority of affection. If there was anything in Chan, he thought the contract with a raw and visibly growing country would bring it out. It was time that supposititious intelligence had a chance. After

all, Chan had spent six years and over thirty thousand dollars since leaving college, and had absolutely nothing to show for it except his rickety lungs.

He had a long face to show for it this morning. That his uncle was in town he did not know. Whittemore, opening the door quietly, having asked the landlady to let him go upstairs alone, found him in a dressinggown and a state of extreme boredom, surrounded by newspapers and gazing out of the open window with a lacklustre eye.

"Ross!" The young man sprang up, proving himself the taller of the two, and reached a bony but vigorous hand for his uncle's grasp. He had always called Whittemore by his first name. "I didn't expect you till next week."

"I expected myself yesterday," said Whittemore. "Sit down, you living skeleton. How are you treating yourself?"

"Family skeleton, you mean, don't you?" said Chan, grinning. He was thin, and had the pallor of convalescence, but the healthy red of his firm, generous mouth marked these signs of illness as only temporary. He had a very genuine smile, quick grey eyes whose under colour was green instead of blue, a shock of rough brown hair, and was accounted good-looking, in a purely masculine way, despite his irregular features. Full face, he had a boyish expression, but *en profile* one suspected that with age the bridge of his handsome nose would assert its Roman sympathies; there was latent strength, even aggressiveness, in that nose. As her artist admirers said of Ellen Terry, Chan had "beautiful bones," as marked by the clean careful modelling of the eye socket and brow; wherefore he showed the effect of a long, severe sickness less than most. "Well, I seem to be alive," he assured his uncle.

"You are marvellously improved—in appearance," said Whittemore.

"Hel-lo," remarked Chan cheerfully. "That sounds like the opening gun. Honest, I haven't done anything."

"No, I suppose not." Whittemore wanted to say his say at the very beginning, that he might observe, during the remainder of his visit, how his suggestions were taking root. "The point is, are you thinking of doing anything? Chan, I've not been easy in my mind about you. I feel as if I hadn't paid my debt to you; as either a preceptor or an exemplar of youth I consider myself a failure." His seriousness could not be misapprehended; Chan sobered instantly.

"I'm not much good, am I?" he admitted. "But don't slam yourself for it."

"I must, in justice. Youth is the imitative period. And I have a horror of interference. I feel rather like a hypocrite at this moment," he said thoughtfully, "or rather, I feel as if I must appear like one. I saw your doctor this morning, on my way down."

"Did you? I'm practically all right again."

"So he says, but you ought to stay here at least another year. I really came to ask you if you'd give that year to me."

"I'll give you ten," said Chan. "Do you mean to say there's anything I can do for you?"

"Yes. I want you to go into the Belle Claire offices later, when you are really fit, and gain a first-hand knowledge of it for me. Then there are several other business propositions I am considering—I have to go to Edmonton about them before I leave—and I shall need some one to stay on the ground. In short, I want you for my unofficial representative out here. But I want you to consider your own interests too, always act for yourself first. I would never have

asked you to exile yourself out here to do this for me if circumstances hadn't brought it about. But as it—shall you mind?"

"Mind? It will save my reason. The fact is, when the doctor told me a day or two ago I couldn't go back for a year without risking my life, I just about decided to throw it in the jackpot. Of all the unimaginable jumping-off places——"

"I thought it was rather lively last night," said his uncle thoughtfully. "But you weren't out, of course. I see you've been taking observations through the press. Have you got acquainted at all with conditions here? I suppose not. Yet I think you might find it interesting."

"Politics, you mean? It looks rather stale to me. Sounds almost Dickensy—'hole and corner Buffery,' you remember—that sort of argument is about their level, if one goes by this." He kicked aside the pile of newspapers.

"They are rather infantile," said Whittemore. "That's why it's interesting—the things they don't realise. They're puddling about the shores of an ocean with teaspoons. But I suppose nations are always built that way. A good many magnificent chances have been missed in Canada for sheer lack of the man. So—we're Colonials. Sort of a national suburb. Fifty years ago now—— But after all, the deal is not yet finished; we have a long future before us. Do you fancy politics? I never heard you give an expression on that point."

"I like a fight," said Chan.

"That's where most of 'em begin and end," said his uncle cynically. "But it doesn't become a *faineant* like me to sneer at an honest fighter. By the way, are you fit to go out at all? I have an appointment this afternoon with Geers—the Liberal member who just

resigned. Should you care to come? Or have you something else on hand?"

"Of course I can come. Thanks, awfully." While they talked, Chan had been keeping a casual eye to the window; by a slight change in his expression, Whittemore perceived that at last the youth saw what he had watched for. He moved quietly to his nephew's elbow.

They were gazing down into the region of backyards, six of them also exactly alike. In the nearest a girl had suddenly appeared. Something about her tall straight figure struck Whittemore as vaguely familiar; or perhaps it was the unconscious pride expressed in the turn of her head. She wore a large blue apron and carried a wicker clothes basket, which she set down while she re-strung a short clothesline. Her dark hair was uncovered, and drawn back from her clear oval face.

"Ah, I see," said Whittemore gently. "You have an agreeable view from here." Chan started violently and even blushed.

"Oh, chop it, Ross. The fact is, I was interested because—because of something interesting that happened last night. I haven't had much to do but look out of the window, you know."

"She looks like an interesting young lady," said Whittemore encouragingly.

"I didn't say it was she that was interesting," growled Chan. "Fact is, I don't know her. But I was looking out of this other window last night," he pointed to a window which, by reason of an angle in the side-wall, looked to the street, "and I did see something queer."

Whittemore passed his hand over his eyes, remembering last night also.

"Yes," he said, this time with no note of persiflage,

"I suppose—a good many things—happened last night. But tell me."

"It was quite late," resumed Chan. "Must have been just after midnight. A fool parade had waked me up, and I was sitting in the dark smoking. A cab stopped in front of the house, the next house, I mean, and that girl got out. Some man got out too, and they talked a minute or so and finally she shook him, kept him on the outside of the gate. She was laughing at him, I think. He went away again in the cab, and she pretended to go into the house, but as soon as the cab was out of sight she came out again and sat on the porch steps. The moon was up, you remember, and it was rather a splendid night. I'd have gone and sat out there with her, for half a cent. But she didn't offer me one; didn't know I was watching. I suppose I had no business to, but Lord, it was almost an excitement to me, after the way I've been living here. So we both just sat around—and then I heard some one coming up the street; those board sidewalks, you know. I thought I'd guessed it then. . . . I tried to make myself go away from the window, but I didn't. And—it was a woman came. She was walking fast, looked as if she meant to go right by. She saw Miss Johns just as she got opposite——"

"Miss Johns?" said his uncle. So he had seen her. . . . She was pinning up clothes by now, mysterious white garments; her uplifted arms threw her into a strong and graceful pose. Both men still watched her.

"Oh, I heard her name quite a while ago, from my landlady. As I was saying, the other woman saw her, sitting there in the moonlight, and she gave a little shriek and just wilted. Fainted. Now what do you make of that? Maybe she was only startled. So

was Miss Johns, but I admired her commonsense. She dashed out and picked up the other one in her arms. Quite a load, I should think. . . . I've carried a girl myself, and it's not such a lark as it sounds. . . . Carried her right into the house. I saw the lights go up in the sittingroom—I guess it's the sittingroom. You couldn't have pried me away from the window then. I watched for about half an hour, and they both came out again. Miss Johns didn't seem to want the other one to go, but she would. Went off at that quick walk again. Miss Johns went in, and the lights were turned off. Now what do you make of that?"

"I don't know," said Whittemore. Yet he felt as if he must be stupid, as if he should have known. "Could you see what the other woman looked like?"

"No. I should say she was young, that's all. But that's why I was rubbering just now. Oh, hang it——" He retreated from the window in confusion. Miss Johns had looked up suddenly, intercepting his earnest gaze and returning it with steady eyes. She appeared to be amused.

"I should say," remarked Whittemore, "that the young lady is learning your habits. Ah, she's going in—by the way, is she a maid over there?"

"No, she's not," said Chan, appearing almost irritated. "She does something or other in the *Recorder* office—circulation department. . . ."

Something in his uncle's eye, rather quizzical than minatory, caused him to break off in utter and unexpected confusion.

"You must have been reading 'Who's Who,'" said the older man, and went on mercifully. "By the way, I have to meet Geers in an hour, and I have to send some telegrams first. If you like, we'll call for you here with a car in about that time. And meantime, don't consider your decision is made in the matter of

staying here. Take time. As long as you like. Wait till you're really on deck again. I should be sorry to crowd you into anything distasteful."

"Nothing you'd like me to do would be distasteful," said Chan, with almost painful earnestness. "I've often wished I could do something for you, Ross. You've been so decent—darned sight more of a friend than a relative—I owe you a good deal——"

Whittemore was genuinely surprised and warmed. He had not the faintest idea what Chan thought he owed him—the boy had spent his own money on his protracted and rather inconsequent education, and had not yet needed to come to him for any help, not even to be extricated from the usual "scrapes" of the callow age. Whittemore would have been almost staggered had he known that it was because of Chan's admiration for his uncle's breeding and conduct of life there had been no such scrapes. His uncle was his unconscious ideal of a gentleman. It was a survival of the days of his very small boyhood, when he had expended his hero worship on the debonair young man who was never too busy or preoccupied with the grave concerns of age to hear his confidences and solve his problems. It never occurred to him later to consider ungraciously that his uncle had no need to be busy at any time. The fixed star kept its place. In the light of it, Chan had tried to be neither a cad nor a rowdy. But this was the nearest he had ever come to expressing the feeling.

"Delirious," said Whittemore, with great gravity. "So sad—a relapse at this stage. I wonder, ought I to trust you with a razor? And yet, the need is urgent."

"Oh, get out. I've been raising whiskers to kill time. It's the only interest I've had in life—barring the window."

He applied himself to a search of his dressing case for the needed articles, and Whittemore departed.

It was without ulterior motives that Herrick went to the window again. He merely desired a good light for the delicate operation in view, and it was not until his lean cheeks were properly shaven and he had finished rubbing the powder on and off that he looked out again. A breeze had come up and played with the curtains. It also toyed brazenly with the articles Miss Johns had exposed to view in the neighbouring back yard. The line swung back and forth merrily, and one of the poles which supported it developed a rakish list to port. With idle concern, Chan watched it sagging and jerking until the thought penetrated to his mind that yet a little more and those snowy banners would be trailing in the dust. And a very nice girl would have several hours' work to do over again. . . . From force of habit in tending his health, Chan hurled himself into an overcoat (undoubtedly he needed it more than he did a collar), and charged downstairs to the rescue. He might have called Mrs. Thompson, his landlady, but Chan always acted first and thought afterward in an emergency. There was no more than the rudiments of a fence between the yards. Chan caught the pole at its last drunken lurch. And then he was quite at a loss what to do with it! It needed re-setting and tamping down. All he could do was to hold it. He did hold it, like the standard bearer of a forlorn hope, and looked about wildly for rescue. To brace against the freshening wind he was obliged to stand with his back to the house, so he did not see Miss Johns until she was at his elbow; indeed, he heard her first, and for the first time.

"Noble youth!" she said. "Oh, I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to be so idiotic. I meant, thanks ever

so much. Millions of thanks." Her enunciation was quick and clear. Her voice was rather high, but without a sharp note in it, expressing gaiety and courage and a sincere spontaneity. It was evident she could not resist the humour inherent in any situation, and she was now more embarrassed than he because she had yielded to that element of the absurd in her very first words. It still glimmered in her eyes. They were the mysterious colour of water in shadow, defined, with the clear sharp line seen in a good Japanese print, by fine black lashes. And her short upper lip, which was of the tint and texture of a pale clove pink, struggled with a smile.

"I only done my duty, ma'am," returned Chan, restoring her to composure by playing up. "Now what's the next move?"

She cast a considering eye on the situation. "I can fix it. Hold on just another minute." She deftly untied the line and walked to the back porch, letting out the slack end. A hook on a pillar served to fasten it up again. Chan's post, in both senses, became merely honorary. He followed her.

"Let me," he said. But she had already knotted it.

"Just as much obliged," she said. "Now I'm afraid you'll catch cold; and your beautiful red slippers are getting spoiled."

They were very red, of fine morocco, and distinctly intended for privacy.

"Oh, I'll go," he said discontentedly. No one ever accused Chan of shyness with women. "Never mind; I'm used to ingratitude. Say, lady, don't you want a handy man to make that pole firm?"

"Well, yes. But we need some one to fix the fence more; any one can get through it now." Chan's mouth actually fell open, and Miss Johns, after one heroic effort at gravity, loosed her laughter over him.

He had to join her; he enjoyed a good riposte as well as any man.

"I beg your pardon," he said at last. "I do really. I know I presumed. And—and so I'd like to presume again. Do you know that I haven't a soul in the world to talk to except my landlady? And my name is——"

"I know your name, Mr. Herrick. And you've got your uncle to talk to. Did you imagine I wouldn't know? I have a landlady too. But I really do not think you were presumptuous—and I do think you'll catch cold." She did not run away, quite, but her swift, graceful gait took her within the house before he could formulate an answer, or decide for himself just what she meant . . . about his being presumptuous. He went in to finish dressing, and consider the matter.

CHAPTER III

THIS was on a Saturday afternoon, else Lesley Johns would have been at her desk in the *Recorder* office, instead of playing the part of the maid in the nursery rhyme. Not that she felt at all like any one in any rhyme. A comparison with Nausicaa herself would not have reconciled Lesley to what only necessity could enforce. Not even if she had known exactly who Nausicaa was. Lesley detested domestic tasks, and washed her own apparel from the most utilitarian of motives.

For once, however, she had been barely conscious of her occupation. An undercurrent of sorrowful yet excited retrospection was carrying away her thoughts, fixing them firmly on the night previous—until she caught Chan Herrick watching her from his window. Then a certain annoyance and embarrassment supervened, mingled with some shy gratification. All of this was prompted by the most feminine of motives. For, though she knew it was absurd to suppose he would observe such a detail at the distance, she was painfully aware that her hands were roughened by the water and the wind. Lesley hated her hands. They were strong, and not small. Her feet, which were of the same type, also infuriated her. Lesley was not vain at all; she was merely sensitive to beauty and its defects. Not vanity, but experience, had warned her suddenly that she was under observation. She had learned to expect that bored countenance with the cheerful eyes, ambushed behind the white muslin curtains opposite, following her movements with can-

did interest. To deny that she was reciprocally interested would be to deny that she was young, feminine, and human. In fact, she enjoyed drawing Chan's gaze, and one might put it down to a sense of justice that she feared he might not extract an equal pleasure from it. She was very certain that it did not add to her pleasure to look at her own hands and feet. Still, he might not be so finicky.

Before Chan's close-cropped brown poll at the window had diverted her attention, she had been mentally going over, again and again, the events of the preceding night, election night. It would be a long time before she forgot that particular night. Her life had been unduly monotonous for one of such spirit, and for once the prayer of her heart had been answered; things had happened.

She had stayed late at the office purposely, sitting in the newsroom and watching the returns come in. The managing editor was rather a friend of hers. When the issue was no longer in doubt, and the room was so thick with tobacco smoke that Lesley could hardly see, she went out, meaning to go directly home after a glimpse of the crowds on the street. And there, just as she would have turned on her heel to go, Jack Addison had caught her.

She could not remember where she had met Addison first. Probably in the office. More than once he had come in on a transparent pretext and hung over her desk, bringing her a flower or bonbons—anything too small for her to refuse. But what possessed her to relax her rule of snubbing him this night . . . ?

For she knew all about Jack Addison; Burrage need not have wondered. He had a wife, living uptown, while he inhabited gay bachelor chambers in the Carhart Block; he had a little girl, too, who stayed with her mother. Also, he had money. Some decency no

doubt he also possessed, because he never explained just why his wife was uptown alone. Of course that reason might not be to his own credit, but no one ever saw any tears in Mrs. Addison's eyes for his absence.

Their domestic affairs formed one of the most piquant staples of local gossip, though neither of them ever contributed any items thereto. Across the border, such a state of affairs would have presaged divorce, but divorce is not simple in Canada.

However that might be, Lesley had simply chosen to forget. There was something in the air, perhaps an emanation from the febrile mind of the crowd, that made her reckless. She wanted some one to laugh with. And Jack Addison was always gay.

"Do you think it's safe for you here alone?" he had said to her suddenly over her shoulder, while she stood looking up at the bulletin board. But he did not find her at a loss.

"I think the crowd will protect me," she returned, eyeing him demurely to point her words.

"Ain't you a——" He had the grace to pause.

"A what?" she enquired, thereby giving him permission.

"A charming vixen," he finished. "That's right; I like to see your eyes flash. Did you know you've got the queerest, prettiest eyes—and I want to talk to you. That old cat at the next desk to yours is always listening at the office."

"You are talking," she reminded him.

"Will you be nice?" he asked anxiously.

"I am nice," she assured him. "Very nice, don't you think?" And she preened herself wickedly in his admiring gaze; so light and straight in her severe blue serge suit and the big hat that struck a sharp feminine note by contrast and drew a line of shadow

just at the edge of her kissing mouth above the firm, ivory-white chin.

"I'll tell you what I think if you'll come out for just fifteen minutes in my car. Will you? It's only around the corner; I've been driving sheep to the slaughter in it all day—voters to the polls, I mean. I want you to reward me for it."

"Nobody voted for me," she reminded him, bubbling into a laugh.

"I did," he said. "I do now. Miss Johns, do you want to entirely waste a night like this? Please—pretty please—I'll sit up and beg——" It was just then that Burrage called to him, and he resolutely stopped his ears. For he almost thought she was coming, and when Burrage interrupted them, he almost thought she had gone. It certainly was not his pleading carried the day; he had not time to begin again when she tilted her chin at him and said:

"Will *you* be nice?"

"Honour bright." A man of impulse and emotion can always sound sincere, because he generally is sincere—at the moment. Lesley was sick of being prudent, of living out copybook maxims about industry and thrift and propriety. Fifteen minutes . . . could she not steal just fifteen minutes from one leaf of the copybook?

"I'll go," she said.

"Good." He tucked her arm into his and bore her away with mighty strides. The little motor, a light but powerful roadster, was hardly a block away; the engine had not been stopped. Some one had just stepped out of it. They were off with magic ease. Lesley caught her breath and looked at her companion.

"Do you know," she said, "I've never been in an automobile before."

"Why, you poor child!" He was positively scandalised. "You shall have a ride every night."

"Oh, no." On that point she was quite decided. "Never again. So this once I'd like you to go as fast as ever you can. I want to see what it's like." Also, she wanted him to have something to do. She was having a fearful joy of her adventure—for he broke all speed laws instantly in his desire to carry out her wishes—and she did not want it spoiled. To a certain extent, Lesley saved her emotions; she always preferred just enough to a surfeit.

They were at the bridge and climbing the Mission Hill in an incredibly brief time; he took advantage of the slowing on the heavy grade to resume his conversation.

"Where do you want to go?"

"Around by the other bridge and back through the East end of town," she said promptly. That would keep them close to the city, which seemed to her desirable.

"Just as you say. I'm going to show you how nice I can be, and if you tell me to get out and stand on my head on the hood, I'll do it. I thought I'd never get a chance to speak to you."

"Why did you want to speak to me?" she asked incautiously, simply because no woman on earth can resist asking that question of at least one man.

"Why?" Now he thought of it, he was rather stumped himself. It was always like that; he followed his impulses without ever stopping to learn whither they would take him. His enthusiasm about doing as he pleased was really refreshing. "I don't know—because I wanted to. Don't you do what you want to?" he enquired.

"I don't think women can, much," she said. "I know I can't. Of course I am now." He turned to her,

his dark, eager, handsome face suddenly alight. "Thanks," he said.

"But we can't, just the same," she repeated firmly. "Don't you know it? Honour bright again?"

"Oh," he said, rather harassed. She was making him think. He preferred to feel. And she *could* make him feel—he didn't know exactly what, but reckless—and decent. Any way she chose; that was it. If only she'd choose—— But she wanted him to stop and think, whether women could do as they pleased—say, if they pleased as he did——

She succeeded in making him think, and of something he wished to forget. It had left a bad taste in his mouth.

"No, I suppose you can't. I've just seen it tried. Say, don't talk about it."

"About what?"

"Oh, you couldn't guess. Just a girl that did what she wanted to. Something you'll never hear about."

Now Lesley, although she knew very few people outside the immediate circle of her work and the house where she lived, did hear about a great many things. The managing editor had a penchant for gossiping with her; he knew her discretion. It exceeded his own. Sometimes she had difficulty in restraining his confidences; the nature of them was not always highly correct. Her mind went through a process not unlike joining the links of a chain, at Addison's allusion. It was because he lived with Garth, of course, that she got the connection; a connection with some obscure matter, only vaguely hinted at, but carrying two names, very definite and clear.

"Maybe I have heard," she said. "She has red hair, hasn't she?" Immediately, of course, she regretted it. She must be mad, to talk to him so!

"Good heavens, who told you?" He almost ran over the cutbank edge.

"No one told me. I don't know anything," she said quickly.

"How many people know it?"

"No one knows. . . . Everything comes to a newspaper office. I'm sorry. Can't you forget I spoke? I'm awfully sorry. I hate myself." The distress in her voice touched him. "I am dreadful. And I don't believe there is anything to know."

"Yes, there is—everything." Apparently the whole town knew it, so he did not mind, now. He had never mentioned it to a soul; Burrage knew because nominally Garth was in Burrage's employ, and had betrayed himself when he got leave to go away. And while Addison didn't want to think about it, by some curious inversion of mental processes he did want to talk about it. The thing burnt him; it made him ashamed, and he wanted to get it off his mind.

"Don't, please," she begged. "I don't want to hear. I only heard a hint, and from only one person, and I was the only one heard it. Now, we came out to be cheerful, didn't we?"

That was enough; he said no more. His amazing volatility even enabled him to forget it all in five minutes, and remember only her. She was the most exhilarating creature he had encountered in weary months. There was a morning freshness about her. Though he forced her to play the ancient game, she put a new flavour into it. His shoulder touched hers as they sat, but she managed to keep him at a metaphorical arm's length. In the bottom of her heart she wished herself well out of it, but she knew better than to say so. And at least he still kept the letter of the contract, and also the route she had specified. She drew a quick breath of relief after they had

crossed the lower bridge and were again within the far bounds of town, the old town that antedated the railroad and had gathered about the Mounted Police barracks.

"I ought to be at home," she said. "I am so tired, and sleepy, and I have to work to-morrow."

"Can't we go up over Crescent Hill?" he coaxed. But she was firm; only for one nerve-racking moment she did not know but he would once more do what he wanted. His hands seemed visibly undecided on the wheel; and it was really that indecision, leading him to jam a lever unthinkingly, that stalled them. They were certainly stalled; the motor stopped dead. He got out and tinkered about, and it did no good.

"And I'm so tired," she repeated pathetically.

"I'll get you home," he reassured her. "Wait a minute." The sound of wheels approached then; he scrutinised the vehicle through the uncertain moonlight, and finally hailed it. "Got a passenger, Cap?"

It was one of the town's venerable cabs, of which there were three. The driver pulled up, chuckling. "Naw," he said. "Want a lift?"

"Oh, we do," cried Lesley, and positively ran for it. Addison opened the door for her, and spoke to the driver: "Drive to——"

"To — Fourth Avenue," cried Lesley insistently, giving her own address. The driver nodded, and Addison stepped in after her. It was not entirely dark within; a ray of moonlight fell across their faces. She watched him, through her eyelashes, her face very composed.

"May I smoke?" he asked abruptly, and struck a match. The light of it was reflected from his dark eyes, making little points of flame in them; his hands shook a trifle, and he said something under his breath. Lesley knew there was nothing to fear, but she wanted,

desperately, to be able to look back on this and smile; to keep it just gay, with no more than enough daring for a spice. She was only a girl. And life had been rather ungenerous to her.

"Will you come again?" he asked, leaning toward her. There was something, her honesty whispered, that attracted her in him, a genuine magnetism. She felt it, as if it were an aura about him.

"I don't know." She did know; she would not. But Lesley was born clever in some ways. "Of course, if it had been any one but you. . . . I can trust you. You've been nice. Thank you." They were getting nearer her house all the time, was the undercurrent of her thought.

It was true that she had some power over him. He leaned back, looked out of the window, and said something commonplace. Then, in ten minutes or so, the driver drew up; they had reached their destination. Addison helped her out. She felt the warmth of his clasp through her gloves. He followed her to the gate, and she slipped through and latched it against him, laughing a little because the suspense was ended.

"You didn't say when you'd come again," he reminded her.

"Because I can't—ever. Good-bye."

"Lesley," he cried. "You little cheat! No, don't go!"

"Your promise," she reminded him. "Mrs. Cranston will hear, and it's so awfully late. Oh, you did promise! And I didn't. And I never said you could call me Lesley," she ended with severity.

"And I never said I wouldn't," he retorted. Then she coolly reminded him he was keeping the cab waiting.

"I had a lovely time," she added sweetly. "Now good-bye."

A man may hardly go and pound on a respectable householder's door at midnight in pursuit of a lady who laughs at him, no matter what his feelings. Addison got into the cab and rolled away. He was near his own rooms before he remembered that he had a guest. By that time of course he did not have a guest. And what he said to Harry Garth would need an unexpurgated edition.

CHAPTER IV

IT was not until she was sure he was out of eye-shot that Lesley ventured out again. She had meant to go straight to bed, but the night was too exquisite, and while there are many such delightful intervals in the highly variable climate of Alberta, they are mostly brief. An hour can witness incredible changes, from winter to summer or back again. It is probably the most irritating climate in the world, though extremely healthy. A stock joke of the country is that one should never go out without both an overcoat and a fan.

This night the moon was nearly full, and a great stillness prevailed. In the thin dry air of that altitude the moonlight is most brilliant and clear, casting shadows that look like black velvet and making the whole earth pale where it falls. Lesley liked night, and the moon; it gave her imagination scope, and she sometimes crept out very late, when her narrow room became too painfully symbolic of her narrow life, and escaped from the town to walk up the river. A little island beyond the power plant, reached by a bridge over the flume, she often explored almost by sense of touch. But to-night she had had enough of movement. She only wanted to sit quietly and dream, and she fell into an unconsciously serene and statuesque pose, her hands clasped about her knees and her face upturned. A ghost of a smile clung about the corners of her mouth.

At sound of the footsteps which had drawn Chan Herrick's attention, she frowned and was of a mind

to go inside. She was aware that it looked odd for her to be sitting on the steps so very late, like a prodigal locked out. But perceiving it was a woman who approached, she sat still. And when the solitary figure, starting violently at sight of her, screamed faintly and dropped to the sidewalk, Lesley found herself singularly self-possessed. She saw the start of surprise and had previously realised the unusualness of herself being there; she felt guilty as of a social stupidity and ran to the gate as much in contrition as alarm. The strange woman's hat had been disarranged by her fall and her hair escaped; in the pale light it had almost the colour of blood, and her face was dead white. Lesley slipped an arm under her shoulders, raised the prostrate form deftly, and kicking the gate open with her foot, went up the short walk with stumbling speed. She recognised Eileen Conway instantly and her mind was in a strange jumble, in which one thought alone was clear, that it would be unpardonable to let any one else see the girl. Certainly not Mrs. Cranston, in whose house Lesley lived. How she would chatter!

Fortunately Lesley had left the door unlatched. She pushed that open with her shoulder, and found her way in the dark to the sofa in the sittingroom, where she dropped Eileen with a gasp of relief. Her arms ached. She got a glass of water from the kitchen before it occurred to her to put on the light. Eileen was still unconscious when the light revealed her; she lay on the sofa awkwardly, one arm drooping to the floor, her head thrown back and her pretty throat curved. Still with the instinct for secrecy, Lesley held her handkerchief ready to clap over the girl's mouth, while she drenched her brow and hair. She had never met Miss Conway, though she had seen her often.

But Eileen did not scream, nor make any sound at all, when her dark blue eyes opened slowly. She looked at Lesley, in a bewildered way, and dropped her lids again. Then she put up her hand, as if to brush away a fancy, and looked again.

"I thought you were dead," was her first extraordinary utterance.

"Why, no, I never was dead in my life," said Lesley. Her tongue had a habit of tripping over a situation and bringing forth strange speech to suit a strange occasion. They matched each other for absurdity. "I mean—I don't know what I mean, of course. I don't understand."

Eileen was looking about the room, as if for some familiar object to orient herself by. She saw none.

"Of course not; what a stupid thing for me to say. But I saw you on the steps—didn't I see you on the steps?" she broke off, as if testing her own sanity.

"Yes, I was on the steps. Don't move, please. Rest a minute."

"I am quite all right, thank you. You brought me in? How good of you. . . . I must explain that silly speech. I saw you out there in the moonlight, and your face was so white; you were looking at the sky and your eyes were half shut . . . and I thought of a drowned person. . . . I'd been over by the river. The water is so dark. . . ." She was sitting up now, and she shuddered. "You see . . . I was thinking . . ."

Lesley felt cold. She reached impulsively and took Eileen's hands in hers, holding them tight. "You poor girl," she said, her eyes suddenly wet.

"Don't," said Eileen. "Don't make me cry." But she buried her face on Lesley's shoulder, with a wrenching sob.

"Don't cry, then," said Lesley soothingly. "Don't

do anything you don't wish to. Don't say anything you would rather not."

"I am tired. I walked for hours—miles. I wanted to get away. There's no place to go, is there? I shall cry if you are kind to me. You ought not to be kind to me. I don't deserve it." Lesley felt the tears through her thin blouse.

"Nonsense; you never did anything to me," she said distractedly. What could one say? She saw this unhappy creature, looking at the midnight river, longing for the silent obscurity of it, beaten by its darkness and mystery and the stark loneliness of death, walking for hours dogged by her own terrible and despairing thoughts. It is only youth that can know despair. Lesley held her close, rocked her to and fro. "Don't you mind," she said in a tender voice that atoned for her meagre words. "Everything will be all right after a while. I do understand."

"Do you?" said Eileen, lifting her wet face, that seemed to harden into a mask. "Do you really know? Does every one know about me?"

"I know your name—I've often seen you. No, I don't think any one knows. I just guessed—indeed, I don't know anything, except that you are miserable." But Eileen's steady eyes asked, and got their answer from Lesley's pitiful gaze.

"You do know," she said in a dull voice. And after a long silence she added: "I thought I should kill any one who knew. But I don't believe you're like most people; it doesn't amuse you. The others will pretend to be horrified and sorry, but they'll enjoy it really. . . . I remember the way we used to talk. . . . And they'll all hear it soon. They always do. Only I don't mind about you. . . . I have to go home. I won't apologise for bothering you; that would be silly. Did I have a hat?" She forced herself to a mechanical

courage, and pinned on her hat with steady hands. But her eyes were sick and her mouth strained.

"I'll go with you," said Lesley.

"No—please. I promise you, I'll really go home. Don't trouble; I've already failed . . . altogether. I couldn't screw myself up to that pitch twice. Nobody can, if they're sane. And I'm quite sane, if I am a—fool!" There was some bitterer word than that on her tongue. Lesley felt Eileen's dark thoughts about her like a cloud; an air of violence still clung to her. It was insistent, as if her frustrate deeds still had spiritual form, and Lesley might have seen their incorporeal shadows by opening the shutters of her brain. It was a feeling she knew quite well, that of standing by a curtain which a strong, uncertain wind blew upon, giving her glimpses of things she could not touch. But instead of making the tangible presence of things unreal, it illuminated them. Only she could not see enough . . . and she feared seeing too much. Nearer than that she could never define it.

Lesley's mind was of a balance both delicate and strong; and her judgment of people was unerring. She knew Eileen Conway now, and would always know her, as well as if they had been close all their lives. She disliked letting her go, but knew also that a protest would be useless. Eileen would go. Some things simply are so.

Had it not happened before, in lesser measure, Lesley would have been astonished how much she knew of Eileen, and of Eileen's story. All she had heard was of the vaguest, a word or two from Cresswell—the managing editor—of scandalous surmise, a sentence from Jack Addison in confirmation of that bodiless rumour. Eileen had supplied the rest, and Eileen had said nothing at all.

Lesley followed her to the door. With her hand on

the knob, Eileen turned suddenly. All her movements were dramatic, but without vulgar emphasis; she posed now in the light streaming from the sittingroom, an enigma of sad and unreluctant farewell, as if all that had happened were to be shut in behind her here and she took nothing but memory with her, not even hope. She was not so tall as Lesley, and of a rounded slenderness, with fine hands and feet and the porcelain complexion that goes with her shade of hair. Indeed, she was all a porcelain beauty, exotic in modern tailored garb such as the dark suit she wore; and her veil, flung back, cast a shadow over her eyes.

"Would you—give me your hand?" she asked, almost coldly.

"Oh," said Lesley, wounded, and gave it.

"Don't say anything," said Eileen, her tones suddenly muffled. "I won't kiss you; I hate kisses. I should have liked you if I'd met you before—— I wonder if you would have liked me? I forgot; will you tell me your name?"

"Lesley Johns. And I wish you would telephone me in the morning, at the *Recorder* office. I know I ought to go with you." But she knew Eileen wanted to be alone again, to brace herself against something she dreaded.

"Yes, I will telephone. I'm sorry I won't ever see you again. I must hurry. I think my father—will be—looking for me." Her face grew set and bitter again. She went down the walk quickly, and Lesley left her at the gate.

Lesley walked back into the house in a sort of daze, and looked about with a start to see all the lights still on. The clock, a cheap little brass thing with a tawdry brass Cupid above it, was ticking noisily, as if to call attention to the hour. Nearly one o'clock! And if Mrs. Cranston had been awake and

listening—heavens, how she would talk, questioning Lesley inanely in that drawling voice of hers. Lesley switched off the light hastily and crept upstairs. She was opening her own door, and thought she had escaped, when the drawling voice, thickened with sleep, intercepted her.

“What time is it, Lesley?”

“Oh, it’s quite late; I didn’t notice,” Lesley called back mendaciously. Both women spoke in that half tone one uses in the dead hours. They might waken the baby.

“I thought I heard you talking down there,” persisted Mrs. Cranston. “I was too sleepy to get up and see. Did you bring some one home?”

“No. I fell over the cat, and talked to her for quite a while,” Lesley continued shamelessly. “She wouldn’t go out.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Cranston. Silence supervened. Lesley shut her door. It was one of Mrs. Cranston’s most annoying habits to sleep with her bedroom door ajar, to miss nothing of any nocturnal activities on the part of others. She thought Lesley “quite cracked” to be such a prowler, and complained of interrupted repose when Lesley, on pretence of raiding the pantry—not always a pretence—would steal downstairs at unseasonable hours. Nevertheless, she did not close her door to keep out the sounds.

Meditating on that exasperating characteristic of the lady, Lesley slipped down from the mood of exalted and romantic tragedy which the strange coming of Eileen had induced. Her brain was fatigued with too much activity, and she prepared for bed with sleepy haste. Yet, though the mood had passed, Lesley recognised that it was not the extraordinary occasion, the moonlight and the solitude that had induced it, so much as some quality inherent in Eileen herself.

She was a romantic creature, whom even the most sordid story could not strip of her glamour, nor tarnish in her special character. The mere type of her beauty—Lesley sighed over that desired gift—exempted her from the common fate of dinginess, if not from the common lot of suffering. Whatever she did, she would be unusual, and would provoke as much wonder as contempt. And she was yet very young and unformed, no more than nineteen, Lesley guessed, quite rightly. Lesley was twenty-one. This while she did her hair for the night, standing before the greenish wavy mirror of her dresser, which forced an odious comparison on her. The mirror did not do her justice, nor did her *deshabille*; there was a suggestion of the classic about Lesley, or more exactly, the pseudo-classic, and in petticoat and stays, of mere *coutil* and cotton at that, she was sadly handicapped. She hastened to put out the light and dismiss her mean attire from her thoughts, which again followed after Eileen. But that was too painful. Eileen would be at home by now, facing her family. . . . A shudder of sympathy went through Lesley; she curled down and buried her face in the pillow, and her heart was hot with the sorrow of being a woman. She had to forget that, or get no sleep, and she had to get some sleep. There was always her work. The one looming fact in Lesley's life was work, and had been for over four years. Ixion's wheel may have been more painful, for Lesley was an active creature, but it could have been no more insistently the controlling factor.

There was no inclination left to think of Jack Addison. The episode seemed negligible by comparison, though perhaps rather common and silly. It dismissed itself. And so, with her thoughts chasing themselves in a circle, like a kitten after its own tail, she was presently whirled into slumber.

CHAPTER V

IT was natural that Eileen's name should spring to mind in Lesley Johns' first waking moment next morning, to haunt her for days thereafter. The spell was not exorcised even when Eileen kept her promise and telephoned, perhaps because she said the least possible—that she had reached home safely. Lesley could not refrain from asking: "Are you well?" "Oh, well enough," replied the bodiless small voice out of the void, and there was the ennui of despair in the phrase. "Thank you again. Good-bye." And that was all. Lesley hung up the receiver and went back to her desk reluctantly. She wanted to do something, but it was very clear there was no further action in her power. In the bald light of day, with the prose of business droning about her, Lesley saw Eileen not less real and appealing, but other facts loomed equally substantial and suddenly inimical. She could not take Eileen in her arms and carry her to safety metaphorically, as she had done in simple reality. She wondered and wondered, during the morning at her typewriter or talking to patrons over the counter, during the afternoon while she struggled with sloppy soap-suds and wet linen; she wondered just how Eileen had fared, and how much the truth had spread. It made her shrink again to think of the gossips tearing that pretty thing to horrid fragments and holding them up to the public gaze. If any one knew what rumour was current, of course Cresswell would, but a scrupulous delicacy prevented her seeking information of him, because in a sense she had Eileen's confidence.

So, sitting before an open fire in the livingroom on the Monday night following, she still turned over the same unprofitable thoughts, even while she tucked her feet under her skirt and scrutinised her hands with hostility and disgust. She had powdered her hands, and polished the nails—but that did not make them any smaller! “And he can’t help remembering how red they were,” she thought hopelessly.

She was waiting for Chan Herrick. He had brazenly waylaid her on the intervening Sunday. She had seen no occasion for flight, and because Chan was not at all stupid with women, it had somehow arranged itself, without her invitation or his asking, that he might call. His uncle, he explained, had a board meeting to attend, leaving Chan at loose ends.

But for Eileen’s persistent image, Lesley would of course have been thinking only of her expected guest, with the faint pleasurable thrill any normal girl feels when a new man, a possible conquest, swims into her ken, voluntarily. Of course any young man is a possible conquest, though Lesley would have mentally excoriated herself had she overheard her inner self indulging in such speculations. But Nature laughs in her sleeve at all of us, and gets her own way whether we approve of her—and ourselves—or not.

So Lesley only gave him half her thoughts now, as she poked the fire and looked at her hands and reprobated her feet. When she looked at her own hands she thought of Eileen’s, and when she rose and anxiously patted her hair she wondered absently why it was not a splendid red, and was sad because she felt the bitter ashes of shame falling on that other charming head. Chan’s ring actually startled her, and she was breathless when she let him in.

“Did you run downstairs?” he asked her teasingly as he put his hat and coat and stick on the yellow

oak "hall chair" without which no respectable American household is complete.

"No, I was thinking," she said. "It's quite an unaccustomed exercise, so I puff and pant over it like we did over our first writing. Don't you remember how you used to write with your entire being when you were at the stage of 'That is a cat'? Or were you an infant prodigy? Come in; this is only the hall." The inexorable kindness of the gods permits us to laugh when we are young, though the whole world's heart is broken.

"I do—and I wasn't." He followed her into the sittingroom, in which there was not even a last vapour of tragedy. Tragedy cannot long inhabit the sitting-rooms of comfortable respectability. It will hardly survive a green velvet "parlour suite" and a red carpet, and crayon portraits of immediate ancestors, and a centre table with a smug calf-bound volume of Tennyson enthroned thereon. This room had all of these. The fireplace mitigated the horror of it, truly, and there was a brown leather Morris chair and some growing plants also, so it was habitable. Though Herrick had known luxury most of his life, being merely a man he thought this well enough, seeing only the chair and the fire. Lesley had had few opportunities of comparison.

"How jolly this looks," he said, drawing a chair to the fire for her. Winter had pounced on them again overnight, and a sharp North wind shook the window casings. "I'm much obliged to your clothesline pole. You don't know what it's like being a stranger in a strange land, do you, Miss Johns?"

"I should. I've only been here a year, and I haven't many friends yet."

"Are you an American—a Yankee, then? I wish you would tell me about yourself. I have invented

several histories for you, while I watched you out of my window—— Did you know I watched you out of my window? I daresay you'll think me a cheeky beggar, but——”

“But you had nothing else to do,” Lesley laughed. “You tell me one of the histories and I'll adopt it. I have no history.”

“A happy woman?” he quoted. She had never heard the epigram; she lifted her eyebrows and shook her head.

“No—oh, I don't know. Anyway, I'm not an American; I'm an aborigine.”

“A what?” This time it was he who did not follow.

“I was born here. Isn't that what it means? Not precisely here, but in this province, in a little sod-roofed shack near Fort Macleod. That's all my story. I was born; I am here. You tell me yours.”

“Perhaps that is why you are different,” he mused. “Not like the Eastern girls, I mean.” He pondered her frankly with his merry grey eyes. Lesley never flushed; her white skin, clear and opaque, was always without a tinge of colour. But she felt hot inwardly. She thought he was making comparisons with the girls he must have known. Girls who could be always dainty, who did not have to work—and act as their own laundry maids! Actually she did him an injustice. He was wondering if she were a Western type; an absurdity to expect, of course, in one generation, but he was still at the age of generalisations. And he thought he had seen the type before, but could not place it. He had, in foreign art galleries, in the paintings of an era as remote from Lesley as the poles. The colouring was different, and he failed to identify them. Black, brown and ivory, her hair and eyes and skin, are subtler shades than the pinks

and blues and gold Watteau and Boucher and Fragonard loved. But Lesley's straight, delicate, rather long nose, her narrowed oval face, small clove-carnation coloured mouth, not curved to a bow but with a slight mischievous lift to the short upper lip as if a smile lurked just behind it, and the shape of her brow, which became best the low soft roll of hair affected by La Pompadour—all these might have belonged to one of the ladies of Louis the Magnificent or his unspeakable successor. So too her long graceful limbs, the low breast and straight round waist.

But she wore a walking dress of shabby black serge with a high white lawn collar; and lacking the voluptuous elegancies which forever surrounded those others, without powder on her hair nor a *graine de beauté* to accentuate that fascinating upper lip, she might have been only some stray descendant filtered through a Puritan alliance. Without the accessories and the glamorous rose and gold she hardly passed for pretty. Herrick, for instance, thought she was certainly a jolly girl, and had nice eyes. In that Jack Addison had only paid her her due. Her eyes were rare, long and having that shadowy depth which is half a trick of Nature's, gained by dropping the eyelid below the edge of the iris. One thought them brown under the black lashes, but they were of two colours, brown and grey alternating like the sections of a complementary colour disk. But Herrick could hardly look close enough to perceive that. Besides, he was remarkably interested in the sod-roofed shack. One read about that sort of thing, but it never seemed real. He had lived in a tent, of course. Perhaps a sod-roofed shack would be more fun. Better, at least, than an igloo.

"Tell me more," he urged. "Why, I never saw a sod-roofed shack. Is it preserved for posterity? How did you like it?"

"I don't believe I ever thought much of it at the time," she said. "No, it isn't preserved; shingles have replaced its ancient glories. It did have advantages, of course; it was a real roof-garden in summer. Perfectly enormous sunflowers grew up there. But one can't have everything; it leaked. One leak always leaked on the middle of my bed. There's a special arrangement of Providence about that, I understand, though it's a trifle ambiguous, isn't it? I remember so distinctly how my father used to get up if a rain-storm came in the night, and poke his head in at the door of the lean-to where we children slept, and say: 'Arise, take up thy bed and walk.' And we did. Did you ever hear a leak falling into a milkpan at three a. m., when you were particularly sleepy? Ah, you have missed a great deal."

"I begin to suspect I have," he said regretfully. "Do go on. Does your father still live at Fort Macleod?"

"My father is dead," said Lesley, her clear, abrupt voice striking a chord of singular pathos. It made the fact so bald and simple and inescapable.

"I am sorry," said Herrick gently. "So is mine. My mother too."

"My mother is alive," said Lesley, looking at him with her dark eyes welling with sympathy. "But she isn't very strong. She lives with my brother now; I have only one."

"I have none. 'I am all the daughters of my father's house,' also. Ross is all my family, in fact. But tell me more about the sod-roofed shack and your non-existent history."

He saw he had touched on a sorrowful subject, and wished to lead her away from it. And he had not ceased to be interested.

"But how can I, if it's non-existent? And I haven't unearthed the secret of your birth yet," she parried

gaily. "Let's tell us all about ourselves at once, so we can be comfortably bored with each other hereafter. Begin, please."

She had it out of him that he had been born in Hamilton, had been schooled in Montreal, in Munich and in Switzerland—it reminded her of Laurie in "Little Women" to hear of his schooldays at Vevay. That was due to Whittemore, who had spent a long time on the Continent following the cessation of his scarce begun career and another event whereof Chan had never heard. Chan had come back to a Canadian college, sauntered back to Germany to sample Heidelberg and decided that hairsplitting over the cosmogony did not suit his temperament, returned to Montreal and played at banking a little while to please Whittemore, dropped that and attached himself to a Canadian arctic exploring party to shoot a musk ox—which he missed—and had come home again to succumb ingloriously to a Quebec winter and go into exile in the West.

"Isn't that a record of uselessness?" he mused. His uncle's words still gnawed at his consciousness. "Why, look at you, a bit of a thing I could break in my hands"—which was a touch of masculine vainglory hardly justified of the facts—"and I bet you've done about four hundred times as much real work. Do you like it—what you're doing, I mean? You don't write, do you?"

"No." She felt her confidence being drawn from her against her will, for her secret ambitions, already twice deferred, were precious to her, and she cherished them with a hope that was half fear. "I want to write. I'm the entire staff of the circulation manager now. And I want to get a year or two of college before I begin to write. They might let me do it here, but I'd rather wait." The rest she would not

tell him, and he did not guess she was holding anything back.

It was that when Lesley was sixteen her father, who had promised she should go to college, had died, and left his small family with a smaller estate, a heavy burden on his young son and delicate wife. Of the three, Lesley was the strongest and most capable, and for a year she had shared the manual labour of the little ranch with Dick, quitting high school in mid-term. Only because she could bring in more actual cash had she gone to work in a lawyer's office in Macleod. There she had saved and hoped for two years, and seen college rising above the horizon—when Dick broke his leg, and the expenses of that and of hiring a man for the ranch and a thousand other unexpected items left her where she began. Now, by such economies as Chan had seen, she dared to hope again.

"I want to be a journalist," she added in a defensive tone. "Not a really literary person, you know. I like—things—happenings—yes, and people. And newspapers. I will *not* write society news," she finished ferociously.

"You shan't," he said soothingly. "You'll be a female Greeley, a Stanley if you like; and I will be a meek and lowly clerk in a black alpaca coat, with a pen behind each ear. That is settled."

She surveyed him doubtfully, and was on the point of telling him such a metamorphosis would be almost miraculous, when the curtains in the arch beyond which, like Italy over the Alps, lay the uncharted region of the dining-room, parted softly, and Mrs. Cranston appeared. She stood with a deprecating foot advanced, smiling sleepily; a thin, kitteny woman with a chlorotic complexion, velvet-brown eyes and a pointed chin.

"Oh! excuse me," she said. "I didn't know you had

company, Lesley." The lie was so obvious that, even though she did not know Mrs. Cranston had been listening behind the curtains for ten minutes, Lesley's short upper lip disclosed her teeth in an exasperated smile. Mrs. Cranston's ways always went against the grain with her; she was too forthright and candid to like the other woman's feline stealth, her passion for petty deceit, her general air of satisfied slyness. To be quite honest, she did not like her landlady at all in the depths of her heart, but the arrangement between the two was so mutually convenient they never openly disagreed. And then Mrs. Cranston did not dislike Lesley; she did not dislike any one who did not get in her way. Lesley was a convenience; ergo, she liked Lesley. Mrs. Cranston did not need to keep a lodger. Lesley lived with her because Mr. Cranston was a commercial traveller, and his wife found it lonely during his frequent absences. Lesley paid a just sum, and provided her with company. Also, she never objected to caring for the baby when Mrs. Cranston wished to spend an evening out. Lesley could not have got so much comfort and freedom anywhere else at a price within her means, and reproached herself for not being really fond of her landlady hostess. So now she subdued her smile to mere welcome and performed the needful introduction as graciously as might be.

"Awfully cold, isn't it?" said Mrs. Cranston, seating herself deliberately and stretching her little feet to the blaze. Lesley hastily drew her own pedal extremities under her skirt and throttled an unworthy suspicion. Chan agreed that it was very cold.

"I'm so glad we've got acquainted at last," Mrs. Cranston prattled on. "It's so dull here, especially for Lesley; and I've often been sorry for you, too, when I've seen you sitting up at your window like—

like—— What did you say he was like, Lesley? I thought it sounded so funny.”

“Mariana in the Moated Grange,” said Lesley sulkily. It annoyed her that Chan should know they had talked him over. But Chan laughed, and she was forced to join him.

“I suppose I did,” he agreed. “Only I should have been sitting in that quaint old baronial castle up-town. Some one showed it to me the other day when I was out with Ross. I thought it was an asylum, but I am told it belongs to one of your leading citizens.”

“Oh, yes—the Varneys. We don’t know them,” sighed Mrs. Cranston. “They are *awfully* rich. But I suppose you’ll meet them now, through your uncle, and then you’ll forget all about us.”

Lesley felt symptoms of imminent suffocation. She wished benevolently that she could share them with Mrs. Cranston—in short, that she might choke that injudicious lady.

“Oh, no!” said Chan cheerfully. “I’m not a bit proud.” He was coaxing Lesley for another smile, watching her out of the tail of a laughing eye. She would not be coaxed.

“Are you going to stay long?” asked Mrs. Cranston. “Mrs. Thompson said she didn’t know. You ought to do well out here, though; and I’m sure you look ever so much better than you did when you came. But I suppose you don’t need to work.”

The naïveté of this amused him as much as it annoyed Lesley; even her annoyance amused him. He only thought Mrs. Cranston rather transparent and provincial, and that she meant to be agreeable. He would have felt a boor if he had tried to “draw” her in her own house. So he yielded up all the information she desired, and she listened with rapt and

flattering attention. But now he had quite definitely made up his mind to stay, and was going on the morrow to the Belle Claire offices to meet the manager, with his uncle, though it might be some time before he would actually commence work. On the whole, he thought he should like living in the "jumping-off place," and perhaps he had been unconsciously influenced by the geniality of all Whittemore's acquaintances. They had offered to put him up for the Club, and invitations had been instantly forthcoming to meet the ladies of their families. Those he had politely begged should be deferred to a future date; he did not fancy posing as an invalid at social gatherings, and had grown perhaps a little lazy in the matter of such amenities, as is the barbarous nature of man when left to his own devices. To step in next door and talk to a girl who had already intrigued his curiosity was a different matter to buckling on the armour of dinner parties and exerting himself on behalf of battalions of girls he had never yet laid eyes on. Besides, he really meant to work hard.

Geers, the retiring member to whom Whittemore had introduced him, had made a strong impression on Chan. It was not that there was anything very remarkable about the man himself; he was merely an intelligent, hardly brilliant young lawyer, with a slowness of speech that might have been either thoughtfulness or diffidence; the very opposite of Folsom. What Chan could not forget was his age; Geers was but little over thirty, and had resigned political life from pressure of business. He told Chan and Whittemore that he had not yet made enough money for a competence, and meant to go back into public life when financial circumstances permitted. So there he was, very little older than Herrick, but with a start made on two careers, and the prospect

of compassing both. Truly, this was the country of young men. Chan chafed under his own record of idleness, the more because it was not too late. Most of us resign ourselves very comfortably over a matter that cannot be mended. In ten years, had he spent another ten years like the last, Chan would have been resigned.

But he had been caught at the critical period. His mind had fallen fallow from forced retrospection during the days of his illness. A seed of ambition, of whatever kind, would sprout in it with astonishing vigour. The soil was ready. And, he reflected rather shamefacedly, if he could not match Geers for parts, he would write himself down a fool.

Mrs. Cranston naturally never got so far as that in her catechism. All she learned was that he would work for the Belle Claire Company, and look about him for a time, and that he certainly would not neglect his new friends for newer. This gave her an opportunity to look at him coquettishly and expound the novel theory that men are all alike.

"Aren't they, Lesley?" she appealed.

"I haven't seen them all yet," said Lesley coldly. "Amy, isn't that the baby crying?" She rose and went out. Mrs. Cranston said, "No, I will go," but made no move.

"Lesley's such a nice girl," said Mrs. Cranston plaintively. "But you know she has the most jealous disposition; oh, yes, she's rather queer. Now, I never was jealous in my life; I say to Mr. Cranston that I trust him, and I expect him to trust me. I don't see why a married woman can't have men friends, do you, Mr. Herrick? Of course, I haven't any here; ever since we came the baby has taken up all my time—but in Winnipeg—we came here from Winnipeg—I was always getting flowers and choco-

lates. I tell Lesley her beaux aren't nearly so generous as mine were."

"You couldn't expect that," said Herrick gravely. "I am sorry to have to leave your hospitable hearth, Mrs. Cranston, but Ross may be waiting for me now; he promised to come in if the board didn't keep him too late. I wonder if Miss Johns won't say good-night to me?"

"Oh, you mustn't mind her; she is so funny," said Mrs. Cranston easily, making no effort to call Lesley as he hoped she would. "I'm sorry you have to go. Do come again." And he would not have seen Lesley at all if he had not purposely lingered in the hall getting his coat. Mrs. Cranston came with him, to be sure, but a coal fell out of the fireplace and she hastened back to save her rug and, just in time, Chan's finesse was rewarded. Lesley appeared on the upper landing, with a white bundle in her arms, her face very gracious. Catching his eye, she laughed silently.

"Good-night," she called softly. "S-sh, don't slam the door."

"May I come again?" he hissed, with fine dramatic effect. "It wasn't my fault, was it?"

"What wasn't?" Lesley breathed sweetly. "Yes, do come. 'Bye." She disappeared. Chan called a hasty good-night to Mrs. Cranston, and escaped.

Lesley was glad he had waited that moment. She had been enjoying herself thoroughly until Mrs. Cranston came, and now she felt she had been gauche, perhaps even rude, and altogether he must think her an idiot, only he evidently did not, so that was all right. She went to her own room immediately to preserve that agreeable impression from a post mortem by Mrs. Cranston.

CHAPTER VI •

WHITTEMORE could only stay a week, but he went away fairly well content. He thought he should probably return before the coming summer was spent, and perhaps rusticate at Banff—in the million-dollar C. P. R. hotel—with Chan up for the week-ends. And if by that time Chan had not wearied of his task, Whittemore felt he might even establish a pied-a-terre in town. After all, he had no one but Chan, and too he was a little tired of everything he was used to. His business interests had long been tending westward; and his visit to Edmonton might bear fruit that would need careful gardening. The negotiations he had opened were of the most tentative nature as yet, but no serious obstacles seemed imminent. A good deal of money would be required for what he had in view, more than he could or cared to raise himself. For that he meant to go to Montreal.

The scheme also required close secrecy until it was matured, though under other circumstances such a course might seem absurd. He was merely planning to organise a company and build a street-car line for the city, a very natural outgrowth of the electric power plant. But government ownership was in the air of the West just then. A good many towns had already taken over their lighting plants; the province of Alberta owned all the telephone lines; and there was talk of expropriation of the grain elevators. There would undoubtedly be opposition to a private corporation building and owning the street-car lines of the prov-

ince's largest city, if that opposition were allowed time to ripen. The city itself could hardly yet afford such an enterprise; it was already growing too fast for the amateur financiers in the Council, so that they found difficulty in extending their bonding privileges to keep up with absolutely necessary expenditures. But that would not matter, nor the fact that street cars were urgently needed for the city's expansion. The public would object. Quite rightly, no doubt, Whittemore admitted, playing *Advocatus Diaboli* against his own interests. But there his interests were. They were back of him, pushing him on. Business was his chief amusement now that so many other amusements had palled. He kept no office, and attended to his own affairs in his own good time, but he had insensibly grown to like the activity that had at first been forced upon him.

So if he could build that road he would. Perhaps it was the idea of building something that appealed to him. The desire to create is in us all. Some part of it we satisfy with children, some with the house wherein we live; an artist has his own peculiar joy; a farmer acts as God's vicegerent, even. Ross had none of these outlets; he lived in a club, he had neither wife nor child, and he only looked on and admired the beauty that other men wrought. He had thought himself content to be a spectator, and laughed now to find that the dull prose of business had its charm. He was half minded to put it all aside and go abroad again, lest he harden into a mere money-making machine—but then there was Chan. Chan had kept him in touch with much of life for fifteen years past.

So he left Chan with regret, which was mutual.

Another regret, which astonished him by its persistence, concerned Eileen Conway. There was no one he would ask of her but Burrage, of course. But

if he had asked the whole city, he would have learned no more.

"She's gone," Burrage told him.

"But when—and where?"

"I don't know. Jimmy Buskirk said he saw her taking the morning train East." The morning train went at two a. m. "Her brother saw her off. Her mother says Eileen's gone away to study music!"

There the tale ended. There were a million rumours, but Burrage knew they were no more than rumours. "It is current gossip, then?" Whittemore asked him.

"Yes, it's all over town," said Burrage angrily. He must have liked Eileen; there was something bright and dangerous about her, Whittemore guessed, that drew men's eyes and hearts. And Burrage remembered her as a little girl, a headstrong, gay, violent, fascinating little minx even then. "People smell a story like that," he added, "like coyotes after a carcass. I guess her parents know where she's gone, but I don't, and even Garth doesn't. He ought to be tarred and feathered." Now that she was suffering the extreme penalty from society, Burrage had nothing left for her but pity. "Her father and mother aren't wearing mourning, but they might as well be. My God, what a waste!"

"What's Garth doing?" asked Whittemore.

"Doing? Nothing that I know of. He told Jack he was going away soon, though. Said he was going to be married!"

"I suppose he may find it pleasanter elsewhere. People can hardly overlook the matter here."

"Well, I don't know. You see, nobody really knows anything; they guess a lot, but that's different, especially now her folks seem to have decided to make a bluff. You and I and Jack Addison are the only ones

on the inside. It makes me kind of sick, the whole thing." He was torn between a desire to cook Garth's goose for him by seeing that the story reached the family of his fiancée, and mere masculine laissez aller, obedience to the code of not telling on another man. Of course he chose the latter course, and held to it. But it galled him. "I mean the women—say, they really seem to want to make a fuss over Garth. . . . Some of 'em, anyway," he amended. "I will say Mrs. Varney cut him off her list. The others—they're curious, I guess. Besides, people stand for a hell of a lot out here. This gets me on the raw, but then I saw. . . . You know, I can't forget her face that night. If I'd ever done anything to make a woman hate me like that, I'd be afraid to die."

An original way of putting it, Whittemore thought. But it was all strange enough. For instance, the point that had struck Burrage left him even more perplexed; the waste of so much loveliness. Why had a girl like that been moved to throw herself away on a youth so palpably commonplace as Harry Garth! But then she was too young to have any sense of values.

"So people don't really know," he repeated thoughtfully.

"No. But what's the odds? They don't need any remarkable intelligence to guess."

"I wonder. . . ." said Whittemore; and went away still wondering. Spring and summer both passed too quickly to permit of his return.

He forgot to ask Chan if he had met the girl next door. By such small curiosities Whittemore kept himself alive on the surface. He could not guess that Lesley Johns came nearest to sharing his own speculations on Eileen.

She, too, had heard what he had heard. Rather wistfully she wished Eileen would send her a word

from wherever she was, that it might not seem as though she had joined the Shades. That in a sense was what Eileen had done; the ghost of her walked the familiar streets and made her one-time friends lower their voices and look askance suddenly. Cresswell told Lesley all the baseless conjectures that sprang up, and said he did not believe any of them. She had gone to Europe, gone on the stage, gone to perdition, the variations ran. The talk lasted more than the usual nine days; she was hardly forgotten before the end of summer. Every community is shaken and harrowed by some such ugly rent in the social fabric once in a way. A crop of small scandals sprang up in the shadow of the large one. It was, in fact, a very busy summer, and at the end of it nothing in particular had been done—quite as usual.

Probably Lesley remembered Eileen more vividly than most even of those who had known her longest. But she did not suppose Eileen remembered her; Eileen would be going through deep water now, and small things would be washed out of mind. In like case, Lesley could imagine she would have no wish to remind herself of things past by writing to one so closely connected with them. And if life had you cornered, it was better not to cry out.

Life did not have Lesley cornered; she was full of vigour and purpose. In the autumn it seemed certain she would herself be going away, to begin her cherished "career," or at least the essential preliminaries.

At bottom there was a good deal of similarity in that summer's campaign for Lesley, Herrick and Whittemore. They were all going through a preparatory period of drudgery. Chan saw the end least clearly, had a less defined plan, but he felt something evolving in his mind. The new country was taking hold of him. He did not know that for a year past he had been

playing harder than ever merely to stimulate a flagging zest in play.

In May he went into the Belle Claire offices. Long before then he had quite definitely pre-empted a corner by Lesley's hearth, and possibly that did more than he ever knew to anchor him when he might so easily have drifted back East, if only for a day or two. Such a day might have stretched into forever, but he never took it. He let Lesley represent her native province to him, and found it an agreeable study. It revived in him the instinct of the natural man for new worlds, so clearly apparent in every boy but later overlaid and atrophied by circumstance. A pioneer Chan might not have been in any event, but he too had the constructive instinct, and what a field for it here! He had the perspective of a fresh eye, and saw what she did not, for her roving blood also cried for "something new and strange," and they gazed in opposite directions.

So he overlooked the tameness and drudgery of his immediate task, losing it in the novelty of all things else. Before the novelty wore off, he counted confidently on getting far beyond the drudgery and reaching a constructive vantage.

As for Whittemore, he was coin collecting, as he phrased it, in the financial marts of the East, and encountering no special difficulty. His reports from Edmonton and Ottawa were also quite satisfactory, so far.

Lesley was happy that summer, the young happiness that does not examine its sources. She thought it was only because very soon she was going away. She had not told any one that, not even Chan. The inhibition had not lessened in force; it seemed as if to tell would be to give warning to unkind Fate. They talked about everything under the sun except the

future. They talked the fires of winter out and carried discussion out under the summer sky.

Lesley felt herself expanding in her first real companionship. It was most grateful to her. She knew so few women that she suffered for friendship. Making friends with a man had hitherto partaken of the nature of walking a tightrope. Nor was she vain enough to wonder why Chan gave her no such moments of insecurity. But once she came very close to stumbling on the truth.

They were riding, coming home after three hours in the saddle, and paused, by a mutual and unspoken feeling, just before they raised the crest of the hill above the river. Beyond was the city; it sits in the fork of two rivers that make one, and had not yet, as it has now, grown up the edges of the cuplike valley to peer at the skyline.

Chan had been obliged to coax a good deal to get Lesley to ride with him. The truth was, she had no habit, and did not want to afford one. When she found herself ordering a skirt for the purpose, she felt positively sinful in her self-indulgence. It cost ten dollars!

Also she had seen Chan ride, and he worried her into telling him the sub-reason of her first refusal.

"I don't ride the way you do," she said, tactfully. "I ride astride——"

"But that's the way I ride," he interrupted gravely. He was always so solemn in his teasing, it made her laugh the more. And she sometimes wished she could slap him, though perhaps not very hard. He seemed like a boy to her, and she was not experienced enough to realise it for a dangerous symptom.

"Just for that," she said, "I'll tell you that I think you *bounce*. Oh, I know it's the proper park style, and you had the best masters, and all that. And you

will think I ride like an Indian, and we shall silently sneer at each other the whole time. Now do you want me to go?"

"Next to riding," he assured her, "sneering is my favourite sport. Come along."

Perhaps she did ride like an Indian, but she was very graceful in her own way, long-limbed and supple, with that slack, indifferent ease of one who has ridden more for necessity than pleasure. It is a style that suits the businesslike gait of the small, wiry bronchos they got from the livery stable. Chan would have bought himself a good horse from one of the great ranches near High River, where one can get the best, but he knew Lesley would not allow him to buy her one also, and he did not want to make an ill-matched pair. As it was, they covered the country very effectively. It gave him a new view of it, with Lesley as cicerone. What had been to him an abomination of desolation when he first beheld it from a Pullman window, took on a fresh face with the advent of spring. The endless stretches of snow-covered plain, the little desolate farmsteads, had a beauty of their own in that magic time, the beauty of illimitable space and air, and that Italian sky of the prairies. He understood the prairie towns, which at first had struck him as horrible beyond words for human habitation. Here was room for a man to do something. Here, too, he was in sight of the mountains, which are astonishingly clear in fine weather, though sixty miles distant. When midsummer came it never grew too hot, though the world turned to a tawny gold under the sun. By September the gold was a soft brown, but the sky was no less blue, and the air on a still day was like a blue veil of impalpable mesh.

"But it was much nicer before the people came," Lesley insisted. "Yes, really. Look, now, the grass

is hardly ankle high, but when I was small it would come above my head in the valleys, and hide me standing. Now it's all grazed down, and there are disgusting barbed wire fences, and people. Once you could ride fifty miles from our own front door, straight, without ever seeing a fence or a human being. It was all our own. And the game, and birds, and the wild flowers! I think this was the happy hunting ground."

"There are wild flowers yet," objected Chan. "Look here, Old Faithful is stepping on a rose bush. Don't they bloom late."

Lesley thought she had never known so short a summer. It was mid-September. Chan dismounted and picked a spray of small low-growing wild roses, pale pink and pure white, of a scent as faint as their colour.

"Put these on your coat; they suit you," he said. "You see, not even the disgusting people who have come and spoiled your Paradise can stop the flowers blooming. Cheer up. You have all my sympathy."

"Is that a compliment?" she asked suspiciously, taking the flowers and pinning them securely. "I am never quite sure—you say such things so—so insidiously. Practice, no doubt."

"You should know how much practice I get," he said, with his most ingenuous air. "Do I know any girls but you?"

"Not here," she admitted. "Don't you find it horribly dull? I did, and I never knew anything different. But you've always gone about a lot, seen things. . . . Chan, I believe you're a stiff-necked snob. You don't think we're worth your while. You won't take any trouble about us."

"Oh, woman, woman," said Chan. "I can see I've been boring you, and you wish I'd take myself off.

Well, I won't. And I take exception to that 'we.' You don't belong in this gallery. I never said you did."

"In a minute," she said scoffingly, "you'll be telling me I'm different." Quite unruffled, he retorted:

"You are. I said so the first evening I called."

"Would I be different, in Montreal?" she asked shrewdly. She was swimming under the surface of their conversation; her words were little torpedoes.

He thought she would, and said so. But she remained unsatisfied, feeling, without being able to formulate the main fact, that in Montreal he would never have got near enough to perceive that difference. She was the first woman he had ever known who worked for her living!

"I didn't mean any harm," he pleaded. "You know society in a small new town *is* funny. Such quaint distinctions and pretensions." Truly enough, he did not identify her with them. She never made any pretensions. But—neither did he place her with the other girls he had known as intimately. That was what she caught, with that diabolically fine-spun sensitiveness of hers. She was a little confused, but she had got hold of something.

"But why are they funny?" she challenged him. "Any funnier, I mean, than anywhere else? Of course you know the Countess de Cruchecassee and the Duchess of Schlangenbad abroad, and in Montreal I believe you've even dined with a director of the C. P. R.—it makes me dizzy to think of it!—but that ought to help you to see just why our leading plumber and the wife of a real wholesale grocer should be treated with consideration. Do you set yourself above Cæsar as an authority on values? Oh, yes, I've read Thackeray; he's the consolation of all the unsuccessful and unarrived. If they actually bore you I forgive you.

But didn't any of your own social lights ever bore you?"

"Horribly," he said, with an air of sincere penitence. "*Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.* I didn't know what I was saying; I have been thinking of other things. I have been following stern ambition rather than butterfly pleasure."

"Then why didn't you tell me?" she said aggrievedly, forgetting her own reticence. "*What* ambitions?"

"It's dinner time," he reminded her. "If you will brave the horrors of that what-you-call-it restaurant—you know, with the mummified palms and armour-plate dishes—and dine with me, I'll tell you my inmost thoughts. It's so long since I've taken a lady to dinner, I feel I must sacrifice you."

"It will be fun," she agreed. "I have *never* been taken to dinner. Think of that!"

CHAPTER VII

LESLEY stipulated that she should go home long enough to freshen her toilette and change her skirt before they dined. So they struck into a gallop, and were silent, enjoying the fine day and the motion and the sensation generally of vigorous life and youth. Once Lesley looked at Chan, who carried his hat in his hand and rode with his head bent as if in deep thought, though his eyes expressed nothing but dreamy contentment. She opened her lips to speak, and then waited until at the bridge they were forced to slow to a walk.

"I shouldn't have guessed," she said, "that you are a shadow rider."

"A what?" he asked. When she fell into her own vernacular he was always interested. "What is a shadow rider? Sounds rather poetic."

"It isn't," she retorted cruelly. "You watched your own shadow for a long time back there. If you did that on the rodeo, and the range-boss saw you—you'd be looking for a new job. It's the lazy ones, the in-different ones, do that."

"Again?" said Chan, with an accent of deep patience. "Lesley, do you want me to call you a shrew? Just one kind word—just one. I'm black and blue. My self-esteem is in rags. Please remember that I was riding for pleasure anyhow."

"Well, there it is," said Lesley, laughing. "Most of us get most of our pleasure—what a superlative sentence—out of watching our own shadows, one way or another. There's something fascinating about it,

I know. I wonder how much of the real things we miss because of it?"

Chan laughed with her. "You aren't Xantippe, you're Socrates. Right, very right. We forget what we're riding after, the great objective, to watch our own shadows. Whoa, January!" They stopped at Lesley's gate; she dismounted too quickly for him to help her, with a flash and jingle of her little silver spur; and he galloped off, leading her horse, while she went into the house.

Mrs. Cranston was asleep on the sitting-room sofa; her lord and master was out of town and she was not disturbing herself about dinner. Something cold would do. The sound of Lesley running upstairs woke her and she called after her fretfully.

"Can't hear you," Lesley sang out. "Downstairs again in a minute or two." Her skirt caught on the spur. Dick had made it for her, out of a half dollar for a rowel. She sat down on the floor, muttering to it earnestly, to tug it off.

"But some one called for you," insisted Mrs. Cranston. Lesley thought she said: "Is some one calling for you?"

"Yes," she screamed down hurriedly. "Chan is coming back in ten minutes." Mrs. Cranston sat up, fluffed out her hair, extracted a chamois skin from the top of her stocking and rubbed it over her face; and then sat with a pensive and watchful expression, listening, and looking meanwhile, sly even when alone, at a vase of deep red roses that were elbowing Tennyson on the centre table. There was a card with a pencilled message beside them, in the emptied box. It was signed with initials only, and Mrs. Cranston did not know whose.

She had tried a dozen poses, and powdered her nose three times, before Chan rang. Lesley was not yet

down. Mrs. Cranston had been afraid she would be. She slipped to the door, holding out her hand as she opened it. It was a small hand, but not soft, with greedy, thin fingers and a dry, hot palm. She wore four showy, inexpensive rings.

"Thank you for the candy, you extravagant thing," she said, drawing him after her to the sofa again. "Though you shouldn't have—Lesley will be jealous. Come here; you're losing your tie pin."

The idea of Lesley being jealous struck Chan as humorous, though it grated on him for some reason he could not define.

"Will she? Then we won't tell her." Mrs. Cranston, standing on tiptoe exaggeratedly, pulling and patting at his white piqué stock, dropped her eyelids and then looked up again deliberately. Her soft, shallow eyes invited; Chan was suddenly aware of her nearness, of the pressure of her fingers on his coat lapels. . . .

"If you don't want me to," murmured Mrs. Cranston. Chan did not speak, nor move. Fearing silence, forgetting or never realising how much more than herself she could represent, the vain, sensual, silly woman hurried on, speaking again to drown her own words: "What a pretty pin!" She drew it out of his tie, removing her hands from his coat; he found himself drawing a short breath of relief.

"Could I get one like it, I wonder?" she was asking. It was a gold horseshoe, with a black enamelled crop twisted about it. Chan thought it rather flamboyant; somebody had given it to him, he forgot who. Probably some woman. He had always detested it. He thought so now, at least.

"Keep it," he said promptly. "Just give me a skewer, or something to hold me together. . . . 'Pon my word, I'd like you to have it." She thrust it under

a fall of lace on her blouse, and gave him a steel pin in return. They heard Lesley's hurried feet on the stairs and drew apart, eyeing each other; Mrs. Cranston's pouting reddened lips shut mysteriously, the air was close, and neither of them could find a word for Lesley as she entered.

"Ready," she said. "Oh, Amy, I should have told you when I came in; I'm going out for dinner."

"For dinner? I don't see where you'll get any," said Mrs. Cranston. "Don't you want your flowers? You missed a motor ride; he brought them himself."

"Who?" said Lesley curtly, vexation sparkling in her eyes. She took up the card, glanced at it, and tore it across. "Idiot!" was her brief comment, and she turned to go.

"I thought they'd wilt if I didn't take them out of the box," said Mrs. Cranston apologetically, watching Chan sidewise: "He was so disappointed——"

"Really!" And that was all she got out of Lesley. She guessed rightly that Lesley was annoyed at her prying about the card, and wondered virtuously why she should be so secretive. In Mrs. Cranston's house, too. . . . Left to herself, she pouted again, looked once more at the torn card, and then sidled over to the window and watched from behind the curtain Lesley and Chan walking away, apparently deep in talk and herself forgotten.

But Chan knew she was watching him. . . . For a long time now he had been conscious of those velvety eyes of hers fixed on him when he thought no one would notice, ready to droop or turn away just the moment after he had caught them. . . . They were full of a surreptitious, personal intelligence. They were in a way to become a fixed idea with him, and while at first he went to her house with a free mind, looking only for Lesley, now, while he did not

look for Mrs. Cranston, he knew he should find her there. . . . The dark side that is in all of us, that is titillated, excited by anything clandestine, asserted itself, fed on her sudden appearances, her lowered voice, her insistence on confidences shared. That there were no confidences to share hardly mattered. "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant," said a poet, looking into his own heart.

Her cobweb net fell away from Herrick as soon as he was out of sight. He and Lesley, seated opposite each other in a stuffy restaurant box, inadequately partitioned from the vulgar world by flimsy walls of red burlap, had something less tenuous to discuss.

Mrs. Cranston's aspersions on the culinary resources of the city had not been ill founded. There was not then a good hotel; the two or three restaurants were all about the equivalent of a cafeteria in quality. Nobody who could avoid it ever tried to find sustenance in those dreary places. But by a piece of good fortune this night Lesley and Chan found there was prairie chicken on the menu; probably it had come cheaper to the boniface than domestic fowl. And Chan ordered champagne, at a price which would have turned Fifth Avenue pale with envy.

"I never tried it," said Lesley warily, "but I will. This is an occasion. . . . Do you know, I like it! . . . Oh, well, you may laugh, but my ancestors were Presbyterians."

"Would you rather have Scotch, then?" asked Chan. "I say, I wouldn't drink more than one glass. It's tricky stuff." He had wanted some himself, or at least, he wanted something, he scarcely knew what, to quiet that jumping of his pulses, that expanding restlessness, stirred in him by the vast outdoors, the crystal air, his restored and now abounding health—and Amy Cranston's following soft brown eyes and

clutching little hands. But he liked and esteemed Lesley far too much to feed her to his personal devil, even to the extent of allowing her to make herself absurd.

"I shan't," she said serenely. "I am really a very cautious person—you must never forget those Presbyterian ancestors." The truth of that was evident; her poise and good sense quieted him sympathetically. It was then perhaps for the first time that he insensibly leaned on her, felt himself braced by her presence. Not that there was anything flabby about Chan, but it is no less than truth that the world of men dresses by the world of women, and falls into a disorganised mob, socially, without them. A community of old maids may be a dry and sterile and unlovely assemblage, but it preserves all the punctilios of civilisation, nay, refines them to the *n*th degree; where an isolated group of men, though it may construct railways and bridges, tame floods and remove mountains, sinks to a condition of savagery in its personal conduct of life. And Lesley was one of the women men dress by. There is nothing very romantic in being a moral tonic. It was not a very happy circumstance for Lesley, possibly, that Chan's feelings for her should thus first resolve themselves, and neither of them ever knew that any such thing had happened. But there it was, a sword between them. They talked over it amicably without ever perceiving it.

"And your ambitions," she reminded him, when the waiter, with a final flourish of a dirty napkin, had removed himself. "Don't keep the presses waiting."

"Eh, what? You know, if I get talking I'll probably never stop, because I can feel enthusiasm creeping over me. I think I shall go into politics. Oh, later, a lot later. D'you know Clarence Geers, ex-M. P.?—What courage, to be a politician with a name like

Clarence—well, I met him here through Ross, and he thought he was quitting politics. I've seen him a few times since, and talked to him; he's a pretty good talker, in a prosy way, and I think we like each other. And I joined the Liberal Association through him. He came into some money just lately."

"I remember," said Lesley. "We gave him half a column of perfectly good glory over it. Well?"

"Well, he only quit politics because he needed money and had to go back to his practice. Now he's entering the ring again. He will run for the Provincial legislature this fall, just to keep his hand in, and then when the next Dominion election comes, he'll go in for that. He asked me, or I offered myself, to work for him. I want to learn the ropes. There's plenty of room for young men here. Ross likes the idea, too; Geers wrote him about it, and he told me to go ahead. Give me ten years, and I may do something. I understand it's the ozone in the air," he smiled deprecatingly, "but I find I really want to work out here."

"The ozone in the hot air," said Lesley sceptically. "What do you really want to do? Want to go to the Senate?" Her mind, on the practical side, had always been extraordinarily clear-cut and definite, and she sometimes marvelled at the powers of self-obfuscation displayed by the average person.

"Do I want to join the Old Ladies' Home?" said Chan disgustedly. "No, I'd like to make a record for myself."

"For yourself?" Lesley could mock charmingly. "Indeed, you were born to be a politician."

"What's the matter, little sour note?" he asked.

"Am I detestable?" She did not want to check his expansive mood. "I'll tell you, it's a reaction. I hear so much talk—and talk—and talk—you know, from our wildcat boomers, and everybody that's getting rich

quick—and that's everybody but me—the Hundred Thousand Club and the Canadian Club and all the other self-appointed promoters, and it's all on the same note. Something for us—for me—right away—prosperity—bring people in and get their money—grab it—quick—boom, boom, BOOM!” She puffed out her cheeks and laughed. “And the politicians hear it even as far as Ottawa and thump it on their little drums, and then we all join the chorus again. What do we stand for—as Canadians? Neither fish nor flesh; we pretend to democratic institutions and issue proclamations beginning with statements about a ‘Majesty by the Grace of God.’ Have we got an idea, a real, whole, Canadian idea, to bless ourselves with? When you were abroad, did any one know by your nationality whether you were an Eskimo or a Patagonian?”

“Oh, I hope so,” said Chan apologetically, but with a slight twinkle in his eye. “I wonder, what ever made such a Radical of you?”

“Ignorance, perhaps,” said Lesley cheerfully. “I am open to enlightenment. No, I think there are real causes. One is that fifteen years or less ago in this country, when we were all living in what I've read is the second stage of human progress, the pastoral stage—am I right?”

“I believe so. Hunter, herdsman, farmer, and so on. You've read a good bit, haven't you?”

“No, I haven't. That's probably why I remember what I did read. I was going to say, we were not only pastoral, but a pure democracy in our social relations. Sometimes it makes me believe Henry George—that is, I might if I knew more about Henry George—because I think it was the way we held land that did it. We all had all the land there was, and no one could have more than one quarter section, at least not easily. Just one homestead, you know. We were all

rather poor, of course—but we were rather happy, too. Every one had an equal chance. And it does seem a strong argument for democracy that those who've experienced it demand it."

"Yes, if renouncing it won't bring them preferment," said Chan thoughtfully. "Any other reasons?"

"The last Birthday list, perhaps," she laughed. "Or the spectacle of a subsidised press. Or natural cussedness. I seem to feel that we're growing a kind of crust that will hurt when it has to be peeled off; like a plaster cast."

"So . . . that is quite true. Of course, we're a curious after effect of the American Revolution. The backwash of it spun our little craft around and left it in the trough of the sea. Without that, our own Rebellion might have mounted to a revolution—we should have blazed a path ourselves. But we got the half loaf and ceased crying for bread."

"Which Rebellion do you mean?"

"Mackenzie's Rebellion; our histories give it a paragraph, but they don't mark the page. We had another, a moral and invisible rebellion when Lord Lorne was put in his place for interfering with local politics as Governor-General. Aren't you unreasonable? We have all our liberties, and we belong to the greatest Empire the world has ever seen."

"You forget," she said, "that I haven't got all my liberties. And I think we are just a hundred years behind the times in clinging to a word like Empire. And I despise half loaves, and the eaters of broken bread."

"Then," said Chan, "you know your logical conclusion?"

"Certainly," said Lesley.

"You are too late, and too soon," said Chan. "In the sixties, England did everything but beat us over

the head with an oar to make us get out of the boat—it looked overloaded and they were trying to heave ballast. But we were impervious to hints, and stayed. Now it looks as if we could pay our passage, do you think we ought to get out?”

“Pay it *and* get out,” returned Lesley.

“You and I may both live fifty years yet,” said Chan. “Time for the tide to turn and re-turn. But I’d like to do something while I’m waiting.”

“Oh, go ahead, do things by all means. And to come down to cases, what do you propose to do to help Geers?”

“Committee room work, drafting pamphlets—maybe a little stumping. I was on my college debating team. Come out and hear my maiden speech. It’s far enough off yet for you to prepare your mind in advance.”

“I wish I could,” said Lesley. “But I shall be far away by then.”

CHAPTER VIII

GOING away?" Chan felt as if he had a personal grievance; it seemed unnecessary that she should go away. He couldn't spare her. Not yet, anyway; not until he had found something to take her place. "Where are you going?"

"To Montreal, to McGill. I shall probably get only two years there, but it will serve. Then I'm going to begin to be a journalist. How impolite of you to have forgotten."

"I didn't forget," he said blankly. "I didn't think it would be so soon, that's all. Do you know any one in Montreal? McGill was my college; I can write to people there to be nice to you."

"I don't know a soul," she said gratefully. "I will take all the letters you can write."

"And when?"

"Next month." She was rather sorry herself that he would not be there; by no means that she would not be here. The world was not so large but that people met again. "I shall read of your career. Perhaps some day I'll write of it," she laughed. "When we are both famous, we'll have dinner here again."

"Never. Some indignant diner will burn it to the ground first. Well, I'm sorry. Who'll I talk to now?"

"There are millions of girls," she said, but not teasingly. "I'm sorry, too. If I were staying I'd make you give me a course in Canadian history and politics. Why did we never talk about them before? I never suspected you were so well informed."

"I'm not, but I mean to be. Ross has it all at his

finger ends, though. He's very thorough—and then he knows all the good old political warhorses of the last generation—those of them that are left. You know his father—my grandfather—helped underwrite the C. P. R., and knew Sir John A. MacDonald, the plausible old scamp, our tin hero, and Blake and Mackenzie and Cartwright and all the rest of 'em. I've often sat around and listened to their reminiscences myself, a few years ago, when several of them were still alive. It's the kind of thing that's interesting to a degree if you know the people concerned in it. And not otherwise. But I don't know but what I felt you were right; we haven't any especial significance to the rest of the world; so I didn't suppose it would be anything but a bore to you."

"I told you I like people and things. That's why I'm going away."

"It seems a kind of shame," mused Herrick, twirling his champagne glass in his fingers. "You were born here—and there ought to be some share in all this for you. Why don't you come back here after college? This afternoon I think my imagination woke for the first time; you phrased it all, but you put it in the past tense. Now it looks to me just as it did to you fifteen years ago. So much to work with—so big—so new. Can't you move up a notch?"

"Move the country up a notch for me," shrugged Lesley. "For women, I mean. I was born disinherited, wasn't I? 'Women, and Indians, and lunatics,' my chivalrous *and* just country's laws mention. Do I get a foot of all this land? Or a word of what's to be done with it? I do not. My brother does, not me. I get my head and my hands, and I'm going to take them and vanish without even saying thanks."

"Is it the suffrage question annoys you?" questioned Chan.

"Oh, not only that—everything. We're Tory, to the bone, in our—our mental attitude, as well as in most of our common law. Spoils and place and privilege—for money over men—party over principle—men over women. It suffocates me." She looked like a runner straining for the race, her curious flecked eyes almost black by reason of the enlarged pupils, her fine nostrils quivering.

"Well, I'd hardly go so far. There's a fair chance for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, I should say. You just commented on the wisdom of the fathers in dealing with the land here."

"The land will all be gone some day. And there's always a fair chance for—the lucky ones! Anywhere, any time. . . . Chan, we've been here for hours, and I positively must go home and do some sewing. The trousseau for my career!"

She put on her shabby gloves; Chan paid the bill, and they moved toward the door. Lesley, craning her neck at a mirror as she passed, did not notice Addison standing near the cashier's desk, quite evidently waiting for her with a fine young thundercloud on his brow.

"Good evening," he said.

She frowned by instinct, stirred antagonistically by his mere tone; then smiled unexpectedly. "Thank you," she said, sotto voce, and was for going by. But he meant to stop her. She seemed to grow taller, met his eyes squarely, beat his glance down, and passed him like an empress.

"That man," said Chan profoundly, when they had reached the street, "doesn't like my necktie, nor the way I part my hair. I met him once, but I think he forgot. Am I impertinent in mentioning him? And does he ever annoy you?"

"He annoys me with flowers," gurgled Lesley.

"You know how annoying flowers are? But I like him. Don't kill him, please."

"Very well," said Chan. "He wore a green plush hat; I'll let him live and suffer. Do you like red roses especially?"

He sent her some himself the next day, without thinking much about it, then or after. He could fancy her dealing very competently with any man who annoyed her too much. And he had a feeling of being let into her confidence in this matter, which was not at all the same feeling Amy Cranston gave him. . . . He sent Mrs. Cranston violets, and more chocolates, of which she seemed able to consume incredible quantities for all her thinness.

Lesley had stated the case fairly enough, about Jack Addison. He was persistent, but merely wishing to see her could hardly be construed into an offence, and she never did see him, so his offending took no other form. How could it? Sometimes, anyway, he forgot her apparently for quite weeks at a time, which was a relief. It probably meant some other woman, for his brief and ardent affairs were a joke. But then something would bring Lesley to his mind again, and he took up the thread with renewed vigour. Now for two weeks he had been besieging her, even waylaying her on the street. But he was trained in the conventions, and she could always dispose of him on the street. He said he had some special reason for wanting to see her now, but he had tried that ruse just once before, and she was wary. In a day or two more he would probably be off on some fresh scent, she thought.

And in the very bottom of her heart she did like him, if only because her human and feminine ego took its required nourishment from his inconvenient devotion. Every woman wants, and should have, her share

of masculine adulation; the need of it is merely a phase of adolescence, but unsatisfied it leaves a blank and chilly memory, a dead spot in the soul. To be undesired is a blight to the emotional life; and the emotional life is as important in its way as the intellectual side. Lesley had not been altogether undesired, even before she left home, but familiarity had bred contempt in her. The approaches of neighbouring young ranchers, or the clerks and mechanics of Macleod, had left her exceedingly cold. She had got a shadowy ideal of a man out of books and her own imagination; and he was not like these. It would have been easy to have deceived her; it is always easier to know the true than to detect the false. But no plausible villains had appeared, probably because there are none outside of Laura Jean Libbey's novels. It was really finish she wanted, unerringly asking for the one thing her own milieu couldn't supply. There was not a grain of the snob in her; she could honestly laugh at social distinctions; she only wanted a match for her own innate daintiness and delicacy; she wanted ease of manner, and culture. Not an unworthy aspiration. And she thought, as most proud girls will think, that she would easily reconcile herself to never marrying at all if her knight never sought her out, or did not exist. Chan's friendship gave her courage, just as Jack Addison's pursuit fed her necessary woman's vanity. Altogether, she was in a fit mood now to go out and conquer. So for a fortnight she carried her head in the air and prepared for departure.

She had to see Chan less because of that. He found himself always missing her now, arriving and finding her not yet home—and Mrs. Cranston to tell him so. One week end she went down to Macleod, to the ranch. From force of habit he rang the bell next door that evening before he remembered Lesley was not there.

... His restlessness mounted steadily higher because of the break in his habits. He missed the men he had used to know; old memories rose and crowded on his mind, ghosts of his careless days, things he had wished to forget. The melancholy of approaching winter seized him. And yet masculine companionship seemed singularly incomplete, did not make all his memories.

But he did not think of Lesley tenderly, in one sense of the word. She had such a definite place in his mind it would have required a shock to dislodge her from it. When he did see her they talked about her going away, and he told her about Montreal, and wondered if Ross could not help her in some way when she got there. He wrote Ross about it, and got a cordial letter in reply. Ross did not mean to be in Montreal the first part of the winter. He was coming West first, and then would be in New York a good deal, and might run over to London. Ross had something to talk over with Chan when he came.

Lesley had no time to think of whether she missed Chan, or would miss him. She laughed at herself for being so exultant over things yet unaccomplished, but sometimes when she rose in the morning she would fling out her arms as if to embrace the whole world. Her spirit escaped from the little room to encompass the world and find it good. Amy Cranston's self-satisfied slyness, never so apparent, went unnoticed. Lesley even relented toward Jack Addison. He could not follow where she was going!

He telephoned, when she reached home after dining with Chan. She knew who it would prove to be, but did not feel annoyed; she laughed into the telephone, thinking of his green plush hat, and Chan's absurdity. Chan was in the sitting room, and Mrs. Cranston had come down; they were talking.

"Hello. . . . Yes, I know who is talking," said Lesley. Addison heard her laughter; she had never spoken to him so softly before. But she could not know how his heart jumped at the sound. In some ways she underestimated Jack Addison.

"I want to see you," he said.

"Sorry, but I'm not receiving to-night."

"You can see that Herrick pup," he flared.

"If you only want to be rude," said Lesley coldly, "talk to some one who is obliged to listen to you——"

"No, no; I beg your pardon. Lesley, please, don't be brutal. I tried to be decent to you; I only wanted to be your friend. And you're going away——"

"How do you know that?" she cried.

"I was in the next box to you to-night."

"Oh." She thought perhaps she ought to be offended—and would have been, could she have remembered anything in her conversation with Chan that should not have been overheard. All human motives are mixed.

"Yes. I couldn't help hearing; I was there first." Perhaps he had been. "Aren't you going to see me just once before you go? I think I deserve that."

Oh, well, what did it matter?

"I don't think I can," she temporised with the temptation to use her moment's sovereignty, just for a moment.

"Oh, yes, you can. Let me come over to-morrow evening——"

Not with Amy Cranston to watch and wonder and come into the room casually to find out who it was. Amy did not know yet.

"No. You can't come. . . . Telephone me to-morrow at the office—no, next Tuesday; I forgot to-morrow's Sunday, and I shall be busy till then. If you telephone me before then, I *won't* see you.

Good-night." Whatever else he might have said benefited no one, unless a listening Central.

"Why didn't you tell him to come over, and make four?" asked Mrs. Cranston, as Lesley reappeared in the sitting-room.

"Because I didn't want to," replied Lesley shortly. Amy did jar. Lesley began walking about the room, pacing up and down with her chin in the air in total disregard of manners. Chan had ceased to be a guest, to her.

"O, saw ye bonny Lesley?" he began to sing, in an agreeable light baritone. "Good-bye, Lesley, you're gone already."

"Oh, I can't be still," she said apologetically. Now she had told him, she did feel that she had gone already. That was how it happened that the quietness he had drawn from her earlier in the evening, at dinner, vanished so soon, and left him at the mercy of his own untamed impulses.

They ended the evening with a kind of romp, the first time they had ever so relaxed; for he rose and began pacing with her, mocking her step with his longer stride, and when to save her dignity she turned on him, he bowed and asked her for a dance, and made her waltz about the table with him, whistling the air. Then he had to take Mrs. Cranston, and Lesley went into the dining-room and pounded out music of sorts on the upright piano, for which there was not space in the sitting-room. She had her back to them; and he had Mrs. Cranston in his arms, with her hair against his cheek, her hand slipped under his arm, pressing it closer. And Mrs. Cranston was speaking to him in a warm, muted undertone. . . .

"I only know three bars of that," Lesley called regretfully, and ended. "You see, I only had three lessons. So sorry." She came back. Chan was glad.

Or he thought he was glad. . . . He went home, and slept ill.

So a little time passed, until the evening he found Lesley, alone in front of the cold fireplace, weeping over a crumpled letter.

CHAPTER IX

MRS. CRANSTON was out. Chan knew she would be out. Her husband was in town, and they had gone to a moving picture theatre. . . . She had told Chan herself, carefully, in advance. And he waited until he saw them leaving, which was not exactly what Mrs. Cranston had in mind. Then he walked in without ringing, meaning to play some foolish game of surprise on Lesley, out of an overflow of spirits, of that continued restlessness. So he found her.

"Oh," she said, jumping to her feet, with a little gasping sob. Even weeping had not reddened her white skin; only her eyes looked heavy and very dark, swimming with tears. Sorrow is not unbecoming to a young girl.

"For God's sake," he said, astonished—one never thought of Lesley and tears—"what's the matter, my dear girl?"

"I—I'm not going to college," she said. "There, you see how selfish I am, to think of that first. My mother——" She choked again.

"She's not dead?" He felt almost as if a personal loss impended.

"No, no. But she's sick; you know she's never been strong. She has rheumatic fever, and her heart isn't good. And winter's coming on, and it will be too cold for her. She must go to California, or somewhere." She looked about vaguely.

"Yes, of course. But she'll get better, I'm sure."

In his experience, sending people to California was simple enough.

"Of course she will." There was more defiance than confidence in the assertion. "The doctor says so. It'll be lonesome for her, though." She wept again.

"Lesley, you mustn't worry." He took her sopping handkerchief from her and gave her his own. It was not the first time he had seen a woman cry. But it touched him no less for that. "Don't; your mother will be all right. If the doctor said so——"

"I know." But she kept her face hidden, and her shoulders shook. "I'm a selfish pig. I—I——"

"Selfish? I don't see that." He really did not understand.

"Because I can't go to college now." She lifted her face and looked at him, as if expecting to see him disgusted. "You see, I am a pig. I'm so—disappointed—it's the third—time——"

"You'll have to go with her, of course."

"I can't do that either," she cried in exasperation and renewed grief. "We can't *afford* it. I just—can't—do anything—but stay here——"

"Poor kiddie!" He simply had not thought of that. He put his arm about her shoulder and drew her to the sofa. "It's tough. But it may not be so bad; we may think of something——"

"No, there isn't any chance. When I can save enough again it will be too late." Stony despair sat on her features; then two great tears balanced on her thick lashes a moment before they fell. "Oh, I do care about my mother, Chan, I do! I don't grudge her anything; it's for her, too. She *isn't* strong; and I wanted her to see me succeed—I wanted——"

"Lesley, dear!" He dried her eyes and held her close, with no emotion but the most generous sym-

pathy. He was reflecting that he had a little money yet of his own, but it was no time to speak of material help. Lesley was proud; he must be tactful and coax her around gradually. She should have her college, and her career—if he had to manufacture a relative of hers and then mercilessly slay him for the sake of a legacy, still in imagination. Let him think it over. . . . A little time. . . . He smoothed her hair with his strong, deft hand. . . . “Poor child, don’t cry any more just now; don’t, dear.” She was quieter, in his arms, hiding her face against his coat, with his handkerchief. His touch on her hair gave her the feeling of a cat being stroked. The nape of her neck was delicious, so creamy white at the edge of her dark hair. And then when she lifted her face again, blinking her wet lashes, trying to smile, he kissed her. . . .

Because he was sorry for her, and because she was at the flowering age of girlhood, which invites kisses as naturally as a flower invites one to smell its fragrance. He kissed her because she was a girl—not because she was a woman who drew him above all others. There are true kisses of consolation.

A faint tremor touched her; she looked at him with parted lips, as if she would speak. But she was silent, and hid her face again. There was a singing in her ears that was like a spring torrent; she thought he must hear her heart beating. He smoothed her hair again, and let her rest. . . .

“Better now, dear?” he asked softly.

He had not heard. . . .

“Better now,” her voice came back, very muffled and small. Then she drew away from him gently and decisively.

He let her go.

With a violent inward effort she controlled herself. She felt light, giddy, lacking the firm support of his

shoulder. And there was an emptiness in her bosom. Lesley had never deceived herself intentionally. She did not now. She knew. . . . And she knew he did not know. . . . Without seeming to look at him, she saw nothing else; in the minutest detail, the crisp, upcurling crest of his close-cut brown hair, the narrow edge of white below it, where his hat brim was wont to keep off the sun, his pugnacious jaw, with its clean line from chin to ear, his merry, anxious, dark grey eyes, the whites of them so clear one looked again to meet his gaze with unconscious pleasure, even his clothes, a grey tweed suit, that still had the smell of peatsmoke, tan shoes, a narrow green tie, were all dear to her. Her cheek still felt the roughness of his coat, and she smelled the heather and smoke. Her senses rebelled against her will, and though she retained command, for a sweet and terrible moment she could feel her inner self bend and sway toward him like a reed in the wind. It cost her a sharp, sickening pang to rise and move away from him a step. . . . For a long, long time afterward she could feel that pain again when she remembered, for it seemed as if she had then lost something out of her life that would never come again with quite the same power, the same promise of completeness and delight.

All he saw was that her mouth set hard for a moment, the short pink upper lip losing its laughing tilt; and her hands, so lax and helpless in her lap, shut determinedly. She had grit, he knew; she was not going to cry any more, though the shuddering of her bosom, subdued at last with a long breath, gave him another impulse to take her in his arms and quiet her. It was not a woman he had held, but a friend. He was capable of that, and had risen to it. Poor Lesley! There was hateful irony in the fact that his

senses had never been more quiescent in his life, because he had been thinking only of her.

"Won't you sit down again?" he begged her, for lack of some other word of sympathy.

"Oh, I . . ." It was difficult yet to find words sufficiently meaningless. "No—don't mind me, please. I'll be—all right—now." She listened to herself in a detached way at first, then a quick revulsion came over her, a feeling of safety because of what she had not said nor done. Her mind grew very clear and calm. "How silly I've been," she said. "Do forgive me; I felt quite Scriptural, and just had to weep on some one's neck. I've raised several blisters on your nice clean collar, but then I'm sure you have millions of collars. . . ."

"All at your disposal," he said. She was not deceiving him, but he liked her for trying. Yet he did not want her to think he thought it amusing. "You do know I'm sorry, don't you, Lesley? You know I'd like to help you?" He took her hands, and she felt comforted, and still strong; he armoured her against herself. Since he could not feel, it was immensely good of him not to see either. She leaned back, holding by his hands, and laughing, as if they were playing "Ring around a rosy."

"Yes, I do know. Thank you. I'll talk about it pretty soon, and get it all off my mind, but now—Listen, I think the baby's crying!"

A little tentative wail, the waking cry of a child, came to them.

"I'll go and get her," said Lesley, glad of the diversion, for with two things she did not want to talk about for the moment, the topics of conversation seemed singularly limited. She came downstairs again immediately, with the child in her arms. She never looked better than this, her tall, round figure poised

to carry the soft burden, her head bent over it. Mrs. Cranston's baby, a little girl named Eve, was not yet a year old; she had not learned to walk, but she had the most engaging manners, and her silky eyelashes alone would have given her a claim to be considered a pretty child. She ogled Chan in a manner so feminine that they must both laugh, and then produced two dimples, showing as many tiny pearly teeth, and gurgled at him. She knew him by sight; and royalty itself is not more gracious in the act of recognition than infancy.

"She does know you," said Lesley. "Little rogue—no, mustn't suck her darling thumb. If you please, Chan, she wants your watch fob. She does *not* want to go to you; it's your money she loves; I'll show you." They sat on the sofa side by side, and Eve lunged at the watch fob with one hand and clung to Lesley with the other.

"She's a bit like her mother," said Chan, and had the grace to colour faintly, though he knew Lesley could not know what he meant.

"Do you think so?" Lesley had a real affection for Eve, and refused to see the resemblance, though it existed, an innocent resemblance. If Mrs. Cranston had known it, she might have adorned herself with her child's charm. But though she really was fond of the baby, and did not neglect it, she wanted some time free of the thought of maternity.

"Eve hasn't any troubles, has she?" Lesley smiled. "I wonder if she'll spoil people's collars some time, and make her funny nose red crying for the moon?" It seemed a little as if it had been the moon she cried for, already, to Lesley; the matter grew remote, and altogether of less consequence. Perhaps because Chan was sitting beside her. She did not have to leave him, at least. Would he ever. . . . With a

mental jerk, she closed the shutters again on speculation.

"Oh, I suppose so, we all do," said Chan comfortably.

"Did you, ever?"

He thought a moment. "No, I haven't yet."

"But you will some day," said Lesley, her eyes closed. Knowledge lay in that darkened chamber of her brain; things of the future. It crowded on her, and she repulsed it.

They talked at last of her spoiled plans, and of her one alternative. "But I don't want to think of it to-night," she pleaded. "I feel as if I must have a rest; and I've got my mother to think of first. I must make arrangements right away for her to go South."

She had already enquired about rates to various points. Chan recommended Pasadena. He had been in California for a winter, and insisted on wiring enquiries to hotels and agencies he knew there.

"You've been everywhere, haven't you?" Lesley said enviously. "Lucky you."

"I have had a lot," he said, though he had never realised it before. Lesley's tears had cleared his vision. And he was still determined to help her, though it did not seem quite time to speak, and he said good-night without broaching the question to her.

Lesley, sitting in her room after he had gone, still holding Eve, rosily asleep again, as if she nursed her vanished hopes, felt quiescent, in such a calm as may be found in the heart of a storm. She would not think, for fear of summoning undesired that strange percipience, and seeing something it was better not to know yet. Sufficient unto the day had been the evil thereof. To wait a little before struggling any more was all she asked. When Mrs. Cranston

came home, pouting and yawning over a dull play, and took Eve perfunctorily to her crib, Lesley went to bed, closed her eyes on the grateful dark, and slept as quietly as Eve. She had had a full day, and it was finished. The double shock had reacted on itself, and was spent. And there was still Chan. . . .

There was also Jack Addison. He got short shrift, and none of Lesley's society. She sent him word she would be busy, and why. Thereon he remembered, and when her mother arrived, sent flowers, and a hodge-podge basket of fruit, for her to take to the train. It melted Lesley's heart toward him, and she decided later she would see him long enough to thank him.

Chan also made himself practically useful by attending to tickets and reservations and tipping railway porters in advance, and loading Mrs. Johns with California literature and directions. Mrs. Johns was small and shy, with the remains of a Scotch burr on her tongue, gained from her own mother. Her thin face was tanned, and her hazel eyes seemed faded from long gazing over wide sunny surfaces. Years of prairie exile, before many neighbours had come near the ranch, made her unready of speech, but her native simplicity and the hospitality the West once enforced on its people gave her a kind of graciousness of manner that kept her from being ever ill at ease. She never spoke much of her illness; she had been so long a mother her own pains did not seem to matter much.

Chan won her heart. "He's such a nice boy; he reminds me of Dick," she told Lesley, as they were preparing for bed, the night she spent at Mrs. Cranston's before taking train. Lesley refrained from expressing any amusement. Dick *was* a nice boy;

they did have that in common, if nothing else. She merely hugged her mother, and kissed her soft, faded cheek. Later she rubbed both cheeks with cold cream, and did her mother's hair in curl-papers, and laughed with moist eyes. When she was a child, she had made a game of such things; her mother did not understand, but submitted to her ministrations with inexplicable pleasure. But to Lesley, her mother was a queen, and she a maid of honour. She had got this, at the age of ten, out of some old romantic novel; and it had for years after that been her favourite play drama. She used to pin on an old skirt of her mother's, take a feather duster for a fan, and walk in such quaint grandeur as only a child can imagine. She did not revive that part of the play now, for this was a play on a play, pretending again what had never been anything but a child's pretence; and there was some feeling of irony in her mind, but not toward her mother. She only wondered if her mother had never had any impossible dreams as a girl; if her life had satisfied her. Was it really enough? She did not ask. Mrs. Johns, after one gently amused glance at herself in the mirror, shiny with cold cream and surmounted by a coronet of curl-papers, waited until Lesley had got into her high-necked cotton nightdress, and then drew her down to her knees.

"Sit here on my lap, little daughter, and let me rock you," she said.

"Oh, mammy, I'll just squash you!" Lesley protested. "I'm twice as heavy as you."

"You couldn't be heavy to me," her mother said, and truly her bosom seemed wide enough, and her arms enfolded her girl amply.

Perhaps it was enough! Lesley, sitting lightly, resting her weight on the arm of the wooden rocker, warmed in the breast that had nourished her, felt

drugged into a strange peace. It was as if she saw herself asleep, and wondered when she would wake. The enigma of the elder generation content in the younger that is not content was unsolved, but she could not contend with it now.

Nor, for a time after her mother had gone South, did she spend herself on any problem. There seemed nothing left of her to spend. She was not exactly tired; she was simply balked. Ambition, gone lame, rested in the shafts.

CHAPTER X

IN the period that followed Lesley, because she had temporarily abandoned initiative action, had a feeling that nobody was doing anything anywhere. Her world drifted, spun about in the briefest circle rather, but made no headway. Yet under the surface motive powers were gathering, casual things happening which later might become significant. It might be we could all control destiny if we knew any more of cause and effect than that they exist. But one heedless word, spoken at the critical moment, can loose an Alpine avalanche, quite literally. The seed of an oak, dropped from a tomtit's beak, may sprout and in time topple a palace wall. Who shall foresee either event?

Perhaps nothing so momentous occurs in the span of any purely private life. Yet we are all immensely important to ourselves.

Chan put off speaking to Lesley about his wish to help her, because he did not have much left of his own money, and that little was tied up. It was necessary to get his hands on it; he hated indefinite promises and offers. In the meantime he found no difference in her; was not even sure that she cared greatly for what she was losing. One evening while they talked and read before the grate—it was suddenly established as a custom that he bring her books, which they read together, and discussed afterward—she leaned forward to poke the fire absently, looking at him the while with her dark bright glance. He saw her jump and her body tauten.

"It's nothing," she said immediately. "The coal

dropped—it startled me. What were you saying?” And she went on, talking in her fluty abrupt expressive voice, laughing and eager, apparently absorbed in his description of Westminster, the old grey mother of Parliaments. They had been reading Morley on Walpole, and she had a way of using Chan for commentary on such things, making him supply the *mise-en-scene* if he chanced to be familiar with it. Facts seemed more impressive to her understanding if she could reconstruct surroundings, even at second hand. Her hungry mind constantly astonished Chan, who had known learning as a handmaiden, not a goddess who was somewhat cold and difficult of access. Lesley drank up knowledge like a dry sponge taking up water.

When she stood up to bid him good-night, and faced him directly, he saw the long red mark of a burn on her forearm. It had accidentally touched the grate, because she had not been looking.

Of course, that was the way she took things. . . . The next day he wired and tried to hasten his liquidation.

They read political memoirs and treatises a good deal because Chan was drafting some leaflets and articles on Geers' behalf for the approaching contest. A small political crisis impended in Edmonton over the treatment the Province had received from the Dominion government in the matter of Crown lands and other rights. This question was not new; it dated back ten years or so, to the time when Alberta had been erected to the status of a province from the tutelage of a mere territorialship; but it had been revived suddenly by certain large grants and concessions to companies easily to be known as backed by political favourites from Ottawa. The Premier of Alberta did not escape scathless. He had blood ties with the most “successful” politician, financially, of recent times, a man who in

seven or eight years had become a multi-millionaire while—remarkable coincidence!—he occupied the office of Minister of the Interior. All this meant a dissolution and a new provincial election, undoubtedly, by the new year. There was just a chance for the puny Opposition to grow fat on their enemies' misdoings. The history of politics is mainly a series of mistakes and dishonesty turned to profit by an opposite party, with disgust serving the people for high motive, and blind indignation for clear thinking.

Geers and Herrick, in an unofficial half hour, rather cynically canvassed that aspect of the contest.

"I don't think they'll beat us," said Geers thoughtfully. "This isn't enough; we have too much of a lead now." It was his party was in.

"We are too prosperous," said Chan, thinking along his own lines. "A people as prosperous as we are now don't mind graft. Prosperity's fat; it cushions and deadens the sensitive nerve centres. Besides, Canada's inured to graft. . . . Wait till there's not enough to go round, though—oh, quite a few years from now. It's amazing how conscience gets up and roars in the lean years, eh!"

"It's got to stop before them," said Geers with sudden heat, as if touched on a personal point. "We've got to clean house—and we will, if I have any influence. But do you suppose the Conservatives wouldn't do just the same thing? And they would come into office hungry. They wouldn't get the public lands back, either. That's only bait for the unthinking; if we can't get them—and I mean to try—while our own party is in at Ottawa, how could they? It's just talk."

"The public lands will never be recaptured," said Chan laughing, "they are much more irrecoverable than the thrush's song. Worth more. Why don't you get

up and say all this on the hustings? I'll get to work on a pamphlet on it to-night. . . ."

Geers for half a second took him seriously; he had that type of slow moving mind which sees everything literally at first glance.

"It would be fatal," he said earnestly, and then, recovering himself: "No, one can't tell the public everything. But just the same this flagrant looting has got to be stopped. It might not be a bad thing for us to have a stronger Opposition; it would certainly help to clean out the party. A free hand is a strong temptation."

"You may not need to pray to be delivered from that," said Chan. "But I agree with you; that Opposition certainly neglected its duty. To let your party get so blamed rotten they hardly dare face the electors! It was their business to keep you—us, if I may—straight. Couldn't I say that, at least?"

"But isn't that the virtue of the party system!" said Geers, refusing to smile, perhaps a trifle flushed. He had some sensitive spots left, and he took his career seriously. Chan had no career, as yet, to render him equally vulnerable.

"Checks and balances," Geers continued, ". . . But we've got to do better. Even if we can't make a clean sweep. It's there; you've got to reckon with it. All our biggest men have had to concede something to it. How are you going to hold a party together?"

"The measure of our great men, in a sentence," said Chan softly. "And of us—principles wouldn't hold us together, would they? But unfortunately there's no other party to belong to. The Conservatives are just a vast negative. Their history is equally odoriferous. And one feels so foolish flocking alone."

"That's it," said Geers warmly. "The Conservatives were worse, when they were in office."

"Oh, why go so far back?" asked Chan, his eyes twinkling.

"But you can't deny the Liberals have made Canada what it is," said Geers. "Why, with all our enormous natural resources, we were losing steadily, until 1896."

"Of course," said Chan. He did not want to offend Geers, whom he liked. The man was sincere, within his limitations he was desperately sincere, and Chan sometimes had to conceal a smile at his glowing faith in certain shibboleths and war cries. Chan himself did not believe that any party had the power of a Joshua, to make the sun stand still or stop shining, or stop certain great folk movements such as had gradually filled the United States and overflowed into Canada, within the last generation. But he wanted to work, he wanted to take a full part in the life of his country, and his mental make-up doomed him to be a Liberal, an affirmative.

It may have been the atmosphere he had been absorbing in committee rooms that kept him from feeling any surprise or idealistic repugnance, when Ross returned and unfolded definitely the object of his visit. Ross never minced words. Only, if he did not want to tell a thing, he absolutely did not tell it. In this case, it was what he had come for.

Ross returned in October, and was delighted with the change in Chan. The youth was made over, subtly hardened. It was an inward adjustment that corresponded with a slight physical alteration. His face had not regained its boyish contour, quite; and the tan seemed bitten in permanently, no mere summer's coating on youth's fresh cheek. And he was alert, though chagrined that Whittemore's purpose had not occurred to him months before.

"Of course, a street railway. Only logical development of an electric plant," he said disgustedly. They

were smoking peacefully in Chan's own room; Whittemore had dodged a dozen invitations, and left the hotel purposely, that he and Chan might not be disturbed. He looked very well himself. To be busy agreed with him, and he had been busy, and successful. All the money he needed was now pledged, by important men, men with their hands on all the remote political strings and with influences that extended and ramified indefinitely. He had secured his outlying defences; he need expect nothing now but local opposition. That he did expect.

"Yes, it's logical enough," he said. "But logical things are generally the hardest to pull off. I've had soundings made, and we can look for difficulties. They'll want to build it themselves."

"I haven't heard it mooted," objected Chan.

"Because, while it's not too soon for us, it's too soon for the city. Their borrowing power won't stretch far enough; and they'll ask for delay. It's our business to make delay seem criminal, wasteful. And—I think I've already spiked their guns as far as getting their credit legally extended for some time to come is concerned."

"Yes." Chan was obviously listening.

"Well, then, there remains to win over the needed majority here. The mayor we can carry if we can secure a majority of the council; he's standpat anyway, doesn't care for innovations, public ownership, and all that. Calls himself a practical man. We've got one of the newspapers—the *Recorder*. The owner will have some stock. There are two men here for you to work with—one, rather, and he'll deal with the other. That one's Burrage, and he and a chap named Addison"—Chan decided there was only one Addison—"can wield a lot of influence for us, in a decidedly underground way. Do you know Addison? Real

estate. He has just got his hands on some suburban property that a carline would boom. He'll let the right people into it—*Verbum sap.*”

“How simple,” said Chan feelingly. “I thought you were going to let me do something for you here?”

“I am. You've got to be my eyes and ears, my *ame damnée*. We're lunching with Burrage to-morrow. We shall have to have a company reorganisation. I expect to be here at least a month.”

“Going to reorganise? Why not a separate company?”

“I never liked that way of doing things, dividing interests,” said Whittemore decidedly. “It gives too good an opportunity for wrecking the business, playing one end against the other. We just want a reorganisation, and a blanket charter. Geers will attend to our new incorporation papers. We shall have a busy week.”

They did have a busy week, and Chan saw very little of Lesley. She was out several evenings, though Mrs. Cranston was not. The rest of the time he found himself occupied. He and Ross renewed old companionship. For a few years after Chan left college they had been no more than young men together; friendship held them as close as blood. Chan wanted to hear all the trifling news of home—so much of home as he had had since he was ten. He had not been gone a year, but distance aided time. His decision to remain made Montreal and Quebec seem definitely of the past. However that, they shattered the fable that men do not gossip, and Chan got an earful. Already some of the pretty girls he had admired were married, others engaged; one indeed was dead; some of his men friends had scattered, others planned a near hegira. It seemed strange, for he had shared Lesley's late delusion, that while he stood still nothing else could be

going forward. But Whittemore saw that he had not stood still.

"Do you really like it?" he asked, watching Chan closely. They had got a few hours to themselves, and had chosen to go motoring, circling the town as they returned. Indian Summer enwrapped them, though snow had fallen a week before, a little flirtatious storm. The endless prairie wind had forgotten to blow for an hour of mid-afternoon.

"Yes, I think I do," said Chan. "It's ugly enough"—he looked at the city sprawling in all its dusty nakedness before them; the square boxes of houses, flimsy, hasty, unapologetic; the treeless streets; the crassly utilitarian business section, still showing shops with false wooden fronts masquerading as two stories when they were but one, unabashed beside one or two square grey stone office buildings; the plucked looking square that courtesy dubbed a park—and the new residential section, nearest them, all jigsaw horrors and imitation bungalows climbing the hill they were about to descend. "Oh, it's a camp," said Chan again thoughtfully. "All this will go some day, every stick of it." He included the bungalows and layer-cake dwellings of the newly rich and great. "I suppose the first generation never really builds, does it? It only takes possession and runs up its flag. But the mere growth is rather stimulating. It's alive. And, begging Schopenhauer's pardon, that's the ultimate good."

"I thought it would get you," said Whittemore. "Don't let it go to your head." Chan looked at him, and mounted a warmer tan. Whittemore smiled. "Nothing personal. But you know most people don't know the difference between being busy and accomplishing something."

"Touché," said Chan. "I have been feeling like a man of affairs. Oh, very important! Hope you'll

come around every once in a while and restore my sense of proportion." They were well within the town by now. Whittemore waved his hand at a house they passed, a big blind ugly grey-stone pile with large grounds and glistening greenhouses that looked incurably commercial. Nothing of it fitted the surroundings; it might have been created by an earthquake, a tidy earthquake.

"Just look at that," said Ross gravely, "and remember your own phrase about the ultimate good, when you feel yourself slipping. But I shan't be far away. As a matter of fact, I think I'll buy the Chatfield ranch."

Chan was surprised and delighted. They talked about nothing else for a time—not even what Ross might do with the ranch when he got it. It would be a good, if slow, investment, however; and Ross knew that. The earth's surface is large, but not inexhaustible; not even that part of it which was once a kingdom with an absentee king—Prince Rupert's Land.

Chan did feel important, and reasonably content. But he could laugh at himself, so all was not lost.

The new company's papers were drawn in record time—the Belle Claire Power and Lighting Co. The old one had been the Belle Claire Lighting and Power Co.! Geers announced that it might be his last private task. His partner would take over his business shortly, and he would plunge into the fray for a seat in the Assembly. His friends understood that would be merely to keep his hand in until the next Dominion election, when he meant to be sent to Ottawa.

Then both Geers and Whittemore went with their charter to Edmonton to see it safely through—a mere precaution—and Chan, with a breathing space, determined to find Lesley if he had to camp on her doorstep all night.

It was simpler than that, though she was late again. Watching from his window, since he felt decidedly disinclined to wait for her in Mrs. Cranston's sitting-room, he saw her coming in about eight, walking rather wearily but with her head high. He caught her in the hall, and she answered the bell with her hat in her hand.

"I'm so glad to see you," she said, and stopped there, unexpectedly, stepping back from him. She had an air of having forgotten something painful.

"May I come in?" he asked humbly.

"Don't be stupid," she said severely, her self-possession recovered. "Come right in—come into the kitchen, if you like. I want some bread and cheese or something. I've only had a ham sandwich this evening."

"Why this asceticism?" he enquired, following her through the house to the pantry.

"It isn't asceticism," she said, with an air of patience, investigating the breadbox. "Thank heaven, here's a currant bun! It's ambition."

"The bun?"

"No—it—me, everything. Mahomet couldn't go to the mountain, she's making a molehill of her own. You might have displayed some curiosity, and telephoned."

"I will, if you'll tell me where to."

She glared at him, with a mouthful of bun impeding utterance.

"Don't you want to hear?"

"I do, I do. Lesley, I've called three times."

"Have you?" she asked, looking unnecessarily surprised, Chan thought. "Amy didn't tell me—— Well, I'm beginning to be a journalist. We seem to be short-handed just now, and Mr. Cresswell is trying me out. I stay after business hours, and learn about clipping

time copy, and take telephone items about Mrs. Varney's next tea and the postponement of the council meeting, and—and——"

"And?"

"Swear you'll never tell."

"I swear."

"To-day I started a weekly department, or whatever you call it. Cresswell said if I could make him laugh, maybe I could do the same for the public; and tomorrow, if you look, you'll find me. 'Mary Jane's Musings,' that's me. People will think it's syndicate stuff, and you must never tell them any different, for I want to say what I feel like. Only I'm afraid I may have to run a woman's page if I'm any good, and if I'm not I'll be fired!"

"Horrible alternative! But, you know, I'm glad. Only, wouldn't you rather go——"

"I can't," she said briefly, and like another well conducted lady, went on cutting bread and butter.

Chan let his opportunity go by. He would not get that money for at least another week.

"What have you been doing?" she asked.

"I'll tell you all about it if you have a week to spare," he said. "Bring your food out where we can sit down—I want to read a leaflet to you."

"Very well," she said, inserting a slice of ham in a sandwich and leading him back to the living-room. "But I haven't a week to spare to-night. I've got to go——"

"Hello, Chan." Amy Cranston interrupted, coming from the narrow hall. "I didn't hear you people come in. I was so dull; I'm glad you've come." She sat down with a definite air of possession that nettled Lesley insensibly. But it was her own sittingroom, certainly. Evidently she had taken time to dress, in a pink taffeta that became her excellently by lamplight,

and with only Lesley's shabby serge to compete. She had heavy, coarse black hair, lustrous and manageable, which seemed to go well with the quantities of rice powder she loved to use; they, and her warm, shallow eyes were all Oriental, but her thinness saved her from sheer vulgarity. She was common, not vulgar; and she was pretty. Lesley needed art; but Amy Cranston was exactly suited by artifice.

Lesley consumed her sandwich in silence, with a feeling akin to that evoked by the presence of an elusive mosquito. It was not so much that she objected to the presence of a third, as——

Well, she wasn't interested in Amy's new buckled shoes, nor in what Amy had had for lunch, nor in what Bill had said to Amy when he was courting her—nor in anything that was Amy's. Amy was a fool! Lesley knew herself to be growing perceptibly irritable of late. She felt the strain of guarding her thoughts and looks toward Chan; she had not yet fitted her neck to the yoke of constraint. Their companionable summer had not prepared her for this. . . . How could he possibly preserve that absorbed air with Amy? What had he been going to tell her? As for what she had been about to say herself, what she had got to do, she had no intention of completing the sentence for Amy's enlightenment. She rose suddenly.

"Excuse me a few minutes," she said. "I must wash my hands. Proofs are the dirtiest things in the world."

CHAPTER XI

THE staircase was double halfway ; that is, there was a front and back stair, one from the hall, the other from the kitchen, meeting on a tiny landing halfway up the first floor, with a door between, and the stair turned back then in the cramped hall to get to the upper floor. This gave direct passage from the hall to the kitchen, and yet saved room for the pantry. Lesley took her hat and coat from the hall rack, mounted to the landing, and went through to the kitchen, and so out of the kitchen door. She had an appointment to keep, at the little bridge over the powerhouse dam. It was that she had meant to tell Chan, perhaps out of a latent sense of mischief, to rouse the possessive and conventional male in him ; but she would not tell Amy. It sounded very like a tryst, but it was rather payment of an obligation.

The evening was cool, but not cold ; and it was not yet dark. There is a long twilight in such Northern latitudes, a lovely crystal twilight when the air seems to hold in solution the last rays of the departed sun. Lesley, walking rapidly, should have enjoyed it, but she was tired, and she had a distinct reminiscent sensation of having been rubbed the wrong way, like a cat ; or, perhaps, still feline, the sense of having been crowded from her own place on the hearthrug. She had almost forgotten why she was going to the bridge when she reached it, and Jack Addison's figure resolved out of the shadow of the powerhouse.

"You came?" he said, holding out his hand.

"Do you think so?" she enquired. "Well, I never will again, so make the most of it, Patrick Henry." Her irritation translated itself into flippancy.

"But why won't you?" he demanded aggrievedly. "Why can't you speak to me sometimes, or come out for a ride in my car, or——"

"Or jump into the river, or do anything equally silly," she retorted decisively. "Your car breaks down, for one thing. No, I won't—I won't—I won't. Now what was it you wanted to see me for so specially?"

"I'll tell you when you answer me," he said, his voice both pleading and angry. "Don't you trust me?"

"Do you mean, am I afraid of you?" she asked with brutal lucidity, smiling candidly into his eyes. "No, I am not. In fact, I think you are quite agreeable, and perfectly honourable, and all that sort of thing—but the least bit selfish and stupid. You forget this town is very, very small, and that you're not in a position to be a squire of dames without people talking, and that I haven't got any one to take my part if they do. Perhaps I wouldn't mind if I really wanted to do this; but I don't; I dislike being—underhanded, and gossip makes me furious. Now when I feel like that, do you think it's quite fair to take advantage of my one silly little indiscretion to worry me and put me in a corner and—and make me say things like this? I didn't *want* to hurt your feelings," she ended apologetically, because his shamed face smote her.

"I know I'm a brute," he said awkwardly, with a flush under his olive skin.

"Oh, please, don't let's be tragic," she begged gaily. "You aren't; you just didn't realise. I'm afraid you take things awfully seriously; and you know life's just one big joke."

"I do take things seriously, Lesley," he said, turning toward her impulsively. "I want to warn you of that.

I'm a kind of a hotheaded fool, I suppose. . . . And you aren't going away at all, now!"

"I suppose not," she sighed, dismissing a passing wonder why she should be warned of his seriousness. "Was that what you wanted to ask me?"

"No; I wanted to ask if you care to make some money."

"Money? Why, of course; who doesn't? But I never did, except by working for it. How do you mean?"

"Give me your word you'll not repeat this."

"I never tell anything," she said with mild impatience.

"Well, here's the chance of your lifetime. Look up there," he waved his hand across the river, to the heights just above them. "D'you know who owns that land? I do—at least, I control it. It's worth fifty dollars an acre now, but eighteen months from now it'll be worth that much for a twenty-five foot lot. I'm running a syndicate that's just bought it, and a lot more on the other side of town. And—this is what you're to keep to yourself—by spring a street railway will have commenced to build across the river. Do you want to put in a little money and get it back ten times over in a couple of years? If you do, I'll be responsible for it."

"So—there is going to be a street car line?" she mused. Why had no word of it been printed?

"You've heard of it?" he challenged.

"No, I hadn't. How should I?"

"I thought maybe Herrick had told you."

"Chan Herrick? Does he know it?"

"He should. His uncle's the one who will build it. And he didn't tell you?"

"Why should he? He doesn't tell me everything,"

"Do you like him?" asked Addison, suddenly com-

ing closer to her side, peering into her face in the dimming light. She, leaning on the rail, looking tranquilly down at the foaming race. "You see a lot of him."

"He lives next door," Lesley reminded him coolly. "Of course I see him. I left him at the house to-night, to come and meet you."

"Did you?" Addison laid his hand on hers.

"Don't do that," she said placidly. He moved away again, and still she did not even look at him. Yet she might have learned something from his face then had she taken that small trouble.

"Well, will you?" he asked, biting his lip nervously.

"Will I? oh, invest. I was thinking. I shan't know for a few days if I can or not. It depends on how well we sell our beef. You know I have to think of my mother, and I have hardly any money. But if my brother makes enough to take care of her for the winter, I will give you what I have. I *would* like to make some money." Hope flared up. It would be too late for college, but not for the subsequent venture of her fortune in the great market places of the East. "It would mean a lot to me," she said wistfully.

"Would it? You know I'd like to do something for you." As always, she had moulded him to her mood, tamed his blood and curbed his reckless spirit. It was as if she had put her cool strong hands on his hot face. They were silent; she had not troubled to answer. Night was coming down, a faint breeze whispered among the dry willows on the little island across the bridge. Not a soul had come near them, for no one lived on the island nor was there a continuation of the bridge to the further shore. In summer, some used it for a pleasance to walk in, but no one walked so far this night. Lesley had expected that when she named it for a meeting place. The rush of the water

over the dam sounded like the wings of darkness swooping on the waiting earth.

"I must go in," she said at last. "And I should like to go home alone from the gate of the powerhouse yard; do you mind?"

"If you like," he said, discontented but subdued. There were many other things he had meant to say to her, but she had defeated them unspoken. His rebellion would come afterward, when he was alone, and could not reach her. They picked their way among piles of lumber, their steps falling deadened on the sawdust and bark of the enclosure, which was all pungent and fresh with the odour of cut pine. She kept a little ahead of him, but turned at the gate, as she had the night of the motor ride.

"How is your mother?" he asked unexpectedly, merely to detain her for another moment.

"Doing well—and she sent regards to you. I'll tell her you asked."

"Do. Did she go to Pasadena?"

"Yes—well, it's very close to Pasadena." She gave him the address. "It's quieter and cheaper out there. She says she feels well enough to come back already, but she mustn't till spring. It was good of you to send those flowers to the train. My mother is awfully nice, you know," she laughed, "and I'm sorry you didn't meet her. Now, good-night."

"Lesley——" he began desperately, but she drew her hand from his with a jerk and repeated loudly: "Good-night."

So that was over. She drew a deep breath of relief as she hastened away without looking back. She had done just exactly what she had planned to do; put a wet blanket on him and weighted it down, carefully extracted all the intriguing flavour from the circumstances of their meeting and made it seem

cheap and sordid and sneaking. She had made him feel like a cad, and hoped righteously that it might do him good. She had labelled the affair definitely as silly instead of romantic, and pinned him solidly to the matter of fact.

Why had she wanted to do that? Such a short time back, one half of her had really ached to go on, to be silly if necessary, and careless of consequences, to seize whatever glamour and excitement he promised. Aside from liking Jack Addison in a casual way, she had, in fine, wanted to do something she shouldn't, because she was so deadly tired of doing everything she should. Eve's daughter was looking at the apple. It was, anyway, such a little apple, and only one bite . . .

But it was all changed now; she was changed. Why?

Under cover of the dark, she began to run, her heart racing, the blood singing in her veins, a nymph pursued. But the piping of Pan was only to her inner ear, an echo of memory. She fled from her own thoughts, from the recollection of what had caused this reaction. Chan had kissed her. . . . Other men—there were no other men now. By and bye she slowed again to a sedate pace, grappled with herself, looking at the calm stars, brilliant and white as diamonds. The northern stars are not the lights of romance, they are too far and cool; they are the mariner's stars, the astronomer's galaxies. She felt immensely insignificant, gazing at them, too small to be hurt, or to cry out.

The gate was open, as she must have left it. She went across the short grass of the front yard, around by the side of the house to the rear door, as she had come. Passing the living-room window, she wondered if Chan had gone away, if he or Amy had

looked for her or missed her, and she stooped, involuntarily, and peeped under the blind. As far as she had a home for the nonce, this was her home; one may not look into a stranger's window, but surely into one's own . . .

Sometimes it is better not to look into one's own, either.

Quite evidently neither Chan nor Amy had missed her; they were sitting on the green plush sofa by the dying fire. . . .

Lesley did not deliberately watch them; she had not the slightest wish to. She felt sick, to tell the truth, horribly, vulgarly sick, and stood straight, with her hands on her contracted throat. If she had desired to look again, there was still no need, for the picture burnt under her eyelids; Amy's lax figure and clinging arms, and the look in Chan's eyes; his satisfied mouth. And that indescribable air of use, of past intimacy. . . .

There are three sides to desire, and a kind of geometrical rule of progression governs the novice in exploring the terra incognita. The first vista yields wonder, a delicious fear, and has no knowledge of things earthy. A first kiss is an end in itself. It is a region of pure ether. Love itself cannot breathe there long, wanting some heavier constituent, some alloy. But the base of the triangle rests very firmly on earth itself, and the searcher comes to that with a soul-toppling shock. Earth is clean or base according to its use. Simple animal passion has a cleanliness of its own in elemental natures, without the shame of sophistication. But it is a terrible thing for that romantic vagrant we call our youth to confront, and some do not survive whole the knowledge of it. They spurn it, or wallow in it, but do not have sense enough to use it to plant the flowers of life

in. And on the third side there is an impartial apprehension of the whole matter, which makes the everlasting courtship of the perpetually renewed race a vast and Rabelaisian comedy. It is purely humorous; it is the gross and wholesome jest from which nine-tenths of our laughter springs. In the end all three impressions are fused; and passion and wonder and mirth are one. Every lover finds in the beloved the most marvellous, the most exquisitely amusing, and the most hotly desired object in creation.

All this Lesley might have heard without being helped at all. She had to see, and she was seeing. The earth rocked beneath her feet and the stars went out, and nothing remained but that one hideous fact. She was left alone in a wide universe with it; she was dragged into complicity by virtue of what she had felt for Chan; Amy Cranston occupied the sanctuary of her soul with her very self, and pawed with her little, greedy, curious hands over the idol of her secret shrine.

Just how long she stood by the window she never knew afterward; it was probably no more than two or three minutes. She did not want to go into the house at all while it held Amy and Chan, but she did go in because there was no place else to go. The human soul quite as much as the human body has kept man from housing like the ants; it demands a place of its very own for its moments of highest happiness and greatest desolation. Lesley suffered now the pang of the homeless; but her room served for a makeshift. Once in it, she found to her astonishment that she had taken off her shoes in order to get upstairs quietly, and this struck her as so ridiculous she was obliged to smother an incipient hysteria with a pillow. Then she grew very quiet, as one is in a house of the dead. With the instinct

of misery for adding to its burden, she sat rigidly on a very uncomfortable straight-backed kitchen chair and stared at a beef-extract calendar girl on the wall, who simpered. Later, she hated the light, and turned it out and lay face downward on the bed, catching cold from the open window. And then she was aware that Amy Cranston was calling to her. It seemed a purposeful insult. She would not answer. Then the most powerful of civilised emotions, the desire to keep up an appearance, not to betray herself, returned to her. She went to the door. Mrs. Cranston was in the hall below.

"I have a frightful headache," said Lesley. If her voice was hoarse, the other two did not notice it. Chan was still in the living-room, but he evidently heard her, and came out. "I am going to bed," added Lesley. "Good-night—oh, it's nothing, really!" She closed her door on their questions.

Chan looked at Amy quickly. He found nothing in her face but an almost innocent relief at having the rest of the evening clear before her. She went back to the fire, and he followed, but did not sit down. He thought he was uncomfortable because Lesley was ill, never having felt it necessary to deny to himself that he liked Lesley. The guilty suspicion that was trying to make its way to the light in his mind seemed preposterous. How much could one upstairs hear of what went on below? He could not hear his landlady at all, unless she shrieked, or upset the furniture. It couldn't be . . .

It is natural to have a reaction against anything that causes us discomfort. Just for the moment Amy Cranston's open lure failed to draw. After all, he had come to see Lesley, and if she couldn't be seen—It was certainly odd of her—

"I think I must go," he said.

"Oh, no!" said Amy, and put up her face askingly. He was so much taller than she that when she put her arms about his neck she seemed to be dragging him down. The flavour of a clandestine kiss when its very circumstances enforce it is curious, and not altogether sweet. Chan was not bitten by remorse, not yet, but the reaction was indubitable. It carried him home, despite Amy's clinging arms. And he wondered how he should see Lesley without running into those arms again.

He managed it easily enough, of course, by watching from a window. She stopped at his hail, her hand on the gate, the very next evening, and her manner to him was a triumph of histrionics. He felt like a sensitised plate, approaching her, but the plate remained blank.

"Are you better?" he asked.

"My headache is gone, and I have a violent cold," she croaked. "Is that to be better?" There was no acting about the cold. Tears make an excellent preparation for influenza.

"Are you going to be in later?"

"I don't know. And I suppose I ought to retire with mustard plasters and hot water bottles."

"I have something—rather important, to tell you," he said. "Can't I come to-morrow night?"

"If I'm alive, I suppose so," she said, and even smiled. It was almost equally pleasant and painful to have him entreat her. She had a sense of justice, at all times, but it was quick work to have brought herself in twenty-four hours to acknowledge that, after all, he owed her nothing. She had no right to require of him more than of any other man, and she did not consider herself a censor of morals for all the men she knew. She had no standing even in her own eyes.

CHAPTER XII

AS it happened, he did not see her again for a week. The next morning brought a telegram from Whittemore, asking him to go to Edmonton for a day or so. He thought it must be important business, and went without question. It was not; the charter had already been put through all essential preliminaries, favourably reported out of committee, and was assured. Whittemore had merely been discovered by the wife of the Premier, who was a one-time schoolmate of his dead sister. She instantly took on herself the status of an old friend, asked him a million polite questions, discovered he possessed a nephew, and demanded the instant production of the nephew to grace a ball she was giving. It made her feel important to have young men summoned specially from remote corners of the earth to decorate her ballroom. And, as she remembered it, Laura Herrick—Laura Whittemore—had been her very dearest friend. She must have been, since Whittemore was so rich and so presentable. Society is run on the Berkeleian theory, that everything exists only in the imagination. What could be more comfortable? Everything in this sense includes everything but money. There is something so grossly material about money as to resist the strongest doses of philosophy.

She was, in any event, a quite agreeable woman, and Chan did not mind, except that he had not brought evening wear and had to wire for it. He spent a

very pleasant week investigating the social microcosm of the capital city, with Ross as commentator.

Lesley's week was not so pleasant, but it passed. One got used, she found, to a dull ache in one's heart, to sickness of life while life did not care if one sickened of it or not. She learned the meaning of the *tedium vitæ*. Even the sight of Amy Cranston did not exactly hurt. It astonished her, rather; roused a curiosity she could not answer. What had Chan found in that? It was not surprising Amy had married; she suited her husband's ideals exactly—so far as he would ever know. But Chan——

Later, she thought, she would probably leave Mrs. Cranston's. The situation was painful, and might grow impossible.

The lack of freedom, which was a simple lack of means, to go from a place that irked her, roused her to action with regard to Addison's offer. Fortunately, Dick wrote that their beef had sold well. Lesley took all the money she had, only about two hundred dollars, and sent it by messenger to Addison. The fervour of the hope that accompanied it was almost a prayer. She had to have something to live for. Addison wrote back with a matching fervour, and suggested talking the matter over with her. She replied that he was to use full discretion, and that was all there was to say. She had to write that same injunction six times before it appeared to penetrate to his understanding. It became humorous at last; she almost shouted over his final letter. But the idea of seeing Addison nauseated her, in the same manner as she had sickened over another sight. The events of that evening had somehow linked themselves together. Herself and Jack—Chan and Amy—they had been on the same business. Her understanding leered at her innocence. It was all ugly, detestable. If she had

not known before, she had been a fool. If she had—— She was jealous, of course, and the taste of it got into everything; poor romance dared not show its smirched and self-conscious head. A fierce virginity—a kind of Iron Virgin—possessed her.

So she worked as hard as possible, to keep her mind off it. Cresswell encouraged her with enthusiasm. He had a very inadequate staff, and Lesley was useful. And she found in him the only tolerable companionship within reach. There is a kind of disillusionment, the disillusion of the spectator who always watches the play from behind the scenes, common to newspaper writers, and to hardly any other class of men. They develop a genial and immensely tolerant and rather relishing cynicism. It is also true that the freshly disillusioned always demand more of the same bitter medicine, so Lesley came to Cresswell. Cresswell had known a larger sphere of action than he now adorned—if one could speak of adornment in connection with Cresswell—he was on the downgrade, but he had once been at the top. He had a Mark Twain shock of brindle hair, a loose-jointed frame to match, mild blue eyes, and a sulphurous vocabulary, for which he used to beg Lesley's pardon *before* unloosing it.

She stayed in the office sometimes in the evenings, struggling with Mary Jane's contributions to the world's thought, and being educated journalistically by Cresswell, who would have fallen in love with her if he had not been fifty and possessed a real sense of humour. He told her Mary Jane was a success already, after one issue—an inconsiderable lie when added to Cresswell's past account. But he knew a newspaper's needs, and he knew timely and popular stuff when he saw it. There was salt in Lesley's writing, just enough. It would be a suc-

cess, as far as success goes in such limitations. He was already thinking of demanding Lesley's full time from the business office, though he did not tell her so. He would have to wait until some one dropped off the staff. He did not want to discharge one of his men; he liked them all, and it was a long way to the next camp.

Late in the week they were in the newsroom alone, when a boy brought in a batch of telegraph flimsy. Cresswell was his own telegraph editor, as he was everything else when need arose. Lesley, resting her head, which felt entirely empty, on her typewriter, listened to the rustle of the sheets of thin paper and waited for him to ask her to re-type or paste up some of it for him. He would. But he only grunted softly to himself and muttered something she could not catch.

"I guess that's the joker," he said finally, speaking to the world at large.

"What?"

"Nothing, my chee-ild. Only the Belle Claire is getting a new charter that covers everything from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter—yeh, they can start a soda fountain or dig for oil or run a matrimonial bureau if they want to—and I guess I know why the Great Mogul told me to let him see all the Edmonton stuff before it went in."

"Don't talk Choctaw. You annoy me," said Lesley, who had no respect whatever for his grey hairs. She was intensely feminine, and a man was a man. It should be added that he liked the treatment.

"Well, then," he remarked, "if you *must* know, and always remembering that I'll fire you if you repeat my girlish confidences, we're going to have a street railway, whether we like it or not. I was just wondering if our esteemed morning contemporary will get on to

the joker in this private bill, granting a blanket charter to the Belle Claire Company?"

"Why is it a joker?" asked Lesley. "Is there anything queer about it? Why not a street railway?"

"As the March hare said, why not? No, there's nothing queer about it yet. I didn't know they were ready to go ahead, that's all. Best thing they can do, though, is to rush it. Costs less all around . . ."

"But what is the mystery about it?"

"Business is very mysterious. So is a City Council. Can you think of anything more mysterious than Alderman Curtin? Why is he?" He liked to tease her, but she was so insistent that he finally told her as much as he knew, which, including surmise, was sufficiently extensive. In fact, he knew pretty well all, only not being one of the inner ring and having no personal stake in the matter, he only heard things after their accomplishment. He had not known the reorganisation charter was on the stocks; he only knew there was to be one. He had not known of Addison's syndicate until it was formed, but he knew who was in it, and why. Lesley listened with flattering attention, and ungratefully forgot to give him any confidence in return.

She wondered what was her own responsibility, her two hundred dollars' worth, in a matter that was evidently going to include bribery. But business is mostly like that; she had seen something of business. The question was academic with her; conscience was gnawing elsewhere. She had never read Proudhon, and when Cresswell unconsciously resolved her difficulty in reconciling current business with any system of ethics by quoting:

"'All property is theft,'" she yielded the point of obscurity, and merely remarked:

"I suppose so." Then she put on her hat and went

home drearily. Chan had sent her a note explaining his absence, and there was not even the doubtful pleasure of his company to look forward to.

But he returned in due course. And Providence ordained that Mrs. Cranston should again go out for the evening.

Lesley's constraint had worn off; she had adjusted herself to all the unspoken things between them. But in so doing she had lost something of her sparkling and natural manner toward him. He thought she still looked ill; she was merely tired. There was an edge on her speech; he put it down to the wearing effect of disappointment.

He was quite right and entirely wrong. He thought he could remove the disappointment by a few words—if he could for once choose them carefully enough. He was woefully mistaken. But he had that money in hand at last.

"You aren't looking well," he began unpropitiously. Nothing is more maddening to a woman.

"I am perfectly well," she said. "I am always perfectly well."

"Please don't be cross!" He was remarkably meek.

"Oh, heavens! can't I even be cross? Can't I do one single thing—I beg your pardon. I don't know what's the matter with me. It must be the wind, or something. Doesn't it get on your nerves? Doesn't this whole town get on your nerves? How can you possibly live here? Let me be cross, Chan." She drooped into pathos, and was enraged at herself for doing so. She feared she would whimper presently.

"I know it's tough on you," he said soothingly. "And that's what I wanted to speak to you about. About your going away——"

"But I'm not going away," she said violently.

"Yes, you can if you want to," he insisted. "If you'll do me a favour, and let me help you——"

"How?" Of course she knew perfectly there was only one way. But she had never thought of getting anything from Chan; she was surprised. It could never have been entirely agreeable. Now it was more, it was impossible. If she could only make it impossible for him to speak. . . . He could not misread her hostile glance, but he had to go on.

"I have some money I don't need——" he began awkwardly.

"Then you're luckier than I am," said Lesley, and her voice broke despite herself. "But that has nothing to do with me."

"Lesley! Please let me——"

"Nothing at all," she said stonily. And then, to her furious dismay, she felt a large tear roll down her cheek. "Don't talk about it, I tell you," she said imperiously, and dived for her handkerchief. The movement sent her into his arms; he was not inexperienced, and she could not see. Well, she had wept once before, and habit is easily formed. He thought he knew what to do. And, as one of the innumerable injustices of finite affairs, he was as innocent toward her as the first time. Her courage, her wit, her abominably hard luck appealed to him on their own merits, not as bait for anything else. Certainly he was fair to her; there was that to be said for him. But she gave him no chance to say it. They were equally taken by surprise, for he got his kiss, and paid for it. She slapped him with a promptitude and ferocity that very literally staggered him. The strength he had noted when she carried Eileen Conway up the walk had by no means departed from her.

Then they found themselves on their feet, facing each other, in a whirl of emotions that left them

wordless. Chan had been a bit of an amateur athlete, and he wondered in a dazed manner whether he had heard a bell ring for time or if it was only a natural singing in his head. Mixed with that he could find a grain of admiration for Lesley; her rage was truly royal. Her long eyes had a greenish flame in them, like the phosphorescence in the eye of a roused animal; the iris had almost disappeared. She was poised like Victory, as if she would swoop and strike again. Then she rushed past him, and he heard her flying up the stairs, and still he stood there, one hand pressed gingerly to his ear.

He was relieved to find he still possessed that ear. He pivoted slowly on his heel, looking speculatively at the door where she had disappeared, sorting out his feelings. It was necessary to know whether he felt apologetic or furious. He felt both, but the outcome was that he followed her quietly upstairs. Standing outside her door, the anger disappeared. She was crying, with little choky, hiccupping sounds, like a child that has been locked in a dark closet. And, indeed, it was so she felt. She had never harmed any one, and she had been humiliated to the last degree her girlish imagination could compass. To get the crumbs from Amy Cranston's table . . .

Without knocking, he opened the door firmly and marched over to where she lay crumpled upon the bed. She sat up, her eyes almost dry, her face very white, her lips parted as if she could not get enough air.

"Please go away," she said. "This is my room. And I am not in the least sorry I——"

"Well, I am," he remarked slowly, his sense of humour penetrating to the surface. "But you did a good job, so you needn't be. I'll go in a minute, but I want to apologise first. I meant well, Lesley.

I'm frightfully sorry." Even with the mark of her hand flaming on his cheek, he was sincere and dignified. He had saved himself somehow, in this deplorable affair; and he was insisting she should do the same for herself. A wave of liking, the old liking that had been scorched by a later flame, surged up in her. The cold light of reason beat into her disordered brain, ranging her alongside him, a worse culprit than he. She had struck him because . . . because she loved him! And he had never asked her to.

There was no possibility of sentiment left in the situation, at least. She reinforced her pride to break it the more thoroughly; she humbled herself for the sake of her pride, and held on to nothing but the truth.

"I—apologise, too," she said, "even if I'm not sorry!"

In a world of unreason there is nothing so humorous as the truth. They laughed, they had to laugh. It was perhaps fortunate for Lesley that no man ever asks a woman: "Why did you do that?" That is her question. His is: "Why won't you do this?" And it was not a time for that particular query. Moreover, they were both exceedingly thankful to avoid explanations, and like sensible people they did so. Also, Chan never again referred to his offer of help. He had had auricular evidence that it was not wanted.

CHAPTER XIII

THE election was called for December. It might have been earlier, for public confidence was badly shaken and the Crown Lands scandal increased daily, but the Assembly prolonged its sittings to get through a gerrymander bill giving the thinly settled northern part of the province a highly disproportionate representation. The North was a sure stronghold of Liberalism, by reason of promises of development through public works, badly needed, some already under way, others definitely pledged. With the Opposition clamouring of extravagance and promising economy, the North would take no chances. Whittemore was glad of the extra time and the general interest in purely political affairs to get his new charter ratified, which was done. He incidentally became very much persona grata at Edmonton. With business out of the way, he wished the election over, so he might proceed to obtain a much more vital requisite than the charter, the city franchise for a car line. As it would not do to have the negotiations become embroiled in the political turmoil, that was delayed.

The fight was hot; several scandals developed far beyond what Geers, in his talk with Herrick, had anticipated. To the surprise of both parties, the Government seemed, judging by rumour and straw votes, to be in some actual danger. Some of the Liberals had possibly foreseen it when urging Geers to stand; his personal popularity had guaranteed his election. They did not wish to risk a weaker

man, since Folsom had succeeded to Geers' old seat on a Conservative ticket. They wanted his strength if only for a year or two; it was thoroughly understood that he would resign once more and stand for the Dominion House when a national dissolution occurred. Who would be his understudy in that emergency it was not yet worth while to decide, although both parties were decidedly short of good material for public men. It is a notable fact that men whom their associates recognise as able are loth to hold any offices but the highest; they will vote for a man they would hardly employ in their private business, and secretly consider their own abilities too large to be wasted in a merely useful and inconspicuous legislative or administrative place. It is sheer vanity; and they pay the price for it in a stupid maladministration of local affairs.

"In a few more years," said Geers to Whittemore, "we could put your nephew in. He's getting into training faster than any one I ever saw. But this is the country for young men." Geers had the politician's penchant for *cliches*; it made him a trifle tedious in private conversation. "By the way," he went on, "you've not mentioned your street-car system lately. I am still interested, you know." His part had been finished when the charter went through, which was purely legitimate business. Whittemore, for excellent reasons, did not want him employed in the civic negotiations.

"I've sidetracked it till the election is over," said Whittemore truthfully.

"I thought you anticipated opposition," said Geers. "In fact, I was surprised myself when none of the newspapers slashed it. I thought the *Call* would, merely as a matter of general policy. They're all for public ownership; and still crying for Govern-

ment grain elevators. I don't believe in it myself; I think private enterprise is the life of a nation," he concluded sententiously.

"I don't know how our charter did get by," said Whittemore. He had thought of that point before. If it was luck, he hoped his luck might hold. Working underground, Burrage and Addison had secured secret promises of support from a group of very influential aldermen. The owner of the *Recorder* guaranteed them the mayor, who owed his election largely to that newspaper. It seemed too easy. However, to worry because there was nothing to worry about seemed the height of the ridiculous. He dismissed the idea, and went up to Banff to meet an old friend who was passing through. And he instructed Burrage to confer with Chan about anything that might develop.

Once in Banff, he proceeded to develop an active case of grippe that had been germinating for several days previously. He wired Chan that it was only a slight cold, but that he would stay over for a week of the sulphur baths. Whereupon, of course, things happened.

Chan was in the Belle Claire office that particular afternoon. He had chosen to take his drudgery seriously, and did not use his uncle's influence to cover laziness. Besides, he wanted a thorough knowledge of costs and charges to take over to the street railway office when the time came. He had put some money—the money Lesley scorned, with some addition—into Addison's suburban development company, and hoped that might lift him out of routine work some day; but chiefly he looked forward to filling adequately the place he knew Whittemore would insist on his having in the new concern. It was nepotism, but he meant to deserve it. There would

be room for an enterprising young man, much more than in the present cut-and-dried routine work.

Answering an urgent summons, Chan hastened uptown to Addison's rooms. There he found Burrage, still clinging to the telephone, listening, and for the most part holding his hand over the receiver so that he might swear reflectively and without disturbing whoever was at the other end of the line. Addison let Chan in, and shot the bolt behind him. They gave each other one appraising glance, and Chan perceived with surprise a latent hostility in Addison's eyes. But they shook hands. Burrage looked up and nodded.

"Just a minute," he said, and then to the telephone: "All right; yes, I'll be here till it's over." And again to Herrick: "Can you get hold of Whittemore quick, damn quick?"

"He's in Banff. I can 'phone or wire. Why?"

"Because some one's stolen a march on us. The city council is in session now—and it's considering a bid for a street-car franchise from a Winnipeg man. I don't know who he is, nor whom he represents, but I'll find out. There isn't another 'phone here, and I need this one. Go up to the Alberta Hotel and put in a call for Whittemore. We'll wait here for you." Chan could take orders. He went to the hotel and stood for fifteen stuffy minutes in a telephone booth and then went back in great haste.

"Ross is sick," he announced. "Can't answer a 'phone call. But unless he's dead, he'll want to hear about this. No, it's only the grippe, I understand. I think I can just get the afternoon train. Good-bye!"

Burrage resumed his lurid soliloquy alone, for Chan was on his way to the station, and Addison had gone out to scout for news.

Oddly enough, Chan had not been to Banff before. It is a lonely place, unless one has personal friends stopping there; for there are no amusements, except riding, eating, and splashing in the tepid and unexciting tanks of sulphur spring water. But the mountain scenery is majestic, the eating excellent, and—there is no place else to go. Alberta flocks there in its leisure time.

Chan was nervous with apprehension over Ross by the time he stepped off the train into the station 'bus, to be driven along the curving road between the pines to the sanatorium. The town had the soulless look of a summer resort when winter clutches it; all the hotels but the sanatorium were closed; and the dark-green river flowed between banks of solid white. Here was real winter. It was the thin, electric air and the tension of the unaccustomed altitude that wrought on Chan's nerves most; but he did not realise that, and felt as if he should presently burst through the roof of the 'bus if it did not reach its destination. But it did presently, and he rushed up to Ross's room on the heels of the nurse who promised to see if he might be admitted.

"Hello, Chan!" said his uncle huskily, looking very distinguished and calm in a black camel's-hair burnous and a reclining chair. The air also keyed him up too much to stay in bed all day, even when he was ill. They let him have his way because he always did get his way, in a manner so courteous that he always seemed to be yielding. "Why didn't you give the nurse your message? Not but what I'm glad to see you."

"It was too long and complicated; it would have bored her," said Chan, smiling at the nurse in question. She smiled back, and rustled out discreetly.

"Ah, I see! Well?"

"Somebody," said Chan, "has turned the tables on us—spiked *our* guns." And he told all he knew.

"So that was it! I'm ashamed to confess that I never thought of that. Will you hand me that glass, please? Thanks; it's some kind of lubricant for my throat. Pity it won't work on my head. I'm glad you came," he repeated. "I can't talk over the 'phone at all; can't make myself heard," and his voice bore him out. It was strange how a certain charm, like the ghost of the tones of his younger days, was still conveyed in Whittemore's voice. "But you can do all I might. Now I think you'd better get Burrage on the wire and see if anything new has happened. Of course the council couldn't grant a charter in one hearing; but I'd like to know who's back of the application. I fancy you may have to stay here some days."

Chan wired for his suitcase, and glued himself patiently to a telephone receiver. He talked and listened at intervals most of the afternoon, and half of the night, and began again in the morning. News came in driblets; the backers of the man from Winnipeg were given out—Winnipeg capitalists—and Addison unearthed circumstantial evidence to show that still other backers, local men and Edmonton capitalists, were lurking in the background. The previous silence of the *Morning Call* was rumoured to have a solid reason. And by noon Whittemore, who had utilised a feverish night for some hard thinking, had decided on immediate action. The council was meeting again that afternoon, having only adjourned sine die the day before after tabling the application for a charter presented by the Winnipeg man.

Burrage carried them another application to table. The surprise of some of the aldermen was genuine. They were largely the ones who had not been sur-

prised by the first one. Since it had come to a contest, Burrage had to offer better terms to the city—a good deal better than he or any one else had had in mind. Whittemore, knowing that no immediate or overt action might be expected, lay back and devoted himself seriously to recuperating his strength, while Burrage made soundings among his pledged and half-pledged friends. Chan remained within hearing distance of the telephone.

There was matter for headlines in that week's papers. The news columns screamed, but the editorial pages were singularly subdued, approaching their conclusions by roundabout. It would never do to seem to have a mind made up in advance. There was enough comedy in it all to make Lesley laugh when Cresswell gave her his own opinions on the very editorials he was writing. Naturally the *Recorder* professed by disinterested examination to find most merit in Whittemore's proposal. The *Call* had a perceptible leaning to the other side. No word of civic ownership yet appeared. Real-estate values in suburban districts were as active and erratic as popcorn in a pan; the city in general rubbed its palms and anticipated a boom. In the past a boom had yielded rich pickings, and the reaction had been slight because population was actually and legitimately increasing at an almost incredible ratio. With farm immigration steadily growing in the vast area of rich lands which had no other urban centre, the city could afford to grow.

The *Recorder's* editorials increased in warmth from day to day; the *Call* did no more than would in any case have been expected of an active opponent, in more vigorously espousing the opposite side. The Mayor preserved an air of portentous and judicial detachment. Chan grew to hate the sight of a tele-

phone, and Whittemore declared himself convalescent.

Only Burrage looked more and more anxious, and the gloom deepened on his round, swarthy countenance. Some of his secret strings had got tangled; he had relied too much on a select few, and Addison's favours had been kept within too close a circle. He met with obstructions and uncertainty, suspected his quondam friends of having been suborned, and altogether was as disgruntled a fat man as the province contained. He had never had much faith in human nature, and that small portion was rapidly dwindling. It is a mere platitude that those who work through human weakness are most disgusted when human weakness upsets their calculations. Burrage wronged his townsmen and the worthy councillors in the main; they were "all honourable men"; no real bribes had been passed, and a business man feels himself within his rights when he protects his own. How it came to be his own does not enter into the matter. The materially disinterested aldermen were honestly perplexed; and felt rather bedevilled into the state of mind which produces "bolters" in conventions. The interested ones were honestly convinced. But there were a very small minority—how many was never quite definitely settled—who smelt spoils, had got none, and felt as honestly defrauded. In short, these would have to be let in, and the ones who were in were not over-anxious to share. That was the gist of Burrage's later communications with Banff. It became rather too delicate a matter to shout into a telephone.

Whittemore himself had an interest in Addison's syndicate. Since it was necessary to heave ballast to keep his balloon afloat, he decided that would serve. He would never miss the money lost; what he was after was the creative power, the building of that

car line. So he gave Chan to understand in a decisive conference over a letter from Burrage.

"Give 'em my share," he said. "Write and tell Burrage to do whatever has to be done; I'll stand the gaff."

And in Chan's answering letter went a blank transfer of certain holdings, to be filled in by Burrage as required.

Generally speaking, it is a mistake to write letters of any kind whatever. Some Eastern peoples believe the written word is a fetish of great power, which must not be destroyed. They are quite right in their premise; but the conclusion should be exactly reversed. However, Chan wrote the letter. He was quite a young man to write a diplomatic communication. He thought, if a thing was to be made understandable, it should be said plainly. But Burrage was perfectly safe. To keep the matter closer, he was directed not to consult Geers *on this occasion*; if any legal aspect of the transfer were insisted on at once, get another lawyer. The rest at his discretion.

Burrage's gloom lightened. When, a week or so later, Whittemore returned to town, with Chan, he reported perceptible progress. Of course the council had not yet acted, and might not for many months.

Chan was glad to come from the heights, the pines, and the mighty snows. Once or twice he had found himself missing Lesley, even though his ear tingled when he thought of her. His feelings with regard to Amy, and the stage their affair had reached, were exactly defined by the fact that he did not think of her at all if he could avoid it.

But, in spite of her, he meant to have a part of his first evening with Lesley. Perhaps at last he might be able to talk things over with her—the street railway business, his prospects, everything.

He did not reckon on Geers, who captured him by untoward accident the very while Ross was registering in the hotel. Geers was anxious and hurried; he was in short an expected speaker for a meeting of his own that evening; and he commandeered Chan as a curtain-raiser.

It was flattering, but it was rather terrifying, too. Chan had given one or two five-minute talks at small meetings in the East end of town, curtain-raising; he had canvassed with a very good humour, and been through the sacred rites of the committee room; but this was to be really a speech. Every idea he possessed on every subject he was acquainted with deserted him as he mounted the platform at eight o'clock! And every man who filed into the theatre auditorium where the meeting was held seemed to subtract by his entrance yet a little more from that void. Chan had tried, in the brief time beforehand, to inform Lesley of the coming event. She had not been in the office at the time. Now he was cravenly glad he had failed. The face of an acquaintance was an acute misery to his vision. His throat dried. Ross, who was on the platform beside him, looked at him with amusement and sympathy.

"Remember," he said *sotto voce*, "everything depends on you!"

"What?" said Chan stupidly. The remark seemed to mean something. He apprehended it after a while. "Oh, go on and gloat!" he said bitterly, and loosened his collar with a surreptitious finger. "I suppose you've got a cabbage in your pocket." The murmurous discord of a crowd settling itself swelled in his ears, grew to a sound like nearing thunder. Those intent, serious faces, row on row, fading into the gloom of the galleries as into remote space, concentrated suddenly into mere rows of eyes, millions of

eyes boring him through, that at moments resolved into one large, fixed, accusing eye which in all the universe saw only his sole self. He shrivelled under it as it were a burning glass. He could not mentally disintegrate the mass into mere men, farmers, clerks, artisans, kindly folk, easily pleased, easily deluded, who secretly envied and admired him for his imposing place beside their moment's idol. . . .

There were a few women also; and some late ones were still filing into the boxes, which had been reserved. He did not know them; he knew none of the local ladies. He would have liked to watch them to keep his mind off the larger audience, but they were all watching him, or Ross, who sat beside him; the more personal regard was almost equally disconcerting. One of them had a lorgnette; another a pair of opera glasses, though she sat within ten feet of the speakers. Chan was looking at that opera glass, wondering if she meant to reverse it to get a perspective, when Ross nudged him sharply and he got to his feet, still without a word ready.

"Ladies and—and gentlemen," he began unpropitiously. Ross suppressed a smile at that terrible hiatus, and Chan felt it; all his nerves had mysteriously got outside his skin. They warned him further of an almost inaudible stir along the far side aisle, where a woman came late to a reserved front seat. He recognised the hat before he could see her face, for she bent down and spoke as she passed the press table, and kept her head down as she seated herself, disposing of her skirts. Then she looked up, her eyes running questioningly along the solemn row of occupants of the platform, and pausing on him.

He smiled at her; but the effect was as if he had smiled at all his audience. Then he began to talk—still to Lesley.

He could not help addressing his speech to her; he had a speech as soon as her eager eyes caught his. There was something about her personality that was half a challenge and half a query; she reacted to mental stimulus, gave back as much as she got.

CHAPTER XIV

AT the end of the twenty minutes allotted to Chan, Ross nudged him again. Chan had implored him to do this; he said time would mean nothing to him once he got on his feet. It would seem as if centuries were passing over him, and that he would never be permitted to stop; and if he tried to glance at his watch, he would forget what he had been talking about and his own name.

He stopped abruptly in the middle of a sentence. He really had forgotten time, but for the opposite reason; he was intensely interested, both in his subject and, like most beginning speakers, in the workings of his own mind and the sound of his own voice. With mouth still open and an eyebrow raised in enquiry, he turned to Ross. The audience grasped the bye-play and gasped in delighted surprise at its own perspicacity. Then Chan turned back and smiled at them again. A hoarse murmur of laughter ran over the room, like wind over a wheat-field. He finished the sentence, but no one ever heard it. The audience was laughing, clapping, stamping. Chan smiled once more and sat down.

Geers rose. They had come to hear him, and listened. Chan, who had heard very much the same speech six times, let it go over his head, and began to look about again. He felt like a criminal pardoned. Lesley had clapped loudly. Now she grew abstracted, and would not look at him again. By and bye she began to show signs of fatigue. She did look at last, nodded a good-night, rose, and began edging out. Passing the press table again, where

Cresswell sat—he had reserved her seat for her—she leaned and listened and laughed softly at something he said, and vanished again down the side aisle. Chan, on impulse, rose to his feet, went through the wings, and so in pursuit. He would not be needed again. He wanted to hear what Lesley thought of his effort, being entirely human. Ross, left with his dignity, put his hand over his mouth a moment, though he was not yawning.

Lesley had nearly reached the corner when Chan overtook her. She had Dian's gait.

"Wait a minute," he said breathlessly, and caught her elbow. "There; that's better. Jove! I'm glad it's over. Was I rotten?"

"No," she said, "you were good—though I shouldn't say it while you fish so shamelessly. Some day you ought to be extraordinarily good; it's your manner—— You make them feel as if you were addressing each man individually; yes, you coaxed them, and then you bullied them. I believe an audience likes it."

"I was talking to you," he said. "Didn't *you* like it?"

"Being coaxed and bullied? No, I shouldn't, if I were an audience; but other people do. Reason is nowhere . . ."

"Wasn't I reasonable?"

She laughed. "This isn't the first meeting I've been to. I'm summing up. Can't I refer to anything but you?"

"Not to-night," he insisted with his peculiar grave humour. "It's my night to howl. Wasn't I reasonable?"

"Well—as far as politics will permit—I mean a party man. You said only the things you could honestly believe, I'm sure."

"Of course."

"Is it of course? Don't you suppose all the others began the same way? I guess I'm turning cynic, but I can't help thinking over what I see. And you know how it is—they get so they don't know what sincerity means. They think they can cut themselves in two, that a man's life and his politics aren't of the same piece. . . ."

"No man is perfect," said Chan, feeling banal. "Can't a man believe better than he is able to perform?"

"I suppose so; we have to. But it doesn't follow that he can therefore get up and lay down the law to others on things he can't or won't perform. Hasn't the success of all teachers of ethics depended on—on——"

"On themselves squaring practice and theory?"

"Yes, that's it. I'm thinking of private morals mostly; but I don't see why public morals should be different. Of course we can all be hypocrites, if that is what they are driving home."

He gave a deep-chested laugh. "I wish I could hand Geers over to you. He thinks the trick can be turned."

"Yes, I know he does. That's why I came away; he'd have bored me. I should have been able to think of only one thing while he talked: How does he manage to do it? I've listened to him twice now, watched him work himself up into a positive rage denouncing some election crookedness as far away as Nova Scotia, or a piece of Conservative chicanery dating back twenty years; while all the time you might say he had his own little piece of street-car graft money right in his pocket——" She stopped in dismay. That was the diabolical disadvantage of having established a habit of intellectual candour

with one who might later become involved in something to necessitate vast reserves. She and Chan had actually thought aloud to each other, and she had done it once too often. But still she did not know how much that reserve had been needed, for she was thinking only of Ross Whittemore—"his uncle's the one who will build it." Since Addison had said that to her, he had not had an opportunity to say much more; and at that time he did not yet know of Chan's active participation.

"Geers!" said Chan sharply. "Who told you he was grafting?"

"I'm sorry I can't tell you," said Lesley firmly. It was Cresswell had told her. "I shouldn't have said it, even if it is true——"

"It isn't true," he said slowly.

"Not at all?"

"Not in the least."

"But——"

"He acted as counsel for the Belle Claire Company in a perfectly legitimate and open transaction. He has been their counsel for years."

"If I was mistaken, I'm sorry."

"Oh, you didn't hurt me. But Geers is honest, even if he does keep bad company." Chan was beginning to be aware of the rent in his camlet cloak, and he was not sure but she had purposely drawn his eyes to it. Of course she had not, else she would not have gone so far. It did not occur to her that by bad company he meant himself and Ross.

She thought Cresswell must have been misinformed. He had not; he had merely drawn a fair inference from his actual knowledge.

"Well," she said doubtfully, "I do withdraw, and maybe there are only six men in buckram instead of twelve. But buckram is worn, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes," he admitted uncomfortably. "Men are hypocrites. It makes life easier."

"If you only want to live easily," she assented. "I suppose it's crude and pinfeathery of me, but I feel contemptuous of that. It's stupid; men trying to build with one hand while they destroy with the other. I suppose they all begin almost imperceptibly, too, and think they can be great men after they get through being little ones. But—I wanted to talk about your speech, too, and instead I've made one. And I've walked home when I started to go to the office; I must go back!"

"So will I," he said, dismissing regretfully the prospect of the fire.

"Well, what was I saying? Oh, I wanted to ask you, were you nervous? You didn't look it."

"I even forgot to address the chairman," said Chan, beginning to see the humour of his cold chills in retrospect. "It was you saved me. It was, really. Nervous? By George, I was nearly gibbering. I couldn't even decide how I ought to dress; that shows you what my mind was reduced to—worrying about my clothes!"

"Men," said Lesley, "from all I've noticed, aren't so very different from women. They're only—more so!"

But he did not catch that, and she declined to explain.

"Did you like it—enjoy yourself?" she pursued.

"Yes. I believe I understand already why politicians develop such egos. I suppose that helps them to humbug themselves; other people believe 'em, why shouldn't they believe themselves? Talk about pitfalls—every time a man opens his mouth he digs one for himself."

"You'll arrive, I think," she said, slowing a little,

in spite of the cold, as they neared the office. There was some snow on the ground, and the wind was keen, not a chinook. She had no furs, and kept her hands in her pockets, with the poise of a vigorous lad. The whiteness of her face under her large dark hat had a warmth from her glowing eyes. There was no bitterness in her voice for her own defeated purpose.

"Arrive where the others do," he said. "You think they're a poor lot. All the big men are dead, eh?"

"I don't know. I do know what you're thinking"—that was sometimes literally true—"that the dead ones had the same faults. No, they were single-minded. Walpole firmly believed in spoils, for instance." She wished herself better informed, better read. "They were candid about having 'no damned nonsense about merit.' Isn't that a difference?"

"Lesley," he asked soberly, "did any one—an agent, say—ever sell you anything you didn't want?"

"No," she said, astonished, "not that I can remember. I've always been too poor, you know."

"I don't believe that was the reason," said Chan darkly.

"Wasn't it? Just as you say."

"As far as I can recall," said Chan, with a touch of gloom, "I haven't said anything this evening. You've made me feel like a budding Gladstone. I've always thought of him as representative of all that business; word juggling, large talk, and both eyes peeled for the main chance."

"I'm sorry," said Lesley, because she could not resist it. "For I assure you I don't think you are—another Gladstone!" Whereupon she cruelly left him in the cold, which seemed to reach to his vital marrow through those innumerable joints in his previously shining armour of conceit.

Had he been really conceited, he would never have felt her thrusts. He went and found Ross, and was so silent the rest of the evening his uncle became almost alarmed over the youth's unnatural modesty.

Lesley, sitting in the office drearily reading exchanges in search of timely jokes, was vexed at herself. She knew she had been subtly unkind, that Chan had wanted to crow, to enlist her friendly help in congratulating himself. She knew more, why he had not commanded her quick enthusiastic approval as he would have a little earlier. It had nothing to do with politics or parties. When one flaw has been found in an idol, it is easy to discover a dozen others. She could look at him coolly now, see how young he was, how masculinely human. During the summer he had come close to her, confided in her unwittingly. She had from the very first kept back some things from him, when she minimised her anxieties and her ambition, to the last, when she was ready to bite her tongue out to prevent its telling that she loved him. Only he had laid aside both sword and shield in the house of a friend—and the friend was now busily pricking him with her spindle. It was hateful, feminine, but very necessary.

Because, when she pricked him sharpest, she loved him most. She dwelt on his weaknesses to save her from a yawning depth of folly, of idealisation, which appalled her commonsense. She could become maudlin over his very eyelashes if she would permit herself!

Perhaps that truth would have comforted Chan, if he had known it. Again, it might only have alarmed and astounded him. He did not know it, and had enough matter for thought of Lesley without the knowledge.

"Contemptuous" was the word she had used. He should have scorned her as a mere female, in return

for her contempt; but in the game of scorning, an almost unbeatable advantage is gained by the one who scorns first. That is not logical, but it is so. He squirmed, and constantly came back to the point, that she had spoken the truth, unless one were a cynic in grain and believed in nothing. Chan's mind was both vigorous and healthy, and he had to believe. He had that physical gusto which made Browning the optimist he was. He was guilty before his own gods. Perhaps Lesley was only a snip of a girl, not very well educated, knowing nothing of the world. It did not matter; she had the faculty of being able to think clearly at first sight, to correlate instantly all the facts presented to her. It marked her for a journalist in the larger sense; she must succeed if ever she had her chance. But that was not what was concerning him; he was still pinned to her conclusions. He envied Ross, who had somehow gone past these things, got beyond good and evil to necessary and unnecessary, inexpedient and expedient, pleasant and disagreeable. Had he known through what bitter waters Ross had reached his Fortunate Isle, he might not have envied.

Ross constituted part of his difficulty. He had agreed to work with Ross, and he meant to do it. He would even be convicted before his other gods for Ross. He went on consulting with Burrage, working on the street railway scheme, which progressed under the surface. And he went on speaking briefly when required by Geers. It was a strange effect of his mental disquiet that his speeches had an unmistakable ring of conviction which won over some waverers. He was reasoning with himself, and the answer always came out the same.

CHAPTER XV

LESLEY'S problem, finding some new place of shelter, was settled for her by chance and Hilda Brewer, whom Jack Addison had undeservedly designated as "an old cat." She was not; she was a gentle and amiable girl on the verge of being an old maid, possessing that fairness which time and spinsterhood fade quickly. She had a great deal of fine blonde hair, no figure, and a habit of minding her own business; so that Lesley had sincerely liked her for a long time without even knowing it. She was a bookkeeper in the business office of the *Recorder*.

Near closing time, Hilda was hurrying to finish and be gone; and Lesley wishing she might put off the evil moment of doing likewise. Like Dante, she was finding the bread bitter and the stairs steep in another's house; to sit in the same room with Chan and Amy together was painful, and to hear them speak to each other was like having a nerve touched on the quick. It humiliated her to own to such a thralldom to a jealousy that had no rights. And all her casually intimate hours were of the past, for Amy was beginning to covertly press her own rights (such as they were). If Chan came, she was never absent. Well, she had in her favour the nine points of possession, of Chan and the house alike. All Lesley asked was to withdraw. So she mused, making hay among the exchanges and filling her wastebasket if not her head.

"I want to get off early to-day," said Hilda, rousing Lesley by banging down the lid of a desk. "I've

two trunks to pack, and forty-eight things that won't go into a trunk. Moving."

"I wish I were," said Lesley idly. "Where does one move to?"

"Why don't you?" asked Miss Brewer eagerly. "Come with me. I have a huge new room, and I'd like to share the expenses. I've been starved out of my old place. . . ."

"I will," Lesley interrupted her. And she went home to give Mrs. Cranston due notice. Since there was some place to go, she could not wait another moment. What lies might be needed to soothe Mrs. Cranston she left to her own ingenuity and the spur of the moment. She did not care if they were not very good lies.

They passed muster, evidently. Amy opened her eyes wide for a moment only, said: "Why, Lesley, I'm awfully sorry," and was called to the kitchen by the coffee boiling over. She was really sorry; Lesley had never got in her way, and was useful to hook her gowns for her. Amy was not exactly a vicious woman; but she was rather rudimentary. The sea urchin is nothing but a slightly animated stomach, but it cannot help that.

"Maybe it's the best thing," pursued Amy at the dinner table, "because Bill's thinking of taking us away to Ferney before spring. I was going to tell you that. Is your new place nice? I hope you won't be lonesome. Have you seen Chan this week?"

"No," said Lesley, and did not return the enquiry. If she had been Amy she could not have asked that question, but she was not Amy. She did wonder if she had wounded Chan by her cool and critical attitude after the meeting, or if he were merely very busy, as he might well be.

He came and answered for himself shortly. Amy

was upstairs, dressing for some church social or other small festivity; Lesley heard her set her door ajar, saw the sudden light stream out on the upper landing, at sound of the doorbell, and answered it with her teeth on edge.

"I'm glad you're in," said Chan. He seemed serious and tired. "I haven't very long to stay."

"Isn't your uncle so well?" asked Lesley, with real concern. "Come in; I'll let you have the best chair, since you won't stay long!"

"Yes, Ross is all right." He gazed into the fire abstractedly. "Things are piling up on us a bit, that's all, now the end's so near."

"I wonder," said Lesley dreamily, "does anything ever really end?" She was thinking of herself, wondering if some day she might look on him indifferently, pass him in the street without even a quickened heartbeat. "It would be nice if they would; but it seems to me that everything goes on and on. We spend our lives starting things we can't finish, because we can't finish anything—well, where am I getting to?"

"To the theory of recurring cycles, I fancy," said Chan. "Where is Mrs. Cranston?" Now he had not meant to ask that; his mind was simply jumping about at random, from fatigue, and distaste of certain matters which kept crowding to the front. He had come over with some vague intent of squaring himself in Lesley's estimation, and did not know how to begin, nor exactly how to do it if he could begin, nor even precisely how far she needed to have her opinion changed.

"In her room," said Lesley, "dressing. I'll go and call her." Spoken very graciously, but a greenish spark lighted in her eyes.

"Good heavens, no," cried Chan. "I just wondered if I could sit here and be stupid a while. I don't want

to be polite and entertaining to-night, and you know one can only be comfortably rude and neglectful of one person at a time."

"Very well, pick on me," Lesley agreed. Silence fell. Something of late was missing in their friendship; the ease had gone out of it. There were gaps, covered things. Even silence was no longer natural between them in quite the same way. Lesley felt as if she would be dumb so long as that roof sheltered her. But it seemed necessary to talk.

"Any fresh news from uptown?" she asked finally. "I came away early, and the council meeting wasn't over. And I'm interested, you know." She quite forgot he did not know; she had never mentioned her investment with Addison.

"In the council meeting?" He hesitated, frowning thoughtfully, turning the matter over gingerly in his mind. "Yes, it's over. They didn't do anything—if—if you mean about the street-car line?"

"Yes. Why don't they do something?" It was all words with her; something to talk about.

"Are you in a hurry to ride?" asked Chan. "Well, I suppose they think it may pay them better to do nothing awhile." She did not see why his tone should be so savage. He thought she was goading him. And he was so deadly tired of the whole thing.

"I never saw a street car," mused Lesley.

"Never? You amazing creature!"

"A Stone Age female," she agreed. "I suppose that's why so many things in ordinary life are inexplicable to me. Why do people do the things they do?"

"I don't know," said Chan. "That's the only excuse I have. You do think I'm a rotter, don't you, Lesley?"

She stared at him, with honestly not the least idea what he was driving at. And before she could say

so, while he interpreted her silence as assent, Amy rustled in, perfumed, powdered, pompadoured, pouting a little, drawing on her gloves.

"I didn't know you were coming, Chan," she said, with soft reproach. "And I have to go out."

"Must you?" said Chan perfunctorily, and helped her on with her coat.

"I might come back early," she whispered, as he bent over her, while she pretended to arrange the violets on her corsage. Lesley looked on, out of the corner of her eyes, missing nothing at all. A great apathy enfolded her. Futility. . . . Not to have been able to do what Amy had done. Amy had got Chan, and she, Lesley, had failed. She did not know she could have done it; a girl cannot know a great deal by instinct about some very important matters. What Amy had got of him she did not know either. So she could not despise Amy, after all. She was only relieved to think she could soon run away now, turn her back on her defeat.

"Your flowers are going to fall, Amy," she said indifferently.

"Are they? Oh, you fasten them, Chan," said Amy. He did, and tore his finger on the pin that held them—his flowers. Also, his pin! Lesley saw it for the first time since Chan had last worn it.

"Where," she said, before she could put a guard on her tongue, "did you get that odd pin, Amy?"

"Oh, it's an old thing. Haven't you seen it often?"

"Perhaps I have," said Lesley. She watched Chan open the door for Amy, say good-night, and return. She felt vicious. And what she said perplexed him for half a second, and then stunned him worse than the box on the ear she had once given him.

"Was that your staff and bracelets, Chan?" That was what she said.

"My——" He looked at her questioningly, while his subconscious mind automatically flashed up from the forgotten years a mental picture of the school chapel at Vevey, and himself, a bored and unrepentant sinner, surreptitiously perusing the more exciting portions of the Old Testament when his bowed head mutely lied that he was engaged in prayer. The sheer drama of the story of Judah and Tamar his dead son's wife is enough to make it stick in the most irreligious memory.

"My God!" he finished.

There was a violet fallen to the floor, where Amy had stood. Lesley picked it up. She was beginning to loathe violets acutely, and without knowing what she did she threw it into the fire, and then tried to rescue it, too late.

"Poor little thing," she said, and began unexpectedly to laugh. "No, I'm not insane. I just remembered a favourite phrase of my literary lights of a few years back. Did you ever read *The Duchess*, or *Mrs. Southworth*?" Chan could not play up quite yet, but she went on. "Their heroines used to be perpetually crushing a spray of sandalwood or jasmine or almost any old thing in their little cold hands, and then all their lives the scent of whatever it was used to bring tears to their eyes. I don't know why I remembered that just now; it was always cabbages had that association for me. I had to transplant cabbages until my poor little knees were sore and my back ached, and ever since then the sight of a cabbage has brought tears to *my* eyes. . . . It's cold again, isn't it? I believe we'll have more snow. . . . Oh, Chan, don't be so horrid and make me do all the talking. Cat got your tongue? Be nice and amuse me." She grew desperate, felt as if she would never be able to stop talking nonsense, as if she were pouring her words

into a bottomless pit of silence that yawned between them. Panic possessed her.

"I think I do amuse you," said Chan, and rose and walked across the room. Now, if only he had hated her, he might have loved her. Or if she had wept again—oh, she should have wept again—only the Fates knew where the flood might have carried their unlaunched craft. But she was laughing, and laughter to one tired and perplexed is like rain to a man without a cloak.

"Why, what have I done?" she asked brightly.

"You haven't done anything. Don't pay any attention to me. It's a beastly night, isn't it?" He had come over wanting to tell her about everything, to talk himself out; and she had driven him back on himself. The springs of sympathy were dried.

Anyway, he reflected cynically, talking would not help. He had to go on now. Go on further than he had ever contemplated, apparently. He had an important conference with Burrage scheduled for ten o'clock. His uncle was equally deep in consultation with Geers and the Premier, being on the committee of ways and means, the purely financial end of the campaign.

Lesley watched him, struggled with herself for the right word; her fine perceptions were blunted with too much and too long stress of emotion. She was infected with his own desire to give up, to get clear. There was nothing to be said. They had never gone far enough, touched each other intimately enough, to explain everything with an embrace. In fact, they were further off than ever; Lesley had controlled herself and the situation too neatly, kept Chan too thoroughly in the dark. She had only got close enough to strike with the shrewdest effect.

"Rotten night," he repeated aimlessly. "I've got

to go, Lesley. Sorry I inflicted myself on you, feeling like this. Good-night." He was going.

"Chan," she said involuntarily as he reached the door.

"Yes?" But there was something too polite in his attitude of waiting.

"Good-night," she repeated, smiling again. He went out.

"He won't come back!" Her heart seemed to swell and suffocate her; she did not cry the words aloud, but they were ringing in her ears. She went upstairs, her knees trembling, holding to the banisters. The house seemed to echo with emptiness. It would have been comforting if Eve had wakened, but the child was peacefully asleep, and Lesley had no heart to disturb her. She went to bed, and lay wakeful half the night, tense, aching for action. If it had been summer she would have wandered through the dark. She felt so terribly alive, and caged; life turned back on itself in her racing veins; the tragedy of being young possessed and shook her. Everything seemed to be receding from her eager grasp, and she strained at invisible bonds. . . .

And it was true that he did not want to come back. A girl, he thought, could be more brutal than any other living creature. If a man had done what she had done he would have thrashed him, let out the bad blood in material earnest. What, exactly, had she done? He could not have defined it, but those words of hers took the breath out of him, like a blow in the pit of the stomach. . . . Women are so extraordinarily conscious; they do know what they are doing, and at the very time; they can put a name to it; a man only does it, and then forgets it. It was said of one type of woman that "she eateth and wipeth her mouth, and saith I have done no evil;" but it may be

said of any man that his right hand knows not what his left hand doeth; and he says nothing at all. It is the woman who looks at the fact and produces an opinion on it.

Anyway, Chan had to see Burrage.

CHAPTER XVI

MATTERS had finally reached a formulable crisis with the street railway project. It was a very bad time for such a crisis, for the election came in a week; but the rival company was crowding the pace.

"It's narrowed down to us getting one more man—that Alderman Curtin," explained Burrage, chewing a fat cigar with a look of distaste.

"Well, how much does he want?" asked Chan disgustedly. No doubt Ross would stand for it, whatever it was.

"If we can meet his terms," Burrage went on, "*and* raise our bid about ten per cent. to the city, unexpectedly, to-morrow night, we can probably stampede 'em. He agrees to do some of the stampeding. We've said we couldn't make the raise, on purpose to get a better effect. They will only give us a fifteen-year charter anyway, but we can fix that in the valuation clause; at the end of fifteen years it won't be hard to see that the valuation is so high the city can't manage to take it over. There are more ways of killing a cat than choking him on butter."

"How much?" repeated Chan.

"Curtin is all tied up for ready money—wait a minute. He owns stock in the gas company; he wants to sell. There's no market for that kind of gas just now. You see?"

"I'll tell Ross," agreed Chan. "See him in an hour or two, when he gets back to the hotel. How many shares?"

"Five thousand—par—dollar shares."

"I need some gas shares," said Chan savagely, and went over to the hotel to wait for Ross.

He was asleep in a stiff wooden armchair in Ross's room when his uncle came in, very late. There was a decanter of Scotch and a siphon and empty glass beside him on the table; the light was in his eyes, and he scowled at it in his sleep. The whole effect was rakish, and oddly pathetic. Ross lifted his eyebrows, looked at the decanter and found it nearly full, and smiled at the younger man, rather tenderly, as he had been wont to do when Chan as a little chap had been forgotten and gone to sleep on a rug or some other unconventional spot. That funny motherless look—surprising how a grown man could keep it.

"Still a sentimental ass!" said Ross to himself, and shook Chan gently.

"Get out—don't bother me," remarked Chan, dissipating sentiment, and then apologising hastily.

"I don't blame you," said Ross. "It's three o'clock. We had quite a session. How did you come off?"

"Five thousand to the bad," said Chan succinctly. "Can you do it? It's a hell of a lot to pay for any man, I think. Five cents for the lot of us would be a high bid."

"Price and value," said Ross thoughtfully, "have practically no connection. Yes, I *can* do it. . . . I thought it might be more. Another Scotch?" Chan shook his head.

"Got a headache now. Oh, I only had one. Curious; I don't believe I ever had a drink alone before in my life. It doesn't taste the same, do you know?"

"Well, I'll telephone you to-morrow as soon as I can get a draft cashed—if you advise it," said Ross, cutting the end of a cigarette absently in the cigar cutter. "What do you think?"

"Why, I wasn't thinking! It's the only way, isn't it?"

"There are always at least two ways of doing a thing—and one is not to do it! I'd like you to be perfectly frank."

"In what way? I've done the best I could—of course I haven't really done anything; Burrage has."

"Do you want to do anything? Would it be your choice to go through with this, seeing what it necessitates?"

"Bribery?"

"Exactly. I've fancied you losing your taste for the job."

"I'm here to do whatever you say," repeated Chan doggedly.

"If I say—do as you feel like doing? Wouldn't you chuck it, as far as your own personal interests are concerned?"

Chan was silent, running his fingers through his unruly hair.

"I think you'd better chuck it," said Ross quietly. "I didn't anticipate quite this, either."

"You wouldn't give it up on my account?" asked Chan, feeling overwhelmed by responsibility. "Hang it all, I don't care." To put his own squeamishness in his uncle's way seemed another kind of cheapness; he was in a cleft stick.

"It is hardly that. If I'd thought sooner I'd have kept you out, and done my own dirty work. But I don't want you to feel burdened with gratitude for nothing, so I'll tell you that other things have decided me. We got word to-night that this whole business is going to be used as campaign material, turned against us and put in its worst light. The Conservatives have put two and two together and got five. They think they can involve Geers, you understand.

I'm not sure but that Curtin is meant as a trap for us. Anyway, we renig at to-morrow's council meeting; I've simply decided to withdraw. . . . How Buraige will swear!" He chuckled quietly.

"How did you hear of their intentions?"

"Folsom always had a weakness for talking; I find he hasn't changed a bit. He thought it was too late to checkmate them now. . . . I met him yesterday at dinner, you know, and he let me understand he had something up his sleeve. We laid a few wires, and got word of what it was. He'll find that, as our esteemed friend the *Onlooker* says, he's got nothing up his sleeve but his cuff! They can't show a thing on Geers, and if we simply announce that we can't bid up any higher, the council by its own past decision will be automatically forced to turn us down, there won't be any sudden conversions of aldermen to investigate—and there you are. And Geers is preparing an interview on the subject that will put him past suspicion. As for Folsom, I'm sending him a check for campaign expenses. The country must be saved; I feel that strongly—you can imagine how strongly when I've contributed to both sides!"

"You make me feel like a kid," was all Chan could say.

"Don't make that mistake. The childish part is to have nothing but games, and that's me. I hope, on the contrary, that you may attain a man's stature, the power to be serious about serious things. By the way, you put some money in with Addison, didn't you?"

"A little—that doesn't matter."

"Of course you'll get it back some time; you'll only have to wait longer. But I'll make it up to you now——"

"Oh, that be hanged. I've been spoon-fed all my

life. If I can't even make money here, what sort of a dub am I? Look at what does make money! You know I'd got tired of the things money could buy. I'll make enough; don't worry." He straightened his shoulders, his eyes thoughtful but his brow clearing. His brain felt rested and his body healthily tired. Ross's words had been more of a relief than he could have imagined; certainly more than he could have hoped for, since the one thing he could not have imagined was Ross withdrawing now.

"And now what are you going to do?" he asked Ross.

"It's a large bit of country," said Ross. "You'd better go to bed. No, don't go home; I'll get a room for you here." He went to the telephone, and talked to a sleepy clerk.

"Good-night," said Chan. "Much obliged."

"I think," said Ross, "that you'll do." They did not shake hands, but each caught the other's impulse to it.

To say that Burrage swore when the decision was communicated to him next day is inadequate. He was lyrical. Chan, in his fresh relief, laughed until he had a stitch in his side; Ross remained imperturbable, and bought Burrage several drinks. They met Cresswell, coming from a conference with Geers and the owner of the *Recorder*, himself somewhat amazed, and bought many more drinks. Chan, who still had a meeting to attend, took cigars until his pockets would hold no more, and hoped he might meet enough voters to dispose of them during the afternoon. Cresswell tore himself away after several false starts, explaining that he had an interview to recast. That was at three in the afternoon.

Cresswell was even more shorthanded than usual with his staff that week; half his men had to be on

political reporting; and his editorial writer had just left. He commandeered Lesley and implored her to return to the office in the evening and take telephone items, and she did. It was ten o'clock before he came in himself. By that time what had been begun at three was well finished.

There was only one reporter in the office beside Lesley, far off, in a dim corner. The telephone had stopped ringing for a moment. The night editor had been impressed for a meeting, and Cresswell had been very urgently needed, though not so urgently as if the *Recorder* had been a morning paper. Lesley looked up with relief, and rose.

"Sit down, my child, till I count you," said Cresswell solemnly, hanging his hat on a copyhook.

"I'd like to go and get some supper; I'm hungry," said Lesley.

"Better than being thirsty," returned Cresswell. "Stick around a minute; I think I need a prop for my old age."

Lesley looked at him, wrinkled her dainty nose, and sniffed.

"Quite r-right," said Cresswell. "I am. That, Miss Johnny, is why I want you. Typewriters are treacherous things. Can you read this?" He handed her a sheaf of copy paper, covered with his own "heavy irregulars," as he called his handwriting.

"Want me to copy it?" It was legible enough; he had written it earlier in the day. She set to work, while Cresswell began devastating another fair field of paper, with a large pencil and some difficulty. In a few minutes she pulled a finished sheet out of the machine, and turned to him in enquiry.

"Do my eyes deceive me?" she asked.

"Quite likely; I'm sure mine do," returned Cresswell equably. Not to put too fine a point on it, he

was as drunk as he could be; but nature or habit had given him a definite deadline, a limit of solubility. He could always talk clearly, even if he couldn't get his thoughts to cohere and assemble themselves; and he had no rotten spot to uncover, so Lesley was not in the least embarrassed and knew she need not be. What had undone Cresswell was not drink, but the impulse in him that made him yield to drink occasionally, which was also the secret of his excellence in his calling. It was a craving of change, an impatience of the thing done, and always for him done with. He wanted every day new; and when it was not new enough, he moved on.

"But do you mean to tell me," said Lesley, "that Geers favors public ownership of the street railways?"

"Not exactly, but he means to tell the public that. *Ruse de guerre*. Johnny, how many n's are there in municipal?"

"Three," said Lesley absently. "No—good heavens—one. Listen a minute; just what does this mean?"

"It means—hello?" He grabbed a telephone. "Yes . . . yes . . . twelve to six against . . . which?" He scribbled a moment. "It means, my child . . . Robinson," he yelled at the preoccupied reporter under his solitary droplight at the far end of the room, "take this story. You needn't write it, but get the facts; Winn will bring it himself in a few minutes. All right. . . . It means, little one, that the city council has just turned down both offers for a franchise. Thatzall. Geers is merely prophesying after the event—neck and neck, rather."

"And there won't be any street cars?"

"Some time, some time. Got that finished?" She desisted, seeing that he was trying to collect his faculties for another matter, and went on transcribing Geers' interview, polishing it up a bit wherever Cress-

well had been in too great haste. She handed it to him silently when it was done.

"Is it awright?" he asked her.

"I think so."

"Take your word for it. Send it down." She stuck it on the copyhook, placing his hat carefully in the wastebasket. Then she looked about stealthily for her own, and thought she might escape. A vain hope.

"Now this." He gathered up the scattered sheets he had been scribbling. "That will be—'lo, Martin." The lull of the preceding half hour was shattered. Martin, the night editor, was back at his post. The foreman had been doing his own editing for the evening. More reporters came. Cresswell and Martin departed to the composing room to have a heated disagreement with the foreman. Typewriters clicked; phones jingled incessantly; callers drifted in and Cresswell came back and disposed of them, all but one. With him he retreated into a close conference in his own more or less retired corner. It was Burrage, and he stayed and stayed. Lesley signalled in vain to catch Cresswell's eye; tact forbade her to tell him before another man that she could not make head nor tail of what he had written, except that it appeared to concern public ownership and street cars. She held her aching head and waited for Burrage to depart, and when he did Cresswell went with him.

"Mr. Cresswell," she shrieked desperately after him.

"Back in a minute," he called back.

He was gone an hour. When he did come back, it was midnight and Lesley had vanished. So had the copy she had just placed on his hook, taken by the foreman on a chance visit. She had done her best with it. Cresswell could rewrite it in the morning if he liked. There was not a word of his in it, but it was neatly marked "Edit. lead," and that was enough

for the compositor. As for Cresswell, he had a hazy idea that he had written an editorial, and was satisfied for the moment.

The destruction of her financial prospects sent Lesley to sleep very heavy-hearted. Nothing prospered under her hand, she thought; she was born for frustrated hopes. And she needed money very urgently; her mother's stay in California was costing more than she had expected. But it was fulfilling its purpose; Mrs. Johns was recovering, though she dared not return before spring.

Lesley felt that she did not care much what dishonesty was involved in the franchise business if only they had gone ahead. Evidently nothing could be done straight anyway; there was an ineradicable kink in human nature to prevent that. She wondered if she should ever get her money back at all, or even a part of it. She had not a line of writing to show for it except a vague note from Addison. In retrospect this seemed a great stupidity. It loomed as an enormous sum to her now, and measured by the time and effort it had cost it was. Also by her need of it. She had got almost used to doing without things herself. Preparing to pack, she had surveyed her scanty wardrobe—three dark plain gowns, one hat, half a dozen blouses—with a certain humour. But she had never had any more than that; even the swiss and blue ribbons of childhood seemed opulent by comparison. Once she had had red shoes with tassels. . . . All this she knew to be quite childish; but there were times when the word failed to quell her real longing for satins and laces, and all the minor daintinesses which cost so much.

"If I could," was her last solemn thought before she slept, "I would buy a whole dozen long white gloves—I wonder if any are made long enough—my

arms are so very, very long and I want them to come right up to the shoulder, and be wrinkled—— And sable furs. . . .” She thought sable was black, and would suit with her hair and skin. . . . So it would have; a fine ironic fact.

And these wandering thoughts were in a sense the result of Chan’s conscientious scruples being too plain to his uncle’s alert eye. By any mundane justice he ought to have been mulcted in one set of sables as a tax for the luxury of keeping a conscience.

CHAPTER XVII

THE sables were forgotten with morning, but the two hundred dollars were not; and she decided on the way to the office to ask Addison what would ultimately happen to her money. She had been dodging Addison ever since her mother's departure, and he had grown sulkily discouraged for a time. It might be best to let him stay that way, but she must know something, however indefinite, about her fortune. She was sleepy and blue, and a letter from her mother on her desk failed to bring the usual joy; she hesitated over opening it, feeling so poor when the thought of her mother always brought a mad desire for abundance to bestow. She was turning it over hesitantly, when Cresswell, passing the door of the business office, looked in and saw her.

"Come over here, Johnny," he said. "We have an account to settle."

"You can't get blood from a stone," she returned. "And I am absolutely stony." So she went and sat by his desk, which overlooked the newsroom but was a little removed from the others. Cresswell looked very hale and fresh, as he always did on a morning after; his hair was particularly leonine and his tie ends wild. He laid a smudgy proof before her.

"Do you recognise that?" he asked.

She did; it was her editorial.

"Certainly I do. Why?"

"I wrote it, didn't I?"

"Of course."

"Johnny, you're a sad liar for one so young," he said severely. "I did not. So you must have."

"Well, there's the wastebasket," she told him, perceiving he was in a good humour, if nothing else.

"And I'll put it over you, you young snip, if you don't be respectful to us both," he retorted. "Johnny, you're a find, a treasure, and I've already told the circulation manager that you belong to me exclusively henceforth. I'm damned if I didn't think I had written that until I found my own notes on my desk—and couldn't read 'em. You're my assistant now, and can do all the work, and I'll take the credit. Will you do it?"

She felt a natural pride.

"Certainly—I should say so. Do you want me to do that kind of work?"

"Some. We'll see."

"Well," she said with genuine diffidence, "if any one knows I write them, you know they won't pay the least attention to them. And I don't know very much; I'm not half educated. I had heard you say most of what's in that. But I'll do what I can."

He looked at her shrewdly, impressed by her common sense and modesty.

"Don't you worry," he said kindly. "We'll make a newspaper woman of you yet; and since you say so, no one need know exactly what you do. I'll keep you busy. Now go and fetch your doll rags over to that next desk. It's a rotten shame to have you down here so early this morning; I'd meant to tell you last night. You didn't get out of here till midnight, did you? It's a great life, Johnny, and you're in it now. You're going to have the privilege of impressing every one but yourself, of being the only one that knows how little you know, of working twenty hours a day for a ditch-digger's wages, and of running the country while your

own affairs go to the devil. Go on and think about your new importance now, and I'll find you some work pretty soon."

So she read her mother's letter in a state of bewilderment, through a faintly rosy glow. Praise is pleasant, however one may steel oneself to stoicism. Yet it struck her only as a moment's praise, and she did not realise that her career might be already begun; she had too long visualised it in a remote setting.

"Dear daughter. . . ." And a page or two of flowers, blue sea and sunshine, which the rosy glow helped in realising. It was nice to think of her mother in the midst of roses and beside a sunny sea. The letter went on with affectionate anxiety for Dick, for herself, even for the animals on the ranch; referred slightly to vanishing ill-health; and, on the last page, striking Lesley's eye above the context, what seemed a strange coincidence, Addison's name. "It must be that Mr. Addison, your friend, who sent the fruit to the train; I'm sure I don't know any one else of that name. Such nice people they were, and took me for an auto ride, and to lunch, and sent me more fruit and flowers. . . . They have a big ranch near here; and said they had been meaning to come and see me for weeks, but had been so busy." What was it all about? Addison in California—oh, no, he had written to some friends of his there, given them Mrs. Johns' name and address, and made them call on her and cover her with these kindnesses! That was why he had asked for her mother's address! She made it out clearly enough at last. Well, that—that was *decent* of him, she exclaimed vehemently to herself. The thoughtfulness and trouble he had been to made her repent in sack-cloth and ashes of the rudenesses she had heaped on him. If he wanted to prove his frequent assertions of a desire to serve her, he could in no other manner.

have done it so clearly and absolutely. She began a note to him in great haste, could not phrase it to suit her, and seized the telephone to call him.

He was not down yet. She called him again later and he had just gone out. She left her name, and was told after lunch some one had telephoned her. But it was near five when he finally answered; she was just about ready to go home. Only habit had kept her in so late; Cresswell had told her to go much earlier, but she was communing with Mary Jane.

"Hello—that you, Lesley?" It was no time to rebuke him for the name. "Did you—did you really want to talk to me? No, I didn't quite believe it," he said.

"Yes. I just had a letter from my mother."

"Who—your mother?" Perhaps his tone flattened slightly. In fact, he had forgotten his own good action; but it had been a kind impulse none the less. "How is she?"

"Oh, quite well; and she thanks you, and so do I."

"Oh, nonsense. Lesley. . . ."

"Yes?"

"Was that all? Can't I see you?"

"I don't see how," she began doubtfully. "No, that isn't all; there is something else I want to ask you about."

"But I can't talk to you over the 'phone," he said. "Can't you come over here? Or mayn't I call at your house to-night?"

"Over where?"

"To my office. I just got in; I've been busy all afternoon, but I tried to 'phone you at noon. Can't you? You know where it is; just around the corner. Let me call this evening, won't you?"

"No, I just can't; but wait there, I'll come over." There seemed no reason why not.

The stairway, one flight, leading to his office, was already dark, and from the bottom she saw him in his doorway, silhouetted in the light, looking for her. "How d'ye do?" she said breathlessly, and gave him her hand. He took the other also, and drew her inside.

Every one had gone from the office but himself; she had not counted on that, but neither did she notice it at first. There were two rooms, furnished with less austerity than an office usually shows. Addison liked comfort, and was a bit of a dandy in his dress. But not this night; he wore a khaki uniform, and a service cap lay on the table, alongside a rifle and detached bayonet. Still he looked very well, the warm olive of his complexion, darker than his apparel, and his regular profile, which inclined just enough toward the Roman type to give him a look of race and enterprise, consorting well with the slim athletic figure outlined in the tight coat and puttees. She looked at him with evident surprise.

"Who've you been shooting?" she asked, withdrawing from his detaining clasp.

"I'm a corporal in the Mounted Rifles; didn't you know?" he asked. "We just had a business meeting, winding up the summer's accounts; and looking over equipment; and we were talking of starting a winter rifle club. It's just a form, always going in uniform to a meeting; keeps up the spirit."

"Oh, the Fourteenth Light Horse," she said, and giggled. There had been a cartoon in a local weekly the summer before, a most unkind cut, showing a sorry-looking nag in an attitude of dejection and loneliness, captioned: "The other thirteen are in McKeown's pasture." The Fourteenth, Canadian Mounted Rifles, had just been organised then. "No, I didn't know you were a sojer," Lesley went on. She

picked up the gun and balanced it expertly; she could shoot a bit. Something to put off speaking about that money, which seemed to have grown into a tiresomely personal affair between them, when it should have been entirely businesslike.

"You said there was something you wanted to see me about," he reminded her. He kept at her elbow; and when she moved he followed; and his deep brown eyes were very bright and followed her also.

"Yes, I did. But first—it was so good of you to send your friends to see my mother. I think she was lonesome, and—and it was lovely of you," she finished awkwardly, edging around the table toward the inner room, which was bad strategy.

"I told you I wanted to—to——" She would not look at him, but her mind seemed pushing him away, and as if he could feel it, he stopped speaking and stood undecided.

"Yes, I know; and you did help me. Now I wanted to ask you—well you know—there won't be any street cars now?"

"No. Whittemore dished us." He scowled, his black eyebrows met, and his eyes looked almost dangerous.

"Why?" she asked. A good many people asked that, first and last, and none of them ever got an answer.

"Well, I don't know; that's the truth. I wish I did; it was like a thunderclap. Burrage says Whittemore was afraid of a frame-up; but I don't believe Ross Whittemore would care for that. Well, it's all gone," he finished moodily.

"All?" Her heart sank. "All the—the money—your money?" He looked up, like a pointer scenting game.

"No. I'm not quite such a fool. Some of it's tied

up for awhile, of course. But we can hold it." He did not say that Whittemore himself had offered to tide the syndicate over, if necessary. "No, I'm not broke. Would you care?"

"Well, it's not nice to be broke. I ought to know," she sighed, and wished she could bring herself to the point.

"Do you like money?" He leaned over the table, not scowling any more, and yet not looking as she was used to see him.

"Of course," she said, without much regard for her words. "I'd love it; but I never had any—only that little bit——"

"Lesley, do you know I'm pretty rich, as things go out here?" he said. "Even without what's tied up in that land, I could realise at least a hundred and fifty thousand cash inside of ten days——"

"Could you?" She was interested, just by the sound of it, and her mobile face showed it. "That's pleasant for you." She was enough accustomed to hear men talk of money—for in the West men do, not yet having acquired a sense of its sacredness and laid a taboo on the topic—not to think him extraordinary, nor even vulgar. "But I wanted to ask——" she began at last.

"You don't need to ask," he said. "You can have it all—you can have me—you've got me——" But instead he had her, across the table, it is true, but both her hands in his. Her eyes opened wide, her lips parted; she felt nothing but a profound astonishment.

"No, no—don't be so crazy—you don't understand——"

"*You* don't," he said. "I am crazy—mad—about you. You've run away from me so long—— Come here!"

"I won't—I won't!" she cried. "What do you think

you are doing?" It was unlucky that when she was furiously angry she was beautiful. Their meeting eyes almost struck sparks.

"I'm going to make you listen to me," he retorted hotly. "This once—— Oh, you sweet thing, I won't hurt you. I want you; I'm going to take you away from here, and teach you to love——"

"But I won't—I don't!" she repeated frantically. "Why, you've got a wife—a family——"

"I haven't had a wife for two years," he said. "What does that matter? It's you I want. We don't need to live here; we can forget all about this rotten little dump. . . . No, you can't get away from me," and he showed all his even teeth in a triumphant smile. "Why, I could lift you right over the table; but I won't. Now!" And he drew her clear, put her hands behind her, still holding her wrists, so they stood eye to eye.

"*He's been drinking!*" was her first real thought, more like a flash of light across her bewildered brain than a consciously formulated idea.

She had the right clue; he had, and it had loosed in him something she had heretofore always beaten down, and he himself had leashed at her command.

Strong as she was, for a woman, she realised she was helpless against his strength. His arms were like steel; he had the pantherine build of men of the South. But, understanding so much, her head suddenly cleared and she understood him all through, and was not afraid. He was reckless, beyond calculation; but not base. . . .

"Now," he repeated, his voice gentle, the half-voice of a lover, at the breaking point of feeling, "Lesley . . . dear . . . couldn't you care—a little? Listen,— I won't touch you—and I'd shoot myself now, if you'd kiss me once, first. I dream of your mouth; it looks

so cool—and I'm burning for you—you can't understand——” And indeed, he was trembling.

“But,” she said softly, “you're twisting my arms.” And she looked at him piteously, quite as if she spoke the truth.

“Jesu!” He thrust her from him, his face whitening. Then she had the table between them again. He wiped his damp brow. “Come back,” he said hoarsely. She shook her head.

“No, I want to go home.” It was she trembled now, for the double strain of acting and holding herself in check—oh, she was not ice nor marble, and she had felt his magnetism before; he had touched her—had tested all her strength. “I must go home,” she repeated. His face darkened again.

“Some one's waiting for you—oh, I know. That Herrick; you see him every day, and you put me off for months. It's him you care for—— Isn't it? Isn't it?”

“What is that to you?” she said, forgetting everything in a blaze of resentment. Then she could have bitten her tongue. “You are absurd; and you haven't the least right to say such—such idiotic things.”

“But it's true,” he hurled at her again, savagely.

“It's not—and I refuse to argue with you—I'm going——”

“No,” he repeated, with a kind of frenzied patience, “you are going to answer me first. You've cheated me twice”—he was beginning to realise now—“you little devil, you clever little devil—but I can make you care, if you'll give me half a chance——”

She fled from him, holding her big eyes on his face, more intent on keeping her poor little surprised secret from him than from fear of personal safety. She felt as if he would shake it out of her if he caught her, wrest it from her somehow. Dignity vanished in

that wild pursuit. She upset a chair in his path, and he stumbled on it and she wanted to shriek with laughter, but had not breath enough. He did want to shake her, to make her drop that cool reserve behind which she hid from him. . . . In another age he would have carried her off on his saddlebow, and kept her in a gilded prison until she smiled on him—or until his heart softened.

It was the bare truth that he did not know he had seized the bayonet from the table until she came to bay, cornered, panting, still defiant, the point at her bosom. And then she caught at the rags of her dishevelled pride; she could endure no more of this tragic comedy turned to a burlesque. With a magnificent gesture she flung her arms wide, a better histrion than he, and beat him with his own weapons. For all that, she knew very well he might, just possibly, kill her. . . . Nothing else. That was the actual danger, neither more nor less; it was within his capacity.

"Oh, go on, go on," she cried, at the utmost pitch of indignant exasperation. "Stab—I don't care—only get it over with!"

His hand faltered. "Oh, you—you——" he groaned, and pitched the bayonet across the room. It crashed into the glass door of a bookcase. She clasped her hands on her heaving breast, leaning against the wall for support. Addison sat down by the table, and hid his face on his arm. If she would have suffered him to put his head on her knees, he would have wept. He was racked, tormented, broken; and she had no pity because she did not know. Very softly, she slipped toward the door.

He heard her. "Wait a minute," he said thickly, interposing. "I—I swear I never meant to hurt you, Lesley. But I love you—I want you. I meant it, only I didn't mean to frighten you. I can get a divorce;

my wife will—— Won't you come away with me? I want you now. I could make you happy, I know I could."

"But you couldn't. I don't care for you. I—I'm sorry. Now please let me pass."

"Very well." A slower, smouldering rage took possession of him. She could have melted him to tears with a word, but she would not speak the word. "Go. I won't stop you. But——" he reached for his cap and rifle, picked up the bayonet from among the broken glass on the floor and fitted it in place—"if you see Herrick to-night, I swear this, I'll kill him." He stood aside.

She never answered, and went out without any further parley or farewell. She heard him following her; and for the first time panic took her. She was afraid for Chan, as she had not been for herself.

On Stephen Avenue she did not dare to run, though her heart was in her throat. Once she looked back hastily. Addison still followed her. He was carrying the rifle under his loose greatcoat. There were numerous pedestrians abroad, indifferent folk who saw only a young woman in a hurry, and at a distance a young man. Snow was beginning to fall; every one was hurrying. The street lamps seemed to be surrounded by whirling haloes of white flakes; a white darkness was descending on the city. At the corner of First Street a young man, just stepping out of the hotel entrance, paused to turn up his coat collar; Lesley almost ran into him. He stepped forward to halt her.

"Good evening—Lesley——" She went straight by, and sheer terror choked her when she tried to answer. The mere unexpected sight of Chan Herrick divided her between a desire to scream and to faint. Wherefore she did neither, but fairly broke and ran, with

his call in her ears. He took an undecided step after her, shrugged his shoulders, and turned back into the hotel. She had cut him dead, and it was beyond him to find a reason; moreover he had forgotten to get any cigarettes. Which was, perhaps, fortunate; as also, that she had so far distanced Addison he did not recognise Chan.

It was well she lived close to the centre of town, for her strength was almost gone when she got inside the house and leaned against the door to get breath. Mrs. Cranston was in the kitchen; the sittingroom was dark. Lesley went on upstairs, into her own room, and without making a light drew up the blind. Kneeling, she peered out, invisible to one in the street. When she got her eyes clear of the moisture of errant flakes that clung to her lashes, her worst fears were realised. Addison had followed her all the way; and he stood solemnly at attention before the house, somewhat in the shadow of the leafless tree. The light of the opposite street lamp glinted on the tip of the bayonet. He had dropped all common sense, all fear of observation, apparently. In fact, his fancied wrongs had gone to his head. . . .

Lesley prayed, since she dared neither cry nor laugh—that he would go, that Chan might not come, that Mrs. Cranston might not be minded to look out of her own front door. To the end of her life she thought she watched there two hours. She was cramped and stiff when she finally rose. . . . He did go at last. . . . Actually, it was hardly half an hour he kept his watch. The night air brought counsel, and with it clearheadedness. Lesley sat on the floor and gave way to her feelings, and then began to pack.

Chan went to bed that night with a grievance.

Addison could never exactly account for the rest of the evening, and did not too earnestly try.

CHAPTER XVIII

ELECTION week rushed busily on to its crisis, found its verdict, and passed. For all the noise and clamour of it, no important changes were wrought. The Government's majority was lessened, but not dangerously so. None but lesser lights went down to defeat. Geers got in—amid much acclamation, congratulation and a torchlight procession. Folsom also was returned for the second division of the city, and had a rival procession. There were a number of barroom fights on the night itself; and triumphant editorials in the newspapers of both sides the next day. Every one, in fact, seemed to be happy.

Every one, perhaps, but Chan Herrick. He could not have named the cause of his discontent, but he felt a strange sense of disillusion and futility; the disillusion of seeing an empty theatre after the performance. He put it down to fatigue and the effect of a late supper and too many cigars. He missed the stimulus of the fight.

And Lesley was a disquieting image in the background of his thoughts. He had had no time to find her and ask the cause of her curious behaviour, or at least he thought he had no time. And yet he did not forget; and a slight unexplained and unforgotten is more likely to grow than to diminish in significance. This was the third time she had struck at him in the dark of his happy ignorance of any offence. Who could understand a woman? He, or any man, might, if an enquiry were pressed; but he and most men prefer to let the cards lie as they fall. It may be

one secret of man's greater achievement; a thing done is done, and matters unproved are more worthy of attention. To-morrow is always a new day. Yet Chan felt a loss, was for the first time aware of the estrangement that had been growing between him and Lesley; and would gladly have had back the thing that was gone. Wherefore he vindicated his sex and went in search of yesterday.

And Lesley also was gone.

Mrs. Cranston gave him the fact smilingly, and could not remember Lesley's new address, nor if there was a telephone. She promised to find it for him when he came again. He had a *mauvais quart d'heure* with Amy. She had never bored him till then; he thought her stupidity—in everything but her own arts—rather naïf; he had not got past the exploring stage of the affair. She had; she was taking possession, tightening her green withes, not tentatively, but calmly. He began his retreat from Moscow that day. It was his first retreat of the kind, be it said. Admitting experiences with other women (he was near thirty, to say which is to say enough), they had not been exactly like Amy. This, to repeat, if anything must be admitted at all. The power of convention can so nearly obliterate stubborn fact that a historian of human nature is at an immense disadvantage in making any "Portrait of a Young Man." For all polite purposes the Queen of Spain still has no legs.

"Why, Lesley moved uptown three days ago," said Amy cheerfully. "I should have thought she'd have let you know, but I told you she's queer. And then she's been kind of taken up with that Mr. Addison. He telephoned every day, sometimes twice." Amy had got Jack Addison's name at last, overhearing it, but by great good fortune she knew absolutely no more of him than that.

"It serves you right," she continued playfully, "you've not been here for—a whole—week." She pretended to box his ears, and he choked down an unreasonable anger.

"Who did you say? Addison?"

"Yes, the one that's had a crush on her for so long, you know. But tell me, you naughty boy, what've you been doing?"

"Oh, a great many things," said Chan vaguely. "And I have got to go and do some more of them now. 'Bye—dear."

"Are you coming to-morrow night? I'll be so lonesome!"

"To-morrow? No, Ross wants me."

"Then the next?" inexorably. It was like a wardress letting out his chain link by link, but never loosing her hold on it. Some wave of feeling, masculine shame at sight of his puerile bonds, surged up in him; there was a brackish flavour in his throat, and his face burned darkly.

"I don't know," he said gently. "I will see; but I am very, very busy, Amy." He took her hands from his shoulders and kissed them as a peace offering, mechanically. Her fingernails, cut to a claw-like point, offended his eye. She wore a turquoise ring on her forefinger and the setting was brassy. He had never before closely observed the details of her appearance.—If he had cared for her at all he never would have noticed.—Her wrists were thick; her ears were not dainty. Below the powder line on her neck the skin was sallow. And her eyes were so empty of intelligence she might have stood as a symbol of—what she was to him. He wondered she could not read his mind, know him for a cad. And if even she had the right to think him a cad——

He simply had to get away, to breathe, and so he

went. The sitting-room, that had once been inviting in a homely fashion, looked hideous and cheap. Lesley had made its atmosphere. But instead of finding Lesley, he had got further than ever from her. There was no possibility of doubt she had always appraised Amy at her true value. He recalled her sudden flight upstairs the first night he had called. In her quality of spectator he was not at all prepared to face her for a few days after that wrenching adjustment he had just made, of himself with himself. It is not human to seek out a witness to one's idiocy. And while an occasional humiliation may be good for the soul, to be convicted of a lack of taste therewith is salt in the wound.

He dined with Ross the next night, staying uptown purposely that he might go home too late to be caught by telephone, or signalled from the neighbouring porch. It occurred to him that he was tired of his lodgings, and might move shortly. But it was not that they discussed.

"I suppose things will seem a bit tame for a while," said Ross. "And since our street-car project has fallen through, I can quite understand you feel disappointed." He had read Chan's moody looks readily enough.

"No, that's all right," said Chan hastily.

"It has to be," smiled Ross. "But my plans haven't changed so greatly as you naturally think. And I need you quite as much as ever, if you are willing."

Chan brightened. "Don't be an ass," he said affectionately. "Have I got any one else in the world to do anything for?"

"You might have soon," meditated Ross. "Thirty is a good age to marry. But that won't interfere——"

"It certainly won't," agreed Chan crisply.

"There are some very delightful girls here," pursued

Ross, with the utmost outward seriousness. "You ought to come out and meet them, not have them waste their sweetness on a dried misogynist like me. I can arrange . . ."

"No girls—no women, thanks just the same. I'm through——" He paused abruptly.

"Again?"

"If you would just go to hell," suggested Chan kindly.

"Give me time," said Ross, chuckling. "That was a bow at a venture, but I've evidently missed something of late. And, not in the least apropos, I have often meant to ask you if you met that charming girl next door?"

"Lesley Johns? Long ago." He looked strangely relieved, which his uncle by no means missed. "She is charming. If you hadn't been so everlastingly busy, I'd have had you meet her."

"I should really like to. There was something about her reminded me—she looked like an individual. It's a mistake to be born a woman, I've often thought. Those sensitive, independent ones; I'm afraid the world isn't made for them." He was thinking aloud, his eyes remote, his handsome, ascetic features taking on an expression Chan knew well. At such times Ross looked singularly young, though worn and ennuyé—like a young man whom life has beaten in some secret manner. His grey hair seemed premature; there was no hint of middle-age in his well-knit, easy frame, nor, curious detail, in his nervous brown hands.

"No," he said, rousing at length, "on the whole, I don't think our boasted chivalry has done much for women. We've driven a hard bargain for it . . . and then seldom stuck to our bargain. But I'd like to meet Miss Johns. And that wasn't what I started to talk

about either. You know I had raised a lot of money for the street-car business. It's on my hands now. I wired to the men who subscribed it, releasing them, and of course apologising. Some of them have withdrawn. The others want theirs reinvested. They believe in this country, and they want me to act as their financial agent. I will if you'll help me. I can't be here all the time. You can leave the Belle Claire if you like; in fact, you will probably have to. It's no joke disposing of half a million prudently, and it's up to us to do it as quickly as possible, and then watch it afterward. I've bought the Chatfield ranch too, and you might keep an eye on that for me. . . . I think an office building here, to cost nearly two hundred thousand, ought to be a good investment. What do you think?" They spent the evening talking money, and Chan was caught again, his threatening boredom extinct as the dodo.

As ambassador from Ross, he forgot his constraint about speaking to Lesley, found out her new abode, and telephoned. And she greeted him with a soothing warmth; her high sweet voice held a ghost of laughter in it even over the deadening wire.

"Oh, it's you," she cried. "How are you? yes, I moved; yes, I like it quite well here."

"Why didn't you tell me you were going?" he asked. Why had she not? She remembered instantly how she had meant to, and Amy's entrance—the pin—all that had put it out of her mind. He caught the constraint of her answer.

"I—I forgot; I was going to—but I didn't see you—anyway, it isn't far," she said.

"No, that's true. Lesley, can you lunch with me on Sunday—with me and Ross? He wants to meet you."

"I'm going home over Sunday, to see Dick," she

was obliged to answer truthfully. All her arrangements were made.

"Well, then, some other day." He could not name a day without first asking Ross. "I should like to bring him to call."

"I can't have callers," she said, distressed. If it had been only Chan—but she had seen Whittemore, and realised she could not, on first sight, treat him with any such informality as she might his nephew. It was not that he would be anything but agreeable, in any circumstances; simply he was not a boy, a young man; it would be incongruous, and she would feel ill at ease. Such straitened Bohemianism as Chan, with the facility of his age, might find amusing, would never suit Ross. She wanted to meet him, but not at such a disadvantage.

"Some other time, then," repeated Chan politely; but the note of withdrawal was perceptible to her. After all, she must have meant to snub him. She had cut him dead on the street; she had moved without saying a word to him; and she did not want him to call.

But she was unable to say what she felt—"Can't you understand it wouldn't amuse a man like your uncle to sit on the edge of a converted bed and talk polite nothings to a gauche girl?" That was her exasperated thought. She said instead:

"Yes, please, some other time—telephone me again."

And she went upstairs with a desolate feeling and surveyed her room, her home. It was a large and pleasant room, and Hilda Brewer's chaperonage would be enough to regularise a call from an old friend, but Whittemore—"He *would* sit on the bed," she reflected dismally, "and insist on me having the chair; and Chan would be obliged to perch on a

trunk, and Hilda would have no place to rest the sole of her foot unless she stayed with us also; and everybody would want to scream with boredom." So she sat with her head in her hands, dishevelled her smooth hair and feeling desolate, until Hilda came upstairs and handed her a letter.

There was no comfort in the letter; it was the latest of a dozen from Jack Addison. All the others were already destroyed. She read this with the same mingled emotions of shrinking fascination and compunction and weariness that the others had evoked. He had written so much because she would not answer the telephone at the office unless a name were given, and that name not his; Hilda had brought the letter from the office, whence Lesley had come early.

It was painful to have a man put his whole heart on paper, to be handed in by a careless postman, as he did. If it had a touch of sweetness also, she dared not acknowledge that; yet she understood him too well. She might have written such words. . . . He wrote with unexpected grace and fire. Perhaps his Spanish blood had brought him eloquence. She had not known his mother had been Spanish—Californian—until he pleaded it in extenuation. To make his mother plead for him—after all, he must care. That letter was the hardest to burn. His regrets, his repentance, moved her less. They were idle; all regrets were idle, a luxury she could not afford herself. And yet it was not his loving, but the uselessness of it, plucked at some sympathetic chord in her. If what she had seen was love, it was hardly worth suffering for. She wanted no more of the clamorous, greedy, dragged thing. This by fits and starts; all her plans were scattered, her emotions a dusty chaos; and she lived by the day, by the hour.

Sometimes she wondered if Addison were keeping

her money purposely, as a last resort to wring forgiveness from her, since he never mentioned it. He did not deserve that. The money was invested, with his own, and he knew it was quite safe and would ultimately bring a profit. She did not speak of it herself, and he thought no more of it.

Then, after he had lapsed into silence, they met by chance on the street. He gave her a glance of checked eagerness and patent submission, waiting to see if she would speak; and she felt compelled to a greeting by his silence.

"May I walk with you?" he asked.

"I suppose so, if you won't bother me," she replied indifferently.

"Do you hate me?"

"No," she said calmly. "I just would rather not see you any more." He winced; but he was tamed to her moods once more; he could not dare again.

"It's coming to me," he admitted. "I told you I took things seriously, but I was mad—I wasn't myself——"

"Don't let's talk about it."

"I wanted you to know that I'm sorry."

She shrugged. "Very well. That's all, isn't it?"

"No. If ever I can do anything to prove that I'm sorry, you may ask it of me; I'll do it. I should feel better if you would, some day. I wanted to say that. You're the only woman I—— Well, I'm not a beast."

"No, of course not." But she did not look at him, nor seem to care. He had only tried to murder her.

"Will you, then? If ever I can do anything?"

"Perhaps," she said. The only thing she could think of asking she could not, because of its association; and he did not offer it. Besides, her need

of money was not so imperative. Cresswell had given her a small advance in salary, which was just enough.

They were at her office; she nodded to him and left him. And then, with a fine inconsistency, she watched out of the window how he lingered and walked away reluctantly. She had lost something. . . . Some possibility of adventure, some zest of life. Whatever it was, it was gone, definitely, with him. She sat a while, rolling her gloves into a ball, thinking; he had thick, beautiful black hair, and his eyes expressed vitality and pleasure more than any one's she had ever seen. And life was very wasteful and meaningless.

Chan did not call again. Whittemore had left town, but Lesley did not know that for some time. All her temporary *agréments* had been snatched from her at once. She had had one golden summer, and the winter of her discontent, more than the literal season in length, began.

The picture of Addison as she saw him last, protestant and apologetic and unsatisfied, but departing, remained as a kind of allegory.

CHAPTER XIX

A YEAR after the collapse of his street railway scheme, Whittemore was in Montreal. He had to come to Montreal sometimes, to still a vague *Sehnsucht* which only the homeless man knows. Yet he found if he stayed too long the sickness came back with doubled force; he missed too consciously what Montreal could no longer supply. That was one reason he had decided practically to live in the Northwest; that, and to be near Chan. He had not altered the decision, though he had not managed to keep it to the letter. What with one trip to London via New York, and a California interval for the sake of his health, he had not been in Alberta more than six months of the intervening time.

He was in Montreal on business, as well as for the lingering love he bore the city where he was born and which held the dust of his parents and others he had cared for. Chan was in charge of affairs in the West, giving excellent satisfaction to both parties. Chan had almost as much work as he could do, which is a good thing for a young man, and was learning judgment in financial matters very fast. There was now an office, as well as the Chatfield ranch, for him to look after; and he was considered a decidedly rising—and eligible—young man. Whittemore had spent most of the autumn on the ranch with him, shooting a few ducks and motoring to town every day.

Whittemore had come East in November, meaning to go back for Christmas, but had failed of that design, and Christmas was long past. As business be-

came dormant in midwinter, the need was not urgent. However, he thought to go before spring, if only to escape from his old friends, who were enmeshing him in kindness.

The immediate net was baited with a dinner Lady Colvin was giving, an "informal" dinner with a score of guests who would go on to the Westmount Country Club for a snowshoe dance. At least, the dance was arranged by an exclusive snowshoeing club, a circle within a circle; the Country Club as a setting by no means indicated the summer solstice. Montreal loves the snow, or makes a virtue of necessity and crowns it with a winter carnival.

Whittemore did not love the snow, nor pretend to. He would have been glad of an excuse from the dinner at the last moment, but politeness was one of his ruling passions. His throat had been unusually troublesome ever since his attack of grippe in Banff over a year before, and this night he could hardly speak. He made an appointment with his doctor for an examination the next day, before muffling himself to the ears and taking a closed carriage, all of which precautions he detested.

Sir George Colvin, who had got his knighthood for being president of a large banking corporation, subscribing handsomely to party funds and University foundations, and acting on committees to entertain peripatetic minor royalties, had a big house on Pine Avenue. The awning and red carpet prepared one tactfully for the solid luxury of the English entrance hall, where a hardwood log burned behind a leather-cushioned club fender; and the almost more-than-Oriental splendour of the drawing-room—Victorian prism chandeliers and Persian rugs and a Holbein over an Italian marble mantel, but the whole cunningly composed by the best decorating talent money

could employ. There was loot, indeed, trove of the marauding millionaire of the twentieth century, successor to robber barons and pirate vikings of a ruder age; but a modest magnificence is not necessarily in bad taste, however acquired.

Lady Colvin, gorgeously dowdy in white lace and pearls—a common weakness of large women—gave Ross both hands and forgot her ultra-English accent for something more homespun and Canadian. She thought Ross romantic in appearance, and sometimes wished in her heart that Sir George could show such a figure.

“Now our party is complete,” she said. “Look about and tell me whom you do not know. It is so awkward introducing people who have met before, don’t you think?”

“Whom I do not know?” He surveyed the group at the far end of the long drawingroom. “Gertrude, you remind me that I am growing old. I am afraid I know none of these pretty young things. There is a new crop every time I come back—some day I will not dare come back at all.”

“But you do know Mr. Campbell—and Sir John Marston? Well, you shall know the pretty young things, too.” The bending of bright heads as he was passed about the group reminded him of a field of flowers nodding to a breeze. He made no effort to remember their several names; it would not matter; he would never see them again. They had their young cavaliers to match—whom any one of them would gladly have exchanged for himself—fresh, agreeable, immaculate young men with that peculiarly deceptive air of conventional goodness common to Canadian masculinity in “Society.” They were there because Lady Colvin had a debutante daughter. Ross was there because the Honourable James Campbell was a Cabinet

Minister and a house guest of the Colvins; Sir John Marston, another knight of the counting house, for the same reason. Because Lady Colvin was taking her young flock on to the dance, and because she knew her husband and the other three men meant to have their own talk after dinner, there were no other dowagers. With the young people sitting figuratively below the salt, it was almost like two dinner parties side by side. The older men talked politics to a soft accompaniment of girlish laughter and adolescent persiflage from the far end of the table. Ross felt "chilly and grown old." Such nice children, and well mannered. . . . To the poetic substratum of his nature it seemed a hard fate that those fresh young creatures should grow into—well, into Lady Colvins. Of course he liked Gertrude Colvin, but . . . Some things weren't enough; that was all. He was wont to say of his own people in his rarely outspoken moments that they were "*so damned satisfied*," there was no doubt that covered Lady Colvin; and he could see as the artist discerns the bones beneath the flesh, the embryo Lady Colvin in every one of those demure creatures. So he lent an absent ear to his host—who resembled his own Holbein modernised, and was a good fellow—until the nearest "bud" plucked up courage between the roast and the salad to ask after Chan.

"He's in the West, turned into a complete savage," he informed her seriously. "Wears a blanket and feathers. You'd better forget him." She blushed furiously, and showed him her pretty shoulder for the rest of the evening.

"The West's the country for a young man," cut in Sir George briskly. "I tell you, it's progressing. Business in our local branch in your town has just exactly doubled in *eighteen months*. And the clear-

ings for all the banks there stand seventh in the Dominion."

"There is but one Progress, and Finance is its prophet," said Whittemore. "Yes, we must admit that they are growing."

"Growing away from us," interposed Campbell. "You had a narrow squeak last election, I believe."

"Not very, but a noticeable reaction," said Whittemore. "It would serve you right if you did lose; you never try to do anything for the West. You've alienated British Columbia completely by playing up to Downing Street on the Japanese question; you Shylocked Alberta on her public lands; and you bleed them all white with your tariff for the sake of the Eastern manufacturer. The tariff doesn't help the West, and you don't try to help them to a market abroad. If they kick you all out some day and trade the devil they do know for the devil they don't know, you need not be surprised. It's over ten years since the Liberal Government got in on the strength of promises of tariff reduction, and except for British Preference on things we mostly don't want anyway, not an iota of that promise has been kept."

"Our manufacturers can't afford to compete with the factories of the United States yet," said Marston. "Got to support home industries first."

"Our manufacturers haven't the enterprise to make as good articles," retorted Whittemore, his gently deferential manner and almost inaudible voice robbing the remark of its brutality. "You can get the same raw material if you let down the bars; and as for labour cost, if it is any higher here, why should our young people of Ontario and Quebec go across to work in the New England factories at the shameful wages they get there? And they do. We *need* competition; competition in brains."

"But," said Campbell, "before the Liberal Government came in our young people were going twice as fast. We couldn't even hold our own in population."

"Nothing to do with politics; natural result of the enormous expansion, railways and the like, of the United States just after the Civil War. It began to slacken naturally and the tide turned slowly when the best of their Western land was taken and we were driven, by sheer threat of disruption, to build at least one railway of our own. Our party has been the gnat on the bull's horn. We'll have to make good pretty soon; there's a kind of subconscious discontent breeding. The people don't know what ails them exactly, but I suspect they are rather sick of hearing Aristides call himself the Just."

"You grant us nothing," smiled Campbell.

"Yes, I do," said Whittemore thoughtfully. "I grant us one heaven-born politician, a natural leader and diplomat—who never had quite run his race because of a double handicap of blood and religion. I grant us almost another Disraeli. But we've need also of a Bright and a Cobden. Not much to ask," he smiled.

"I should say he had run his race, and won it," said Campbell. Whittemore only smiled again; this touched one secret conviction of his he had never shared with any one. "And, by the way, have you seen him lately?"

"The Premier? No, I have not been in Ottawa lately."

"Well, in substance he agrees with you. This is in confidence, of course. He thinks it time the tariff was altered. We are prosperous; we can afford it now. We need——"

"A new battle cry," said Whittemore suavely.

"Well, I'll only say that Washington may be ap-

proached shortly, and the question of Reciprocity revived."

"I don't believe in it," said Sir George suddenly, with shrewd common sense seizing the trader's viewpoint. "Don't believe in involving business in any agreement that may be terminated by a second party and leave us flat, with capital tied up and the outlet closed. It's a sand foundation."

"We've always wanted it, we Canadians," Campbell said.

"We had it once," Colvin reminded him. "And our neighbour pulled the chair from under us while we were at table. Besides, the people don't always want *anything*. Change their minds worse than a woman."

"My dear," Lady Colvin, as became a good wife, always heard what her husband said, "the whole of civilisation depends on the ability of women to stay of one mind all their lives. Nine-tenths of us undertake at the beginning of our lives to do just one thing—launch the next generation. We have to do it more or less in spite of you men, who are always chasing off to the ends of the earth for new scenery and a different kind of work—but the human race is still extant. And our work can't be dropped and taken up again whenever we feel like it."

"To the steadfast sex," said Whittemore, raising his glass amid a chorus of laughter. "Do you believe in Reciprocity?"

"Certainly not with the United States," she said. "I do not think we ought to enter into any alliance with a nation of vulgarians; nor do anything to imperil our relations with England." Like many Canadian women, she had a kind of naive snobbery which passed for patriotism; and then, she was truly grateful. The United States could never have made her a

"Lady," nor could it better a knighthood with a baronetcy. "I usually take George's view on public questions, anyway," she added, smiling.

"Well, I've said, and I repeat," Sir George stated, with a look of honest pride at his spouse, "I don't believe in it."

"Your point is well taken," admitted the Minister. "Don't give it away to the Opposition. And you?" turning to Whittemore. Campbell was called the most noncommittal man in Canada.

"There's a string to it, yes. But anything is better than our hidebound Toryism. Aren't we building on a sand foundation now, with an enormously high tariff artificially sustaining business, in a country where the people have the political machinery at hand to pull the whole thing around our ears in a fit of exasperation, involving us in a common debacle? Those gusts of passion shake every people occasionally. Our neighbors are now watching the pillars tremble with the struggles of their blind Samson. Can't we ever learn? Ah, my rhetoric is running away with me. Tell me, though, is the party secretly committed to this venture?"

"Ask our Disraeli. He was wishing you were present, the other day. We were discussing the West. Is it true that Jonathan Ward is dying?"

"It is some months since I left, and then I had not seen Ward for other months," said Whittemore. "He did not look well last summer." The man they spoke of was Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta—the Honourable Jonathan Ward. The office is purely honorary, a party reward.

"Whom will you put in his place?" asked Sir George, with a meaning look at Campbell. "I knew Ward when we were both twenty-dollar-a-month bank clerks. He went West, cut loose from the grind, made money

so fast he couldn't count it, I've heard. Good man; I'm sorry if he's going." Colvin rather liked referring to the twenty-dollar-a-month period, implying, with the conscious pride of virtue, that he owed his Holbein and his house on Pine Avenue to his own stupendous exertions. In reality, an incredibly aged grandparent had died at a convenient moment and left him a more than comfortable nucleus of his fortune.

"A large question," murmured Whittemore with veiled irony. "We have many rich men out there, and a new crop coming on fast."

"They don't shell out," said Campbell blandly.

"Ross does," said Sir George. But Campbell said no more until after Lady Colvin had gathered her brood and departed, sweeping out on a wave of chiffons, after polite scuffles by the young sprigs for dropped gloves and fans. By prearrangement, the sprigs departed also, bearing their spoil; the butler carried out the last of their atmosphere with the lace and damask cloth. Whittemore, who was not allowed to smoke, and had already strained his throat by talking more than his wont, composed himself to listen, while the other three lit Havanas. He was not thinking of Jonathan Ward, nor of anything that was his, when Campbell returned to the subject.

"Whom should you select as Ward's successor?" he asked, looking even more noncommittal than usual. Ross had always thought Campbell a bit of a bore, with his cat-after-the-canary air. He did not trouble to give the question any consideration.

"I couldn't say; never thought of it."

"You were very generous, as Sir George reminds us."

"Oh, I was interested."

"Would you care for it?"

"Care for what—the Lieutenant-Governorship? I?" A surprised amusement broke over Whittemore's face.

"Yes," repeated Campbell, with a detached air. "In point of fact, the Premier commissioned me to ask you informally. He felt it would give him pleasure to anticipate any such wish of yours."

"It had not entered my head. I am honoured"—he could say no less—"but— A ribbon for my button-hole, no. I have no one to be gratified by the bauble. A man takes those things because it pleases his family, I suppose." Sir George nodded modestly.

"Then you won't?"

"No, with many thanks. But—I will still shell out."

"You were always a lucky devil," said Sir George, "and you were always just that damned cool about it. The rest of us have to hustle for what we get, and be thankful when we get it. If you had done that, you might have been Premier."

"You still over-estimate me," said Whittemore. "I am not sure that I believe there are any might-have-beens; we are all just exactly what we might have been, and certainly nothing less, though a few of us seem more." The dinner was too far advanced for that remark to be quite digested. Whittemore meant it; he knew he could never have been a true leader, lacking alike patience in dealing with fools and the force to drive them. Too fatally had it been proven to him once that he did lack force, that irresistible energy in a crisis which makes defeat negligible.

He listened to the others again with half a mind, looking at the dark ruby of his glass of port, buried in his own thoughts, though politely attentive on the surface. He knew his reflections on the vanity of life were trite, but they swarmed over his mind,

little prying thoughts that let in an unwelcome light. Obscurity and shadows in those secret chambers suited him better; and he did not need to be reminded that he had no one to whom he might carry a "bauble." He tried to imagine how it would seem if there were such a one. Oh, yes, he would have taken the post—if she had cared for it. And she would have cared, almost childishly; she had been a warmly human woman; largely it had been that quick, naïf responsiveness that had . . .

Sir George could not let Whittemore's refusal stand without comment, and worried it on all sides. He had been privy to the idea before the Minister broached it to Whittemore, and was enormously surprised. All he got was a more determined negative, and Whittemore, slightly wearied, returned to his hotel earlier than he might have done.

CHAPTER XX

DR. EDWARDS, Whittemore's physician, also a friend of long standing, had with friendly insistence besought Ross to come for his verdict to St. Jerome's Hospital. It was the doctor's pet institution, and indeed his monument, for since its inception he had been the moving spirit in it. Lately he had achieved a new wing for it, and other wonders, which he declared Ross must see. Probably wanted a subscription, Ross thought kindly, and saw to it that his cheque-book was in his pocket. Dr. Edwards was known for his benevolent extortions on behalf of his work. He had had no time to make a fortune for himself, wherefore he felt licensed to levy on all malefactors of great wealth whom he could charm into range.

The hospital, a stodgy, belated Victorian structure of red brick with too much buff trimming, was not beautiful, Ross thought, as he approached it. That red against the blue winter sky, and the white background of snowy lawn, was rather too much for the unprepared eye. But time might mellow that uncompromising front; and considered in its true light, as a monument, not as a work of art, it was certainly imposing. More than that, it *was*.

"Edwards has got something to show," was Ross's reflection. There was the tangible fruit of a busy life. His own existence struck Ross as sterile and empty. An impulse to action ran through his veins, and was balked for lack of a purpose whereon to expend itself. He mounted the steps.

He felt an old twinge of distaste for the gaunt order of the entrance hall, and the odour of death which some morbid streak in his psychology detected, that scent of disinfectant and flowers which so strangely mingles in the quiet atmosphere of science's battleground. Ross hated death. He did not fear it; he was indifferent to the thought of dying himself; but the irrevocableness of it, in the abstract, made his soul creep.

Dr. Edwards pounced on him then, as he waited in the doctor's private office.

"Ah, you're here! Sorry I was detained—most interesting case, though—oh, I'll spare you! How's the throat? Ah, bad, bad; I can hear, don't have to see it. Shouldn't be out; why didn't you tell me you shouldn't be out? Want an examination first, or will you look us over? Our new wing is splendid, but we need some radium, and the new X-ray apparatus took all our——"

"Just my luck, to come when you need radium," said Ross huskily. "How much?"

"Oh, now, now, I didn't mean——"

"How much, you Æsculapian pirate?"

"Wait till you've thought it over," said Dr. Edwards soothingly, but with an irrepressible gleam of triumph in his eye. "Wait till we've fixed you up, shown you what medical science means to humanity. Come, we'll look over the place; and then I've got Bocock here for the examination. I can't keep up with the specialists in every line, but we've got the best. Bocock can do anything with throats; he's a marvel." Still expatiating on the wonders of modern surgery, which left Ross finally with the impression that, by going about it piecemeal, a really good surgeon should have no difficulty in substituting a new human machine entire, leaving no shred

of the old organism to cause any disturbance, Edwards piloted him down the interminable wide, white corridors, past innumerable screened doors and noiseless nurses who looked neither right nor left. Whittemore even had a look at the gruesome neatness of the main operating room, empty for the moment, and felt obliged to protest he could dispense with the basement and diet kitchens, before they returned to meet Dr. Bocock for a verdict in Dr. Edwards' consulting room.

A white-capped nurse had come in. She sat at a roll-top desk, examining and docketing a pile of charts. She did not turn as they entered, and her slim, white hands fluttered methodically among the papers. Whittemore could not see her face, and forgot about her while Dr. Bocock peered reflectively, with the aid of a cunning maze of tiny mirrors and lights, into his suffering larynx.

"Pretty bad; you've been neglecting it," he said at last. "You ought——" He squinted frowningly at the afflicted region again.

"Operation?" asked Whittemore, when he was permitted to close his mouth. Dr. Bocock looked at Dr. Edwards, who nodded.

"Yes. I see you've had one before."

"Three," said Whittemore patiently. "Another won't matter. Go ahead."

"I shall have to give it twenty-four hours' treatment first. Will you enter the hospital for it?"

"Is it so serious?"

"Oh, no! Only for convenience."

"Then I'd rather not," said Whittemore. The nurse rose and went out, with a crisp sound of starched skirts. Whittemore saw her face. . . .

"No, I'd rather——" He stopped, looking at the door where she had disappeared. Some impression

of brightness had gone with her, a gleam. "Can't I have it at the hotel?" he finished.

"You must have a nurse," said Dr. Bocock decidedly, "because it will need spraying every fifteen minutes for a few hours; and then you won't be able to speak the first day."

"Very well; bring a nurse. . . . That is, if it's all right. I've a suite at the Place Viger——"

"My dear chap," said Edwards, "nurses go wherever they're told."

"I see. When shall I expect you?"

They fixed an hour for the next morning. After Dr. Bocock had swabbed his throat with some unpleasant medicament that annoyed almost as much as it relieved him, Whittemore lingered purposely. He waited for a private word with Dr. Edwards, and got it.

"I'm going to make a strange request of you," he said, "and I shall have to trust you not to misunderstand. I should like to have the nurse who just went out, to attend me."

"Who? Which one?" Edwards looked blankly amazed.

"She was at the desk when we came in. She just went out."

"Nurse Conway? Oh, hang it, that's my own nurse; I can't give you her. She remembers everything I forget. Take another; we've got all kinds and sizes."

So it was Eileen—and she had not changed her name.

"Miss Conway—yes."

"Do you know her?" asked Edwards, with marked curiosity.

"Not exactly. I know her friends. That's the only reason I can offer, but I give you my word. . . ."

"Never mind; never mind." Dr. Edwards remembered the radium. Also he knew Ross. "Take her. She's a jewel. So you know something of her! . . . Perhaps you know she's a kind of mystery, a sphinx. And a machine; perfect nurse on that account; no more feeling than my lancet. How do you account for it, with that face, that hair?"

"I'm afraid I can't account for it," said Whittemore. "And if you wouldn't mind not mentioning to her . . ."

"Of course not," said Dr. Edwards, with a frank stare, running his hand through his hair. "Anything you say; sure it's all right. So you know her! By Jove!"

"But I don't know her," Whittemore repeated. Dr. Edwards merely grinned and shook his head.

Whittemore might have added that it was because he wanted to know her, for he had not forgotten a word nor a gesture of hers, and had thought of her oftener than ever he knew. He imagined her scornful refusal to attend him should she guess. She would not understand; would think him merely cheaply inquisitive. Well, he did not understand himself, except that it was an echo of his own question and Burrage's answer—"What does become of 'em?"—which was not an answer. To know that she was a nurse at St. Jerome's was not enough; what had become of *her*? Had she lived or died, the girl he had seen turn on life with such a mad resentment that she would have silenced that jeering force by sheer annihilation? Since chance had given him an opportunity to observe, he meant to take it. He had sometimes hoped he might see her again, sooner or later.

It was for her he waited at the appointed hour next morning. Dr. Edwards, being notorious for in-

attention to small matters, almost forgot to bring her, and once there quite forgot to watch their meeting. But he brought her. She bowed to Whittemore, and effaced herself while the two doctors hailed their victim; but Whittemore, though he could not very well turn and scrutinise her, was yet aware, more by feeling than hearing, of how she softly slipped out of her furred coat and little trim hat, behind him at the mantel mirror. And when they set briskly to work, she was at his elbow, holding the small bloody sponges, the basin, and shining, curious knives. While Bocock delicately explored his throat with the edged steel, Whittemore's mind was so intent on Eileen that he barely felt the brief, keen pain. A vestal presiding at a sacrifice, he thought, and withdrew the phrase immediately, for she moved so he could see her clearly, and there was no devotion in her attitude, nothing but a mechanical concentration. She was a nurse by chance, and a good one by virtue of some thoroughbred quality in her; that was all. The lack of expression on a face so mobile and richly coloured by nature could not but seem deliberate; he saw why Edwards had called her a sphinx. Something in her had gone to sleep, he concluded, when the operation was over and she was taking Dr. Bocock's directions about the spraying, and how the patient's temperature must be watched. She looked bored, like a child stupefied by the fatigues of an over-long school-day. Then she spoke.

"Yes, doctor, I understand." She had not schooled her voice to match her face! Whittemore had never heard it before save under a stress of anguish that must have altered it. It was a sweet voice, a little blurred, a mezzo-contralto, he guessed, if she should sing. Probably she did sing. Whittemore had a keen ear. "Yes," she repeated patiently, "I will." That

young, warm, eager voice, with the imperious upward inflection—that was Eileen!

“Very well,” said Dr. Bocock briskly. “Now, Mr. Whittemore, since we’ve silenced you, we’ll go. And don’t answer back to the nurse, because you can’t.” Laughing heartily, he departed, and Dr. Edwards, after a final handshake with him.

Eileen had carried the basin away, and he heard her washing up in the bathroom. Then she came back; Whittemore shifted in his big wing chair to watch her, though he seemed to be looking out of the window at the snowy roofs across the street sparkling in the sun. She put a writing pad at his elbow, methodically arranged the books and papers on the table; her eyes rested a moment thoughtfully on a flat bowl of pansies. It was for her eyes to rest on that Whittemore had ordered them. They looked foreign in a hotel sitting-room, with no other sign of any but a masculine occupant. There were books and papers, a big oak box for cigarettes, a stubby brier pipe which Ross used only when on hunting trips but always carried, a writing portfolio, and a few photographs. There was design in the photographs. One of them, a large one, showed himself and Chan mounted, by the corral at the Chatfield ranch. It had been taken the summer before. She did not seem to see it at first, and then paused, poised, pressing her finger-tips on the table so the nails whitened, her fixed gaze seeming to absorb the picture. In that second of silence he fancied he could hear her pulses check and leap. Then she turned away, opened her small handbag and took out a book and a handkerchief, and sat down with the deliberate grace which is so rare in a woman of small stature. The handkerchief gave out a faint odour of roses as she crushed it into her pocket.

"If you want anything," she said, "please write it. It's just as well you should keep as quiet as possible." He nodded, and she opened her book.

He thought she had grown thinner, but it might have been only her close-belted uniform, with the straight white collar and austere cap. She was very slight, anyway. She did not look worn nor faded; a strong morning light beat on her, and showed her skin flawless against the dark, ruddy hair and the starched collar.

Of course, she was very young, but there was that in her brilliance that seemed to defy accidents and externals. Her uniform was equally incongruous and becoming; her fine ankles looked the more dainty above her flat-heeled shoes. She wore silk stockings; that, and the rose-scented handkerchief, struck him as a discovery of her character.

While she read, the eloquent immobility of her face remained, and even when she lowered the book a trifle and, without raising her head, ceased to read, the word was not unfitting. Yet a change came; some secret purpose defined itself, a steady determination. No, she was not asleep after all, only waiting. There was something she wanted, would have, if an obstinate and passionate will could bring it to pass. What was it? She was looking at the photograph again, through her lashes, just as he was watching her. He turned to regard her directly.

She started. "Can I do something for you?"

He scribbled on the pad. "Yes. I want to talk to you."

"I'm sorry, but you can't," she answered, smiling for the first time, not at him but at the written words. Had she known it, that smile was her best disguise. In it the woman vanished, and Eileen recaptured girlhood; mischief welled up in her sea-

blue eyes, and a little half-moon depression showed in her cheek.

"Then," he wrote again, "I want you to talk to me. I can not bear silence, and that will be next best to hearing myself talk." He did not want to alarm her with excessive gallantry. She nodded.

"It is tiresome, I know. But what shall I talk about?"

"Anything," he scribbled. "Your book."

Peau
"This?" she held it up. He had already seen the title; it was Balzac's "Peu de Chagrin," in the original. "I've only begun it, and I go slowly because I'm still learning French. Do you want me to criticise it?" He nodded now. "I was wondering if Balzac meant it for an allegory of life itself. I suppose so; we've only so much allotted us, only so many possibilities, a certain term of years, and if to wish were to accomplish, we should use it all up just so, without thinking. And what we do is only our wishes put into action. And at the end it's all gone; we hold nothing in our hands. I think—oh, I don't believe I can go on talking to myself; it's 'no' canny.'"

"Then just speak to me sometimes," he wrote craftily. "Don't bother to keep it up steadily."

"You'll only have to wait until to-morrow," she protested, yet yielded. "Now I must spray your throat." Very deftly she tipped back his head. There was vitality in her very finger-tips. He felt in them the reason she had not succumbed, gone down. What she felt was that his hair was singularly thick and soft to touch, which one does not expect of grey hair. She wondered just how old he was, why it was grey, who he was.

Again her eyes strayed to his books, when she returned from sterilising the atomiser. There was the

English Review, the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, even the *Corriere della Sera*, and volumes of memoirs and essays, privately bound. It made her share his regret that he could not talk; it was true that she could sympathise with one enforced to silence. For more than a long year her mind and soul, awakened by a shock that had first stunned, had clamoured within her for knowledge and expression. Superficialities irritated her, and she had not been able to afford any intimacies. She wanted to understand; she desired a searchlight on the dark places of the spirit wherethrough she had passed; she could have screamed questions at the whole world, if she had not known it would only think her mad. Whittemore looked clever; yes, even to her mistrustful eye, he looked kind. She thought she knew the limits of kindness—self-interest. But sometimes she withdrew that generalisation; for one thing, she remembered Lesley; and there was an old French-Canadian woman, who probably had Indian blood in her, who had been kind even to tears, when Eileen most needed it. Much bitterness had been melted in those tears. Eileen's mother may have wept—but at a distance! Eileen had nothing of her own mother's, but she had a little, tarnished silver crucifix on a worn ribbon, given her by Madame LeSueur. She kept it, not because it had any religious significance for her, but because it had been pressed into her clasp in an hour of such anguish and terror that she had felt as if she held to life itself but by the grip of Philomene LeSueur's hard hands.

It was not of that she was thinking now, for by fixed purpose she never thought of it at all if she could help. She remembered Madame LeSueur and sometimes spent her afternoon off with her, but the rest she resolutely put behind her. She knew her

handicap heavy enough without keeping that memory fresh.

Whittemore got little more from her that afternoon, though she remembered to speak at intervals, and he used up a good many sheets of the writing pad to keep her from feeling self-conscious. But the next day, when he was able to speak, he used all his skill and charm to draw her out, and felt reasonably rewarded at the end of it. He did not know if he was surprised to find her smile had not belied her; she was still no more than a girl by flashes. There was a hard and bitter rind about her, but within her spirit was still hot and generous—but how she had bitted and curbed it!

"Is it impertinent," he enquired, "to ask why you are a nurse? Is nursing a vocation?"

"It's bread and butter," she said briefly, and withdrew into her shell, but added with an elusive flash of mischief: "Canadian girls always seem to go in for nursing; lack of originality, I dare say."

"But you don't need French for it," he suggested tentatively.

"A woman needs everything she can get," was her answer, and added quickly: "It is very useful in Quebec, of course."

"Yes, I forgot." And he saw that her eyes had strayed again to the picture of the ranch. "Do you like that?" he asked.

"Yes. I—have lived in Alberta."

"Have you? Perhaps you will go back some day. It has possibilities."

"Perhaps." He saw the brooding purpose gleam in her eyes again. A wildly fantastic idea leaped into his brain. It was so grotesquely suitable as a rounding out of his life, that it inevitably occurred to him as an accomplishment on which to expend that

impulse for action which Edwards' achievements had waked in him. It was indeed quite diabolically apropos. Eileen smiled, the corners of her mouth curling delicately, with an irony so fine it became her beauty. "If I thought they'd kill a fatted steer for me," she said, "I might. A calf isn't enough of a temptation. There are other places to go."

"Do you want to travel?"

"Oh, I suppose so." And by way of silencing him, she sprayed his throat with great thoroughness, though it lacked five minutes of the allotted time. "There, that's the last time," she said. "To-morrow you can do all that is necessary yourself."

He anathematised his own stupidity. This was something he should have arranged with Dr. Edwards. He must redeem the mistake as best he could.

"You are not coming to-morrow?"

"No, you will not need me, and Dr. Edwards does."

"Would it be unprofessional," he asked, with a deference she could not mistake, "for you to continue an acquaintance with me? I should like to see you again. Perhaps all your patients bore you with that request; I do not mean to be tiresome. I shall be in Montreal about two weeks longer, and may be back later."

She reckoned the matter in her head, as coolly as if it were an account, possible profit and loss. It was to that end she had drilled herself.

"I have one afternoon and evening a week off," she said, after an almost imperceptible pause. "I am just past being a probationer, you know; it is only by chance that I am on your case, because Dr. Edwards took a fancy to me, and had me in his office, and he decided that I should attend you. I suppose you are an old friend of his?" Whittemore assented.

"So if you cared—a week from this evening I shall be free." She did not feel suspicious of him, only because she thought herself hardened against all contingencies.

"I believe there is opera on this month," he said. "Do you care for music?" It was a happy thought, as he could see at once.

"I should like it very much," she said formally.

"I will get tickets, then," he said. When she was going, he only bowed, and did not offer to shake hands.

But the next day he bewildered Dr. Edwards still more with an additional request, trepanning him to dinner for the especial purpose.

"I want you," he said, "to tell Miss Conway casually that I am a more or less respectable and responsible person—tell her what you know of me. I have asked her to the opera, and in justice she ought to know whether I'm a common burglar or a regular M. P. Will you? I make a point of it, a favour to me."

"Why, yes, yes, certainly, if you put it that way. Ross, you always had good taste; by gad, you still have! But isn't this a little out of your line?"

"Yes, it is," said Whittemore deliberately. "Put it down that I'm in my dotage—but don't think anything else."

CHAPTER XXI

WAITING for Eileen on the appointed evening, in the small reception-room of the nurses' home, Whittemore examined his own motives with almost distinterested curiosity. It was long since he had paid any but the most formal courtesies to a woman, except two or three matrons he had known since childhood, whom he now seldom saw. People had ceased to speculate jestingly in his presence why he did not marry; women had given him up as invulnerable. Even the young and innocent Dianas, sweet scalp hunters who loved conquest with the ardour of inexperience, fought shy of him after one or two encounters. He did not laugh at them; he took them seriously, whereupon they digged pits for themselves with essays of worldly and learned conversation, and fell into them in hopeless confusion. The "buds" who were daughters of his old friends, with whom he had played in the nursery, looked on him as a supernumerary uncle, and confidently expected flowers and birthday gifts from abroad. He had lost his place in a stratified world, as an unmarried man with a sense of humour does after forty; he was tagged "unattached."

He did not think of women in the present tense. In Rousseau's phrase, he did not see women, he remembered them. If he played with romantic fancies, it evoked only a bevy of fair ghosts, with the melancholy of old days veiling their gaiety like a cloud; "dear, dead women . . ."

It was that singular surrender to time and change

that Chan sometimes wondered over, watching Ross unawares; a surrender scarcely demanded as yet even by those implacable twin powers themselves. Ross had laid aside the sword of youth, hung it on some unknown altar.

Nor had he taken it down for Eileen Conway. But he seemed to see her entering his own passionless place, abdicating the sun for the grey fields of Dis. It is a lonely land, and cold. There was no one there who called for her. She had not forfeited the sun, but only a small corner of earth. Let her pay whatever forfeit she must, of struggle and sorrow and even penitence; but pay it and live. It was then that again that fantastic thought came to him. . . . If she had nothing she could pay but youth, could he not lend her the price, and save those lovely years?

Whereupon he came back to actualities with a pleasant shock, for Eileen was standing before him holding out her cloak. She wore a white net gown, out of date, but still simple and becoming. It was trainless, and very evidently belonged to the days before the deluge. Her copper-lighted hair was in a Greek knot twisted with a green and silver fillet, and her profile justified it. She was almost too pretty, he thought, and searched for a saving fault. With a certain satisfaction he noted while he slipped her cloak about her that her slim shoulder blades were not quite perfection. They drooped, giving her a pathetic air, like a tired little girl who forgets to stand correctly. And she had a mole on her left arm. The arm was thin, with delicately pointed elbows. Standing immediately by her, and taller by a head, he perceived these things for the first time, and also that she was smaller than her light carriage led one to think.

When she drew the hood of her cloak over her hair she looked smaller still. The blackness of her brows was pencilled on; he liked her for that femininity. They were irregular; the brow above the half-moon dimpled cheek was the higher. He began to feel as if he knew her now.

"If you will buckle my carriage boots, please," she said. Her touch of imperiousness was good. So were her ankles. But she looked surprised when they were ushered into a parterre box. The Fanshawes had lent it to Ross. With "Butterfly" scheduled for the next night, and "Thais" the night before, they had felt unequal to "Tosca." There was a chance irony in "Tosca." Whittemore settled himself in the shadow to watch Eileen, not the stage. She faced the glare with indifference. Of the curious eyes that focussed on her she seemed serenely unconscious. In fact, she was unconscious; to that also it had been necessary to school herself. She must never be aware.

Nietzsche did well to fear pity; it is the most dangerous of sentiments. It is stronger than strength, and can prevail over wisdom herself. Yet without it strength is vain and wisdom fruitless. It is the dew of life. Lacking it, the human heart becomes an arid waste.

Whittemore may have known that theoretically; he knew a great deal too much theoretically, and a little too much by demonstration. He fancied Eileen was not unlike himself.

The music touched her less than she herself expected. Once she had loved music childishly; now she listened critically. In the next box a high-nosed, hard-eyed dowager sniffed audibly for fifteen minutes, and strangled an over-wrought sob into her handkerchief when the stabbing scene was reached.

Eileen's eyes were dry. The story seemed artificial. She did not care what the heroine suffered. Suffering seemed stupid to her, after all she had been through. Over-much pain is an opiate. Besides, the theatre always makes its greatest appeal to the inexperienced.

"So silly," she murmured. "People, you know. They—they make such messes, and there isn't ever any real reason." Yes, she was hard. The curtain went down, so they could talk.

"Real? Oh, as real as anything—'you can't get behind Bishop Berkeley,' as Samuel Butler says," said Ross.

She knit her brows. "No-o; well, I tried to read Berkeley, last winter. I suppose it was funny; I went to the library and asked for a list of great philosophers; then I took the six that headed the list, and read them all in a jumble. I remember Berkeley because he made me feel as if I were trying to bottle a moonbeam; and then I decided he wasn't real because he proved it himself, so I needn't pay any attention to him." It was deliciously incongruous; herself in her little white net frock, and the philosophers.

"Are you so interested in philosophy, then?"

"No," in the same slow, doubtful, detached tone. "I was looking for something."

"But you didn't find it," he supplied. "I know. Philosophy is a game, it isn't a remedy. It has nothing to do with life; it is all a vain attempt to put the ocean into a thimble—the universe into the brain of man. To confront life armed with philosophy is like arguing with a ravenous tiger. One has to act; philosophy is your game of golf after the day's work."

"Then it isn't any good?"

"You want me to commit myself to a philosophy," he warned her.

"Oh!" she said, making a moué of unconscious and comic despair. "There's the orchestra again, just in time to save me. I wonder why opera houses are upholstered in red?"

"You shall have one done in green," he said slyly. But she did not answer, and he withdrew into the shadow and watched her again. Nothing of the tremulous enquiry of man to woman and woman to man troubled the air about them. Not even the music stirred them; it remained on the stage, and they apart. In the last intermission, she turned to him again.

"It's all false, isn't it?" she said. "Music, and poetry, and drama? Childish—nice, thrilling, but not life. Artists probably never grow up. If they listened to the truth, if they didn't keep on believing at fifty what they believe at ten—they couldn't do it, could they? I mean—they pick and choose, and what they don't like they refuse to admit, or if they admit it they dress it up. I think it's life that's long and art that's brief. Art—— Perhaps it is true, too, but it doesn't *go on*—it doesn't work? Does it?"

"The problem of art and realism? Actually I believe they are incompatible, since you insist on being exact. The French have tried seriously to write the truth—the Russians are still trying—and, strictly speaking, they've failed. A magnificent failure, but it can not quite be done. And these new artists who are trying to depict emotions instead of facts are further off still. They can't give us the same emotions tangible things and events do, not even as well as the realists. They can only start us on a guessing match. We've developed a kind of secondary set of emotions—well, if the real ones *could* be in-

duced by art, any one who cared deeply for literature or music or painting would die of emotional exhaustion in middle age."

"I think that's what I meant," she said. "I read 'Anna Karenina' the other day"—strong meat for a child, he thought—"and I could almost smell the fresh-cut hay and feel the sun and breeze when I read the chapter about the mowing, but not quite. And neither did I get sunburned!"

"How did you like Anna?" he asked.

"She was as stupid as she was clever," said Eileen absently. "She gave in."

"She was Russian, of course. Wouldn't you give in?"

"I don't think I should. But of course she had lived quite a lot."

"Do you think it's good to be alive?" The secret idea pricked at him.

"Sometimes. It could be."

"Yes, you should feel that," he said.

"Why me?"

"I imagine," he hazarded, "you have all the capacity for living."

"An appetite, and no dinner?"

"Would you take all your opportunities, if they came?"

"I mean to," very quietly, not to him, but to herself.

"What do you want? Love?"

She drew away, almost as if from a blow.

"No," she said. "By the way, can you tell me who is in the stage box opposite? Such a pretty woman."

"I did not ask out of idle curiosity," he continued. "I can give you everything else. Will you take it?"

He was not precisely aware of forming a resolu-

tion before he spoke; rather that urge for action gripped him suddenly again and spoke for him. He had been damned for inaction once, years before; if he earned a second damnation, it should be for something performed. He could do for Eileen what none could have done for him—give her back her opportunities. (He could not think that it was Harry Garth she mourned for.)

He did not love her, but he pitied her so suddenly and sharply that there was hardly room for any other feeling, save one. He did feel an ironic desire to strike back at fate itself. Because he had once bowed to the iron custom of his little world, he meant to mock it now; to make a bitter jest of it in secret. He did not value it a featherweight; and Eileen had nothing more to lose.

He saw that he had sent her self-control spinning. She doubted her own senses. What did he mean? Guessing was too dangerous; she asked.

"I do not understand."

"I am asking if you will marry me."

Her spangled fan fell to the floor with a tiny clatter; she half rose, and sank back again weakly. The glittering parterre smote at her eyes and blinded her. She decided she was mad. Dr. Edwards had discharged his commission; she knew all about Whittemore's worldly repute and financial circumstances.

"I don't believe it," she said at last, with a shake in her throaty voice. She had not lost her quality of being surprising.

"I know I've done it badly," said Whittemore, picking up her fan and looking with a detached air at the fragile, cheap little trinket before he handed it back to her. She took it mechanically; she was peering at him in the gloom of the box. "I meant it, but I should have given you more time to—to get

acquainted with me. I do mean it. Do not answer now, if you prefer."

"But—but—why?"

"Apparently you don't appreciate yourself," he said quickly, before he had time to think of another implication to the words.

"That isn't a reason," she said, putting a hand to her burning cheek. She was breathing unevenly, he saw a fluttering of her throat.

"You are the only reason I know," he said.

"No, you must tell me." Her voice grew almost harsh; she was going to have something from him she could understand and hold to. She feared most making a fool of herself by misinterpreting him, even though he had been so glaringly explicit; still she could not believe it. "You haven't said you—you—" Love me, she meant. There was a kind of terror in her attitude; and he understood her perfectly.

"I will try to explain. I am not so very young"—she made an involuntary gesture of dismissal of the words. "Not so very young," he repeated deliberately. "I am lonely; I want an intelligent companion, with charm and beauty, some one who will give me an excuse for taking part in life, for buying a house, making plans. . . . An aged and self-conscious sentimentalist, you see. It isn't much to offer a young girl."

"Is—is that all you want?" she insisted.

"My dear," he said, "I want exactly what you seem able to give me. But you *are* young, and I suppose I can't offer enough in return. I certainly can't fulfil a young girl's natural dreams and hopes; all I can promise is that I would be ridiculous and try. It wouldn't be Arcady—it would be—this!" He indicated the box, the entire opera house, making them

significant of the things of which they are the crown and apex. "Do you understand?"

"Yes—oh, yes!" she muttered feverishly. She could not make it seem real.

"Then I can only ask you to think it over. You shall have all the time you want."

"*You* had better take time," she said.

"On the whole," he said, "don't you think I have already taken more time than most?" Certainly, if she were trying to spare him, there was humour in it; she looked such a child, and he never more a man of the world. She swung back to her acquired poise slowly.

"I will marry you," she said, and then was seized with a belated panic that she had not said it sooner. So much for her boasted hardening that it could allow her to hesitate at such a time. She had planned to spend years of effort to create such an opportunity as this; and when it fell into her lap without her even shaking the tree, she must act the fool, and dally with scruples.

"Thank you," he said, as if she had given him a dance. A sweet, sudden crash of the orchestra startled them. Neither had realised that the curtain was up again, the opera progressing. It gave them an excuse for silence. They sat through the remaining act, each wishing it over; the music sawed at Eileen's nerves, her bewildered brain groped after the strange, quiet, grey-haired man, sitting so near but coming no nearer, who had just transformed her air-castles into almost palpable bricks and mortar. Whittemore himself felt the strain. He was glad when they could escape into the cold, dim night, where the stars and the street-lamps struggled together for the city's sleeping soul.

In the carriage again, Eileen sat rigidly in her

corner, so small in her voluminous cloak, waiting for him to claim his new rights. . . . His pity for her made him feel a monster; he knew what she waited for. It was perhaps a morbid sensitiveness on his part, for the expected would have relaxed her nerves, and he was not repugnant to her, neither was her blood frozen with her heart. But he only made some trivial comment on the principal soprano.

"She isn't Tetrzzini, nor Farrar, but she does very well," he said. "You haven't heard them, perhaps?" Eileen's monosyllable told him she had not. "You must, if you care for—oh, the most expensive," he smiled.

"I've always thought I would."

"I'm glad. We—could go to New York for the end of the Season—perhaps you'd rather go abroad. You must tell me to-morrow which you prefer, and how long you want the engagement to be."

"How long should you want?"

"A week?" he hazarded, of purpose, to see if she shrank. She surprised him again.

"Then, a week."

"Shall I write to your parents? Perhaps I can go to see them?"

"No—no. I'll write. They aren't here. I can't bear—discussion. I've always hated it."

"Just as you say." He did not think her parents would object, for the best of reasons, nor did he suppose Eileen would be critical of his behaviour on that point. They were dispensing with a good many of *les convenances*. But he meant to force her to tell a little more of what he already knew, to save future embarrassment. "Did I ever ask you where your parents live?"

She struggled for an answer; told him the truth finally, in spite of the immediate risk. Common sense

warned her it was the only thing to do, to guard her own defences; she must tell no more lies than necessary. She was tense with fright until he answered.

"I wonder I didn't meet them," he said. "I was there all last summer; I thought your name was familiar. Of course I was out on the ranch mostly. Your father is Judge Conway, isn't he? Will you come with me next time I go back?"

"Oh, I want to!" She set her teeth vindictively on the words; she did want to, most of anything in the world. He had unveiled that secret purpose—to go back, and not wearing the white sheet and carrying the candle. It was a pitifully human ambition; he was glad he had read her aright from the first, so he could give her her chance.

Eileen could not sleep that night for a blinding headache. Even her jaws ached, from the terrific nervous repression she had put on herself. She lay awake listening to the gentle breathing of her roommate, looking at the future, which was epitomised in that moment when the glare of the opera house had dazzled and frightened her. The head nurse, not a sentimental person, took her off duty the next morning at sight of her white face and purple shadowed eyes, and she went back to bed, and to sleep finally, and slept twenty-four hours.

A delightful note from Whittemore awaited her, and a box of flowers. She tried to answer it, carrying it about all day in her bodice, not tenderly, but with some subconscious fear of losing it. She could have seen Whittemore in her afternoon hour off for exercise. He was waiting her commands. Instead she hurried downtown in a cab to call on Madame LeSueur. She wanted to tell the old woman her news, to see the effect of it—anything to make it seem real. It was a rash act, but she was driven; and

never before had she so felt her isolation. She had no one, no one in the world but this simple old French-Canadian habitant woman to tell. The thought of writing her news to her parents turned her cold with distaste. Probably they would not believe it either; undoubtedly it would remind them of the past; they would imagine her going to the altar grateful and penitent. Grateful—she, to any man! In that moment she loathed even her future husband. She felt a secret, perverse pleasure in deceiving him. Another reaction, then—why should she see herself in the light of deceiving him? What did his life contain, that he would never reveal to her?

To all this fever and turmoil of her heart Madame LeSueur was like a grateful lavation of cold water. Madame LeSueur remained quite calm; she was pouring Eileen a glass of cordial, and brimmed the glass precisely while the tale was told. Afterward she picked up a piece of knitting, answering, with a smile of content illuminating her dark, weatherbeaten face.

"*C'est bon,*" she said. "A woman needs a husban'. He is not young, no? *Oui*, that is best; a young man is not a good husban'. A husban' is for wear, a lover for ornament. Is it that he is *riche*, also? *Mais*, is it that he knows——"

"No," said Eileen, with a thin, mocking smile. "Why should I tell him?"

"Ah, *pourquoi*? For what has one a confessor, if one is to tell one's husban'? *Non*, one gets absolution; it is enough. A husban' never absolves, *jamais*." Madame LeSueur had always firmly ignored the fact that Eileen was a heretic.

"No, I suppose not," said Eileen. There were two tiny lines between her brows, which smoothed imperceptibly as she watched Madame's clicking needles darting in and out of the bright-coloured wools she

was shaping to a tasselled tuque. She had been rapidly nearing the screaming point on her way down; she left much refreshed.

The visit helped her somehow to see Whittemore the next day. She met him for a hurried tea. It was then she got her final shock of the incredible.

"You said you would be willing to go back to Alberta—at least for a visit," he began, offering her a cigarette in his only lapse into confusion and absent-mindedness.

"Yes," she said. "No, thanks. I'd like to, but they'd put us out." This to the cigarette. They were in a quiet little tea shop, chosen because Eileen had to come in her uniform.

"Pardon—how stupid. Eileen"—he managed her name very naturally, though she had not as yet got herself to call him anything at all—"Eileen, would you care to go back to stay a few years? I have many interests there, and—this depends on you—I've been offered the Lieutenant-Governorship. You know what that means; a lot of tedious social red tape and gold lace of the provincial kind—but rather amusing, for a time. Do you want it? Perhaps you hate Edmonton? Of course we could be away at least half the time, anywhere else you liked."

"Why," she asked, "what has become of the Wards?"

"Ward is dead."

"Oh, I'm so sorry for Mrs. Ward." She had known Mrs. Ward quite well, but the words were only an echo; she did not feel anything at all. How could she? All those people had been utterly dead to her for nearly two years. It occurred to her that Mrs. Ward would bitterly resent giving up her social leadership. Social leadership. . . . *Hers*, if she wanted it? And she did want it, not for its own sake, but

so that she might grind her dainty heel on—the past. . . .

"It would bore you?" she asked tentatively, watching his expression. But he looked much less bored than he had a week before.

"Not at all, if you liked it."

"I think—I should like it." She would be like a swimmer plunging into an icy flood; it would take all her courage, would put in pawn all Whittemore was giving her, himself included; but she had meant it when she said she would take her opportunities.

"That is settled, then. Now, another point. Of course I ought not to ask you this, but after all it is your taste to be considered. You will need—I am ordering—something to put around your neck—oh, no, not a collar," he smiled. "Pearls? Sapphires? Aquamarines? Diamonds?"

"*Diamonds!*" she said, shutting her teeth with a click. "They will understand diamonds!"

Whittemore went to Ottawa that night, and came back the next day, having settled all details of his acceptance of the post he had ten days before rejected.

He tried to persuade Eileen to leave the hospital at once, but she would not. That was because she did not yet believe. No one but Dr. Edwards and the head nurse knew she was going; Dr. Edwards alone knew she was to be married. She wore the magnificent sapphire ring Whittemore gave her with the collet inside, and none of the nurses were intimate enough with her to offer any chaff or teasing about the flowers that came daily. Dr. Edwards went about with his hair in a perpetual uprising of astonishment, scarcely subdued for an hour while he acted as best man.

Eileen and Ross were married in a parsonage parlour; and Eileen could not remember even the minister's name afterward, nor anything but that her hus-

band—her husband for whom she had not yet found an intimate name in her own mind—had kissed her for the first time. It was a friendly kiss, not formal nor passionate. But she felt that strange expansion of the bosom, the overflow of generous blood which rises at the touch of one who possesses the mysterious potentialities of physical attraction for oneself.

Then they drove straight to the station, and after that it was New York, the Hoboken piers, and at last the Atlantic, like the running of a cinematograph reel. Only in New York they stopped long enough to get the significant diamonds. They would have been Eileen's only wedding present but that Madame LeSueur sent her the red and white tuque she had been knitting, with a blessed medal wrapped up in it. Edwards sent a gift after them, which they got two months later.

Eileen put on her two gifts, together, and made a burlesque parade of the double stateroom, and Whittemore laughed. She was a married woman, and had a right to wear diamonds; and she had a husband who seemed to find her extremely entertaining, though he had only kissed her once. Moreover, they were on their way to Paris, and thence to the Riviera, for clothes and a sight of the world at play.

One secret they had in common and yet unshared. Neither had informed any one in the West of their marriage. Ross had written to Chan, but with an injunction to secrecy, omitting as if by carelessness Eileen's name. He got a congratulatory wire before sailing, but risked no more. He did not want to give Eileen's friends a chance to rake old ashes before she came back and put scandal out of countenance with her brilliance. Eileen did not want—to think.

CHAPTER XXII

TWENTY-THREE is a ripe and sorrowful age for a girl, but if she could only know it, there is this consolation; she will never feel so old again. Lesley was twenty-three the month Eileen was in Paris. She had had a lonely year, and the spring got into her blood and tormented her with unfinished memories. Sometimes, in the evenings when she tried to read weighty books to get something to write about for the next day, she looked at Hilda Brewer with a feeling of mad revolt, and decided that if she were doomed to live such a life as Hilda's, she would certainly kill herself by some violent and splendidly dramatic means. This ended in laughter, for she knew the idea had been merely a semi-humorous conceit, as when she had worn her mother's gowns and fancied herself a princess.

Her mother had come home from California wonderfully better, and had not suffered any relapse yet. But still most of Lesley's modest salary went home, and Lesley continued to live with Hilda in the big, shabby, cheerful room at Mrs. Holt's. Hilda was always fussing over the room, adding a new chintz cover to a shirtwaist box or a pink paper ballet skirt to an electric light. Lesley was not a domestic creature in that sense. She spent her spare time walking, reading or writing; she was maddeningly healthy, she bloomed in her white rose way. Mrs. Holt sometimes got drunk, and babbled about her unhappy married life and forgot to get any dinner; and the two girls ate cream puffs and talked of the uncertainties of life.

Lesley almost envied Mrs. Holt her moments of oblivion, though they disgusted her; or she envied Hilda, who was steadfastly religious without being dogmatic. She felt as if they had something, and she, she had nothing at all. . . .

She was invaluable to Cresswell, but it seemed a trifling matter to her, and sometimes, seeing people reading with a serious air what she had written, she was obliged to laugh. No one would have listened to her saying the same things. The power of print was very remarkable; black and white magic. Lesley had not forgotten her ambitions, but she dared not go far from her mother without a reserve of money, enough to bring her back instantly if needed. She might have got some credit as a local prophet, but her ambitions dwarfed her achievements so greatly that the mention of her work filled her with an embarrassment mounting to shame, so that people did not really know anything about what she did, except that they heard vaguely of a very clever girl on the *Recorder*. She might have made more friends by trying, but—oh, she had no money, and no pretty gowns, and it wasn't worth while. Some day she would take her share all in one bite.

The town had come to the end of its boom, the bubble collapsing gently after the demise of the street-railway project. It pattered on its way peacefully. It was growing, but not excitingly. In fact, another boom was on its way, and the City Fathers announced that they were considering a street-railway project of their own. Lesley hardly believed it. People were always talking. The amount of talking that could be done without anything being said filled her with astonishment. Writing, any kind of writing, develops a habit of unconscious criticism, of looking for the pith and meaning of words. Any craftsman must learn

his tools, and the uses of them. Lesley's capacity for boredom increased alarmingly.

The coming boom impressed itself on Cresswell; he thought something might be said about it in a leader. Not to call it a boom, certainly not. He told Lesley to see what she could do. She told him gloomily that what she would write on the subject of her city wouldn't be fit to print; and he laughed and told her to go out and look and ponder. It appeared to be the only thing to do. She put on her hat and went out of the office in midafternoon and spent three hours on the hills.

Suburbs impressed her as loathsome. The town was losing its pleasant, placid, unhurried air; had lost it. Up on Crescent Hill she found hundreds of little stakes bearing lettered boards with Jack Addison's name on them, offering the lots for sale. Stingy little twenty-five-foot lots, that seemed absolutely idiotic out there in the middle of nowhere, with vacant, unploughed land stretching to the back of beyond on every side. She had got free of the suburbs, over the brow of the hill, and could not see the city. She spent a pleasant half hour kicking the little boards over one by one, giggling to herself. Of course they made her think of Jack Addison; and with his name came the wildest, most rebellious ideas. Why hadn't she bolted with him when he wanted her? He did not want her any more; at least, he had given up finally when she had told him she never wished to see him again. Sometimes they passed each other on the street, with a touch of shy amusement on her part; on his, she did not know what. He would look at her, a curious, abrupt, unreadable look, without smiling, and go on. He had had at least two affairs since then—married women, the sort of thing every one knows but the husband. He was a cheerful pagan, who probably

wanted to go to Hell, like Aucassin, with the gay, brave array of sinners. Could she have kept him if she had tried? She thought she could have; and anyway, he might have been a gate to the world at large. She would have had to pay something—respectability—virtue—whatever it is; but what use was it to her? No one else cared.

In a kind of melancholy intoxication she sat down on the short grass beside one of the little signboards. It was April, and the air was delicious, with that exquisite flavour of evanescence only the prairies know. Probably it would snow the next day; this softness bred weather, and the mountains had banks of still grey cloud behind them; but now. . . . There was a delicate purple windflower, a prairie anemone, hiding coyly behind the signboard, still holding its collar, like a moleskin stole, about its neck. Lesley took it up and kissed it. She pulled tiny, hairlike shoots of green grass, that pushed up under the dead stalks, and made a bouquet. On some close-grazed spots this new grass made a faint flush of green. A prairie lark sang and sang, repeating its bright bubbling note unweariedly. She thought she would write a leader about these things instead of about the fools who came and stuck little boards about and puzzled the prairie lark. The earth was clean, clean. Lesley lay back and stretched, turned and pillowed her head on her arm, her side and bosom crushed against the sod. And then she found she was crying. She had not cried since . . .

Hastily she sprang up, straightened her hat, smoothed her crumpled skirt and brushed the dry grass stalks from her coat. And she came down the hill with a free, splendid stride. She wanted to get inside the office again, and shut out the spring.

The streets were as dusty as if they had never

heard of spring. An automobile came down Stephen Avenue as she reached it from Center Street. It was preceded by a pillar of dust like the children of Israel in the wilderness, for it was driving slowly and the wind was ahead. Lesley's eyes were filled, and she sputtered and sneezed and reached for her handkerchief. Then some one called to her; no, not to her, some one said simply:

"Oh-h-h!" in a drawn-out, breathless manner. It was the woman in the automobile, who wore a grey coat and a long grey veil around her head like the clouds behind the mountains. Lesley stopped at gaze, and then made half a step forward, and stood still again.

"Stop here," the goddess in the car called quickly to her chauffeur. "How do you do?" she said directly to Lesley.

Lesley sneezed again, and burst into laughter. "It's you!" she managed to remark.

"Yes, it's me," said Eileen. "Come, get in; I have often and often wished to see you again."

"Did you? Did you really?" Lesley asked breathlessly, getting into the car.

"Yes," said Eileen. "Go on, out of town anywhere," she added to the chauffeur, and turned for a long look at Lesley. "You look just, just the same," she said. "I'm glad; I thought I might have remembered wrong."

"It's my hat and suit," said Lesley in a matter-of-fact way. She still wore blue serge, and a broad black hat. "I get 'em as near alike as possible, year after year—for hundreds of years now. It seems so piffing to bother about variety when you can only have one variety. Why did you want me to be the same?"

"I wanted some one to talk to. And I'm going to

use you; you won't be able to help yourself. I'm going to use everybody, of course, but that's your use. Probably you won't get anything in return. I haven't any heart, you know; not now; it's just a little dried-up article like a pea in a pod. You can hear it rattle around if you listen. When it rattles too much, or I'm bored, I'll take it out and show it to you. I hope you don't mind, for I'm going to do it anyway." She spoke with the trained lightness of a good comedy actress, but she looked at Lesley with an intent gaze her casual tone could not dissemble.

"Yes," Lesley nodded. "Go ahead; I don't mind."

"Did you know I was here, in town?" asked Eileen.

"No. Have you been for long?"

"Only two hours. You haven't heard a word, have you?"

"No."

"Then I suppose no one has—if you still hear things. Do you?"

"Yes," said Lesley. "I'm still on the *Recorder*. Please—please go on."

"I suppose Ross purposely kept it quiet; I suspect him of being dramatic. He loves to do things carelessly, last-minute effects."

"Who?"

"Ross Whittemore—my husband." Lesley was aware she looked absolutely imbecile with surprise, her eyes circular and her jaw dropping, but she could not control herself for a moment. "Do you know him?" asked Eileen. "No, my dear, he doesn't know—what you're thinking of." Lesley started, and Eileen laughed, a little clear, cool laugh that rang like a new coin. "I warned you. Do you know Ross?"

"No. I know—I used to know his nephew."

"Chan? I don't. Ross has gone to get him for

dinner; we're surprising him, too. I think Chan is the only thing on earth Ross really cares for, deep down, you know. Oh, no, not me. I don't know what I'm doing in his gallery. Isn't that strange?"

"Yes, it is strange," said Lesley, taking an open, detailed survey of Eileen. She was exquisite, even in her loose pongee coat and shrouding veil—Paris, both. In spite of her warm colouring, she had a carven finish; her eyes were blue jewels; the *poudre de riz* on her straight little nose resembled marble dust on a newly-finished bust; even her eyelashes had a precision, as if they had been measured and counted to the exact requirements of beauty, with the same art she had used in the pencilled curve of her brows.

"That doesn't count," she said, answering the look. "Think of the women he might have married. They all fall in love with him; you will yourself. I can always tell as soon as one begins picking me to pieces with her eyes. Lesley—do you mind if I call you Lesley?"

"Anything—whistle for me if you like." It was all so wildly improbable, why bother about what one said?

"Well, then, Lesley, what are you doing to-night? Were you going to the Horse Show? Fancy our luck, coming just in time for the first night, when we never even knew there was to be one. Perhaps Ross did, but he forgot. What gigantic social strides they've made!"

"Oh, no, I'm going yachting," said Lesley flippantly. She was arguing with herself; could Eileen be telling the truth; was she married to Ross Whittemore? "No, I never go anywhere. I'll be asking Hilda to pinch me to see if I'm awake; that will be my evening's amusement."

"No, you won't; you'll come with us. Won't you?"

"I'll show you my marriage certificate first," she added sweetly.

"That was nasty of you," said Lesley, in a low voice. "I had better go back."

"No, I am sorry; I beg your pardon. You'll come with us to-night?"

"Me? I haven't got a gown."

"Never mind, wear a nonchalant air. The Lieutenant-Governor's box will back it up. I suppose you know Ross is the new Lieutenant-Governor?"

"No, I didn't," said Lesley weakly. "I—my head feels queer." Eileen laughed again.

"It's all true. A splendid climax; I wonder if Ross knows I have a weakness for melodrama myself?"

"Don't you know anything about each other?" Lesley enquired desperately.

"Very little indeed. But think how much time we have to find out! It makes life almost interesting. Now listen, have you any more work you really must do to-day?"

"A lot. I ought to be doing it now."

"Then I'll take you back to the office, and when you get through, come over to the hotel. I'm sure I have a hat that will make you ready to go anywhere. If you weren't so much taller, I'd fit you out with a gown, but never mind. You cannot afford to miss this; it will be social history. By evening the news will be spread; all the dowagers will have fainted and been revived, and there won't be an empty seat. I understand they've made the old Fair Building into a hippodrome, haven't they? It will be a *grande tableau*." Her saphirine eyes glittered with malice, then she turned grave. "It may not work," she said. "Will it make any difference to you—your friends—if it doesn't?"

"Haven't any friends," said Lesley. "At least, only

scrubwomen and such; not the Horse Show crowd. As if I should care!"

"Then that's settled." She spoke to the chauffeur, and he turned back. "The town is a little changed, isn't it?" she went on. "I came out on purpose to see, since Ross was busy. Besides, if any one discovered our arrival, I wanted to be out."

"Saving the climax," said Lesley. She did not want to talk about the town; she wished Eileen would go on and tell her the real meaning of this romantic extravaganza. How? When? Where? Eileen read her again.

"I was training as a nurse, in Montreal," she said, without prelude. "I attended Ross; and we were married in just two weeks. Then we went to Paris, and Nice, and Monte Carlo, and came back. Ross agreed to take the Lieutenant-Governorship before we went, but he asked them not to announce it. And—oh, I have six trunks full of French gowns, and no memory. Not in the sunshine, anyway. Once I think I read a sad and stupid story about a girl who—died. I am her epitaph. That is to say, I lie. But never mind that now. What is Chan like? I never asked Ross; you can't find out about any one from the people who love them."

"Chan is——" Lesley began to answer before she had grasped Eileen's last words, and could have said: "Then I can't tell you either." But her heart came up in her throat and stuck there, and when she had quelled its mutiny—for over a year now she had kept it battened under hatches—she went on courageously. "Chan is quite nice, really. A little bigger than his uncle, and not so handsome, but not—not ugly. He's amiable, and—rather clever; and looks ever so clean. His hair won't stay brushed. And I think he's running around with Cissie Martin, but I never see him

any more. He must have been an awful pest as a small boy. That seems to be all," she summed up confusedly.

"That's very clever; I can see him now," said Eileen. "Is this your office? Au revoir; come over as soon as you can. I'm going to see my parents now; they will be surprised, too." Lesley stopped with her foot on the step, her face again petrified into an expression of incredulous horror such as she had felt before she slept on the night Eileen had fallen at her gate. Eileen could not mistake it, but her look did not change.

"When you have no heart," she said, "those things don't hurt. It's very convenient. I must go, because it's also *convenable*. I'm booked all the way through. Please come over as early as you can." Lesley stood stupidly watching her, till the car disappeared around the corner. And again Eileen did not look back. One expected that of her, that she would never again look back at anything.

Eileen knew her parents would not have moved. They owned their house, on a comparatively old street falling into shabbiness. It was a plain, square, home-like structure. The brown lawn was neat and smooth, as always, and the porch swept; the foot mat was geometrically precise before the door. Eileen had put her veil down again, but she saw no one at the window. The blinds were just so. A maid answered her ring. They had not always kept a maid; Eileen did not know that her mother's health had failed greatly of late. On an inspiration, Eileen gave the maid her card, out of a morocco and gold case, and sat down in the orderly sitting-room, where nothing had been altered save that the enlarged photograph of herself as a child, which had hung on the green cartridge wall paper between the two front windows until it had

made a dark square spot by its shade, had been removed. A steel engraving hung in its place. There was a chenille cover on the square library table—the same cover. The same table; the same mahogany rocker and green rep armchair of her father's; and the mahogany cabinet, and Empire sofa with tarnished gilt arms; a medley of furniture gathered throughout the frugal, prosperous years. Even the same threadbare Wilton carpet, whose roses Eileen had tried to uproot as a baby, covered the floor. She was making an unconscious, unemotional inventory of these things when her mother's soft, slow step roused her.

"Mrs. Whittemore?" her mother said questioningly.

"Yes, mother," said Eileen, putting up her veil. "Oh—be careful——" She had to spring forward and catch her, for Mrs. Conway, her plump, wrinkled face suddenly grey, groped awkwardly for some support and tripped over the rocker. "Sit down—there—that's quite right," said Eileen, loosing her arm from about her mother's capacious waist. Mrs. Conway caught at her hand as she drew it away, by sheer blind instinct. A mist obscured her vision; and she felt very, very old.

"Eileen!" she said, and put her other hand to her heart.

"Yes, mother," repeated Eileen soothingly. "It's Eileen—at least, I suppose so. Don't get excited; I'm sure it's bad for you." It was true that Eileen's heart felt dead; she spoke in much the same tones she had been wont to use with suffering patients. "It's Eileen, but she's married. That was my card."

"Married?" Her mother blushed painfully, and clutched her daughter's hand tighter. "Who—who is he?"

"Ross Whittemore, mother; I'm sure you must have heard of him. He was here all last summer."

"Not—— He—he's very rich, isn't he?" Mrs. Conway was equally worldly and religious. She had a firm grasp on the foundations of respectability. And she did love her daughter.

"Yes, very rich."

"You didn't write about it?"

Eileen almost wished she might feel softer, but everything her mother said echoed from some cynical, empty chamber of her brain. It was not Mrs. Conway's fault; she was a simple woman, and grasped obvious things first.

"It was very hurried, and we planned to come in person. Ross will come to see you to-morrow, and apologise. I think he meant to see father this afternoon." That was a mere sop to convention; she had told Whittemore she would see her parents herself first. "How is father? I'm sorry I can't wait to see him."

"But you must stay to dinner." Poor Mrs. Conway's arms ached to embrace her daughter, but that slim, unyielding figure did not offer itself to an embrace. Even if she did see only the obvious, she could see that.

"No, I can't; I promised Ross I'd meet him at the hotel for dinner, as I wasn't sure of finding you in. But to-morrow—— Are you going to the Horse Show to-night?"

"No, we didn't aim to. Mrs. Martin asked us, but I—I hardly ever go out; I don't feel equal to it." Her eyes overflowed, but she did not dry them; she devoured Eileen with her gaze. "Are you—happy, Eily?" she asked.

"Quite happy. My husband"—she used the phrase purposely—"is—is very good. Now, mother, I must go. Bye bye." She stooped and kissed her mother, on the cheek, and was clutched timidly and kissed

again. While Mrs. Conway still clung, they heard the sound of the front door opening.

"It's your father!" said Mrs. Conway, in an agitated whisper. "Wait—let me tell him——" She hastened out of the room with surprising rapidity, despite her infirmities, closing the sitting-room door tightly. Eileen walked to the mirror, calmly arranging her veil and putting on her gloves. She could hear the colloquy in the hall; her mother's voice hurried, the words indistinguishable, and a deep ejaculation from her father:

"*What!* What did you say?"

Then her mother's voice again, broken by a movement which heralded her father's unintentionally noisy entrance to face his child. So they surveyed each other a moment, neither hearing the continued flow of Mrs. Conway's confused exposition of the prodigal daughter's return.

"How do you do, father," said Eileen, fronting him with a look that held neither fear nor defiance, only an instant readiness to go her way, letting him do likewise. It was he who recalled all the bitter things there were between them, the corroding words and the shame that tears had never washed out. Eileen had got more than her regular features and physical vitality from her father; she had got her will, her pride, even her waywardness, which he had wrought out in more than one *wanderjahr* before he had married and struck hands with tradition and law and the puritan conception of order. But now the years revenged themselves of one loss with another. His blood had cooled, his pride bowed under the load he had laid on it; and his will had questioned itself in the sleepless hours his age knows. It was he who behind that piercing look felt his bowels yearn over his child; though he could only say, in his strong, resonant voice:

"Well, my girl, you've come home."

"No, I haven't," she reminded him.

He might have winced inwardly, but his physical presence helped him to carry it off; his upright carriage and square shoulders and the dignity of his grey beard.

"I came back with my husband," Eileen went on, "and I thought you might want to know. Our home will be in Edmonton for a while, of course. Ross would have come to call this afternoon, too, if he had not been obliged to attend to some other things. Besides, I thought I would ask you first if I should bring him?"

"Bring him?" her father repeated—his only sign of faltering. "Why, what else should you do?" If his heart could have uttered itself, it would have told him she should cast herself into his arms, strip herself of her air of maturity and elegance, and restore to him his daughter. He could have wiped out the dark intervening time. It was she who stood back. It is a hard thing that parents must live their lives twice over, the second time following their children step by step, despite the handicap of having lost the plasticity and resilience of youth; unless they will see their children grow away from them into strangers and judges. Her parents had drunk of Eileen's cup perforce, but they had not performed the act of grace with it, placed their lips where hers had been held. So she was apart, spiritually and literally.

"Then I will bring him to-morrow. Shall I?" she said.

"Of course—why not to-night?"

"They—they're going to the Horse Show," said her mother quickly.

"Yes, I believe we must," said Eileen. "And I am sure he is waiting for me now. But to-morrow."

She kissed her mother again, the same light passing kiss, and went.

Mrs. Conway sank into a chair, the unheeded tears coursing down her cheeks, the tears of Rachel.

"There, there," said her husband, stifling his own impulse to drop his dignity and yield to tears also. "There, there, mother, don't now; our girl's all right. Her husband's a fine fellow." Thus his unconscious masculine logic, which is true enough except that it seems oblivious of its reverse truth. He stroked his wife's hair awkwardly. "She looked well," he urged.

"She looked lovely," said Eileen's mother, with a kind of wan enthusiasm, and dried her eyes resignedly. A little later, Judge Conway, going to the telephone, found his wife already in vested possession of it.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHILE Eileen's automobile vanished in the distance and its own dust, Lesley entered the gloomy, littered, cheerful newsroom slowly, with a look of deep preoccupation. Cresswell hailed her twice before she answered, though she had stopped at her desk, immediately beside his. By the signs, she might have known he had something to impart to her.

"What's the matter, Johnny?" he enquired solicitously. "Seen a ghost?"

"Almost," she admitted, taking off her hat and shaking her head, like a colt worried by flies. "Excuse me; I didn't hear what you said first."

"Oh, nothing; only who do you think is in our midst?"

She shook her head again. "Don't ask me; my brain is pied."

"Our new Lieutenant-Governor—at last. *And* his wife. And who—*who* do you think the lady is?"

"I don't need to think. I've just been autoing with her."

"Pardon me, but I certainly will be damned. You've spoiled my exclusive story, you—you hussy. I didn't know you knew her. And what in *hades* do you make of it?"

"She's the prettiest woman I ever saw," said Lesley ambiguously. "Now don't bother me, for I've got to get through and go to the Show with her."

Cresswell fell back, ostentatiously gasping for air. Lesley laughed, fixed her eyes firmly on her type-

writer, and wrote, without much idea of what she was putting down. She kept on shaking her head to Cresswell's interrogations.

"I'm sorry, but I can't tell you another thing," she said. "I used to know her, and I met her by accident on the street. That's all. Good-bye."

She went out, dodging a rubber eraser thrown at the last moment by her esteemed chief. Whereon her chief got down and hunted for the eraser, as it was the only one he had and he used it for a paper-weight; and Lesley hurried to the hotel, forgetting all about her dinner.

She was shown up immediately, evidently by Eileen's forethoughtful order. The Whittemores had an improvised suite on the second floor. Eileen was in her bedroom, in a green crepe negligee, a castaway in the midst of a sea of feminine apparel which overflowed from various open travelling impedimenta, even unto the sitting-room, beyond which was Ross's room. Ross was invisible, his door closed. Eileen had a dinner tray before her and a middle-aged and quite evidently perplexed French maid under her eye, unpacking. She rose quickly.

"Throw that stuff on the floor, Lucie," she said, indicating a mass of delicate lace and chiffon on a chair. "There, sit down, Lesley, you dear thing. Put your hat and coat—oh, heavens, hang 'em on the electric light. Or the doorknob. Have you had dinner?"

"Why——"

"Of course you haven't. Chicken or ham? And a little Chablis? I hate eating alone, and Ross and Chan dined at the club; I hadn't time to go downstairs. Lucie, bring me that grey hat with the bronze quill; the Virot model. And take down Miss Johns' hair and dress it while she eats. Dress it to go with the hat."

"Mais, madame——" Lucie broke into an electrical explosion of protest in French.

"Never mind that, Lucie; I'll do my own. Plenty of time. You attend to Miss Johns. Yes, and get that Malines jabot, too, and the long topaz chain, and—and some tortoise shell hairpins. I know now why I bought those pins, though they look hideous in red hair. *Vite*, Lucie." Lucie *vited*. Lesley ate her chicken and salad under a cloud, a cloud of hair over her eyes, under which she was obliged to insert her food at what seemed propitious moments. She got hair into her coffee cup; she laughed and got it into her mouth. By and bye the cloud lifted; a few final deft pats and touches, and she was invited to behold herself. Lucie knew her business, knew better than to put any frivolous waves into the smooth soft narrow roll drawn back from Lesley's clear brow. At the back another dexterous coil, from nape to crown, gave the fine outline of her head, emphasised by tortoise and silver pins. With an artist's pride, Lucie adjusted the wide grey hat, with its glint of bronze, like a benediction.

"Oh, how nice," said Lesley rapturously. And she submitted to the jabot, which fluffed below her round chin, and the long string of topaz that brought out the brown flecks in her eyes, with calm content. The two hours she spent in the midst of this purely feminine excitement and luxury was like a perfumed bath. She gave sage advice as to which gown Eileen should wear, and they settled on a blue-green chiffon, weighted at the hem with blue paillettes, held over the shoulders with strands of jet. When Eileen added a carved Spanish comb of silver to her own shining coppery crown, and at last bent her graceful neck while Lucie clasped a single strand of large diamonds about it, which caught colour from her gown and shot blue-

green rays into the depths of the dresser mirror, whence they reflected again, Lesley was dumb and dazzled.

"I think that will do," said Eileen. Her cheeks kindled to a warmer rose, but she seemed quite calm otherwise. Suddenly she swept across the sitting-room, her chiffons billowing about her silver shod feet, and rapped on Ross's door. She had heard him come in a little earlier, though Lesley and Lucie had not.

"Come out quick," she called. He appeared instantly, minus his coat and waistcoat, having evidently just finished tying his white lawn tie. Lesley had never before seen him so closely, and she was struck by the fact that he still had a waistline, retaining the peculiar firm elasticity of youth in his figure. His mouth was young, too, with no hint of that slack-lipped look which betrays the man of gross appetites and indulgences as the years pass. His fine, aquiline face had the indescribable stamp of the ascetic, but without exaltation; no one would have taken him for a "religious," and yet it was of that—hermit, priest, solitary—he inevitably reminded one. In fact it was the expression of the celibate. He looked at his wife for a long moment without moving, while yet his expression gradually altered, as if forgotten emotions strove to reach the surface. The blood mounted slowly to his temples.

"You are a wonderful woman, Eilidh," he said at last, in his low, husky voice.

"Am I?" She threw back her head, with a rising of her bosom that made her seem about to float toward him, her arms held out a little from her sides. He would have spoken again, but the maid Lucie made some involuntary noise, drawing his eyes for the first time. He saw Lesley also.

"Yes, and a bad girl," he added lightly. "I did not know you had a guest; I must apologise."

"It's only Lesley," said Eileen, with that carelessness which is somehow a tribute; as if the one spoken of were inevitable because necessary. "Come here, Lesley; this is my husband."

"How do you do?" Lesley came forward and held out her hand, conscious that Whittemore had appraised her before she crossed the threshold.

"At last," he said. "I asked to meet you a long time ago, but Chan was lazy, or you wouldn't come. Now I must cover my confusion with a coat." He disappeared.

"Do you like him?" asked Eileen. "There is something—something about him—" She might have been talking to herself.

"You've both got it," said Lesley, and immediately was not sure what she had meant. Eileen stared, asked her, and got no satisfaction. Yet they did have some intangible quality in common, a detachment, an exotic note . . . there was no word for it, except that it savoured of finality, of having seen some part of life definitely closed.

Whittemore came back.

"What was it you called me?" Eileen asked, inconsequently. She was not nervous, but she was restless. "Was it Ey-ley?"

"Eilidh," said Ross. "There's an inflection in that it's hard to catch; Gaelic is a singing language. Some of my 'forebears' came from the Isles, but I don't remember just where; Skye, or the Orkneys. My grandmother's name was Eilidh; but there was another, legendary Eilidh who was a kind of witch, a sea-witch, a Gaelic siren; and your green gown and silver comb and golden hair made me think of her."

"'Golden hair' is good," said Eileen. "Where is

Chan? and where are the pumpkin shell and the four mice?"

"Downstairs, prancing with impatience." He took her cloak from her maid; he never failed in such matters. Eileen wrapped her head in yards of gauze, covering her face to the eyes; she had no wish to be stared at in the lobby. She had met Chan briefly before dinner, and made no attempt to cement the new relationship further at the time, but turned Lesley over to him. She might be interested still, but she wanted her husband beside her that evening. Chan looked at her as she went out ahead of him with patent admiration.

"Corkingly pretty, my new aunt," he said to Lesley. "I don't blame Ross—'old Sir Richard, caught at last.' You look nice, yourself, Lesley. Jolly you're coming with us." He wondered how she had met Eileen, but somehow did not ask. "Where have you been for hundreds of years?"

"Travelling in Thibet," she retorted. Where had she been, indeed! Not following Cissie Martin, anyway.

"How like old times," he said gravely. Lesley burst into a laugh, like old times indeed, and got into the motor peaceably. They had a very little distance to go, but it seemed shorter. It was probably to Lesley's disadvantage that merely to be with Chan always made her so unreasoningly satisfied she never at the moment wanted more, else she might have got more. Men and women alike respond insensibly to all strong undercurrents of feeling, and do not resist easily the unuttered demand of sex. Lesley made no demands at all. There was something childlike in her shy pleasure in his society, which brought out the boy in him to match.

Afterward Lesley remembered that neither Eileen

nor Ross spoke at all; and that she had herself forgotten the evening held something in the balance for Eileen, that all the lightness of the past two hours had covered a purpose. It might be only a game, but Eileen played for stakes. For her husband, even, it might be. . . .

They were late, or every one else was early. The big, gaunt-raftered building was crowded to the top tier of plank seats. The boxes, next to the railing halfway around, bloomed with plumes and shoulders, incongruous against the flimsily garlanded plank partitions, above the tanbark, and yet the more taking for the contrast. There is a flavour in the refinements of civilisation, the little luxuries of money and millinery, in such surroundings, which is more piquant, less enervating, than when every detail of the setting is complete. It is Burgundy in an earthen mug; champagne in the open air; truffles in a monastic refectory. There is a fine disdain about the white bosoms exposed amid such rusticity, a determined, inflexible elegance in the men's inutile starch and broadcloth. If some wearers are patently new to their accoutrements, that only adds a truer enjoyment, the naïveté of a child with a first toy. If some of the gowns might pale before the Diamond Horseshoe, they need not feel out of countenance here; so much the better. Withal, Mrs. Dupont had hers from Paris; Mrs. Shane's aigrette was genuine; Mrs. Manners' rose point was a hundred years old.

A distinctly audible stir went round the tiered seats as the Lieutenant-Governor's party was suddenly observed entering the central box. (Ross had yet to take the oath of office, but courtesy post-dated his honours. He was expected in Edmonton for the ceremony in a week.) Without lifting her eyelids, Eileen saw the rows of faces turn toward her party.

She smiled at her husband, begging him to remove her gauze scarf. Perhaps it was for that effect she had selected it. Lesley sat down, looking about with a lively expectation and some apprehension. She got only the overflow of the investigative glances, and could gaze back at her ease, or so much ease as her anxiety for Eileen allowed. Eileen slipped from her cloak at last, while Lesley's gaze still ranged the boxes. She stood for one graceful moment glancing down to arrange her skirts, and then sank slowly into her chair, unfurling a large black lace fan. Lesley heard the swelling murmur, half a sigh, which was Eileen's tribute; and in some inexplicable manner it told her what she was waiting to know. Her heart grew light. Eileen had won.

Eileen's face betrayed no consciousness of victory. It expressed neither triumph nor disdain, but a peculiar innocence and unawareness, which innocence itself cannot achieve. It is a look only possible to a woman who has suffered, and deliberately forgotten; it can outface innocence itself because it has no mingling of curiosity; it is invulnerable—from the outside. The most acute observer could hardly have guessed if Eileen was acting. Only sometimes she tentatively drew in the corner of her ripe mouth as if she would bite her lip, and ceased again; or her white-gloved left hand slipped down stealthily and gripped her chair, the fingers locking and unlocking. She looked at the horses, at Chan, at her husband, anywhere but at the rows of boxes. Their *partie carree* had an air of utter self-sufficiency.

People rose and resettled themselves, shifting up and down the great building, visiting from box to box, always manœuvring for a nearer view. The mayor came up to speak to Ross, and was introduced with empressement to Eileen and Lesley. The Premier,

whose wife was unluckily in Edmonton, came in late, and went directly to greet them. Then Lesley saw Mrs. Dupont give a look of calm command to her husband, and move majestically toward them. Of course she could not hear what Mrs. Dupont said to Mrs. Satterlee, which was:

"We'll have to do it, my dear; we won't be able to resist ourselves. Besides, it would be stupid. And I'm going to be first. It pays. I hand it to Eileen. I'll give a dinner for her next week." Mrs. Dupont was even clever enough to appreciate the sub-acid flavour of herself according the *pas* to Eileen, receiving the black sheep into the fold—Mrs. Dupont, whose love affairs, to call them by no cruder term, had become a matter of course. She had waited for matrimony, that was all.

She was first, by a narrow margin. Mrs. Martin crowded on her heels, and Mrs. Martin was impeccable as Lucretia. Mrs. Martin pretended to yield to pressure from little blonde Cissie, who was on pins and needles at sight of Lesley in full possession of Chan. With the instinct of a young woman of the world, she saw very clearly that Chan was firmly ranged on Eileen's side already. It was both or neither. Cissie played innocence, in spite of having listened from ambush to her mother and Mrs. Ames that afternoon. Cissie was just out, just back from an Eastern boarding school the previous autumn.

"But you know the Conways, mother," she urged. "Why don't you go and speak to her? I wish you'd let me wear colours. My hair would go with green." Mrs. Martin prudently waited until she forced Eileen's eye, bowed, and felt an actual relief at Eileen's distant inclination in return. (She had smacked Eileen and given her cookies, like a second mother, a dozen years earlier.) Then she went. And Mrs. Manners, who

had always been aristocratically Bohemian. She was an Englishwoman, and like her kind thought that any one she chose to recognise was patented thereby, in a country where any other distinction was idiotic. Social distinctions—fiddlesticks! They didn't exist outside of England; this was a rabble. Choose the most amusing of the rabble. Here promised amusement. All of which goes to show only that most of us can see the beam in our neighbour's eye even without pulling the mote out of our own.

"My dear, you've actually grown," she said, coming up statelily and tapping Eileen's snowy shoulder with her fan. "Pretty child! Why did you never write to an old woman? Your mother telephoned me an hour ago that you were back, and I made a point of being here to see you. I meant to call to-morrow."

"Do," said Eileen. "We can sit on the trunks and have tea."

"After we've looked into the trunks," said Mrs. Manners firmly. "I am intoxicated with your gown. Paris, or Vienna?"

"Paris," interposed Ross. "I am afraid Paris has much to forgive me, for snatching Eileen away from it."

"Oh, was it there?" asked Mrs. Manners archly.

"Yes," said Ross. "The combination, you know——"

"You met in Paris? How romantic," said Mrs. Martin. She couldn't think of any other adjective.

"It spoiled a career; Cavallini vows she will never forgive me for taking her favourite pupil," said Ross. "She was an old friend of mine, too—but I couldn't help that."

"Were you studying with Cavallini? Why, so did I!" cried Mrs. Manners. "But—no, it was her mother I was thinking of—going back to the dark ages. Oh,

youth! I'm giving a musicale next week; you'll sing for us?"

"If we don't have to go North first," said Eileen, contradicting nothing. She had always before thought Ross remarkably truthful.

"Eileen!" said Mrs. Ames, squeezing her portly person into the perilously crowded box. "I've nodded my neck out of joint, trying to bow to you. How you've dazzled us!" Mrs. Ames was respectability incarnate; the wife of a leading bank manager, who mothered all the fledgling bank clerks in the city, marshalling them at her teas in phalanxes and battalions. She also chaperoned innumerable girls to the dances.

"Ross was standing on that side," said Eileen. "I can't see anything for him."

"Very proper, in a bride," cooed Mrs. Ames. "Eileen, my next At Home is on Friday. Can you help me receive?"

"My shoes are too tight to stand in," said Eileen. "I'd rather sit in a corner and eat all the cakes. Lesley, do you know Mrs. Ames—Mrs. Manners—Mrs. Dupont—— How d'ye do, Mrs. Varney?" For Mrs. Varney had come also, executing a flank movement and visiting the next box, to lean over and nod to Eileen with just the proper degree of carelessness. Eileen knew she was violating "form" in presenting the matrons to Lesley, instead of the reverse. She did it on purpose. They beamed on Lesley. Mrs. Martin cut out Chan and carried him away. She was a good mother.

From a procession it became very nearly a stam-pede. Eileen had known every one. Then nobody had known her. Luckily, she had escaped the actual experience of that, by going away. Now she knew every one again. She had lived in the city fifteen of her twenty-one years. Her smile became more and

more frozen. The taste in her mouth was honey and ashes mixed. Her manner was iced perfection.

Lesley's spirits gradually sank; she grew nervous and depressed. She had humanly thought success must mean happiness, and she could not doubt the success. She crowded back to the edge of the box to let Eileen's guests have room, and while she looked at Eileen, with her trouble in her eyes, Whittemore leaned over her shoulder and spoke, tuning his voice below the chatter of the women.

"It was good of you to come with us," he said. "I hope we shall see you often. Eileen is deeply attached to you; and she needs you. She can't live on this, you know." His eyes indicated the festal throng.

"Yes, I—thanks," said Lesley confusedly. Whittemore undoubtedly meant more than he had said, but precisely, what? The conjecture that came to mind was obviously untenable, but it persisted. There could, however, be no mistake about Whittemore's friendliness. She liked him. Owning that, she remembered that Eileen had said all the women fell in love with him, and she wanted to laugh. Helplessly muddled at last, she wanted most to escape. "Of course I will come," she repeated. "But I've got to go before I can come, haven't I? I wonder if I can get out? Please let me, without being noticed." Ross went back and said something to Eileen, who let Mrs. Ames address herself to her back hair while she turned to Lesley.

"Of course you must go if you're tired," she said. "Send the car back for us. I want to see you tomorrow." The iciness melted out of her eyes a second, until she turned again. Ross had signalled to Chan in the interval, and he came instantly. Lesley had meant to slip away without seeing him,

through some sudden, craven foreboding, but she was glad she could not, and refused to argue with herself. She shut the lid down abruptly on all her feelings, and kept Chan highly amused all the way home, which she insisted on walking.

"By Jiminy, you're the only sensible woman in this town," he said at the last, with a look of perplexity. "I'm afraid you make the other girls seem stupid. I've missed you." Lesley's heart leaped, and quieted again. He was, too, too obviously just a friend. She didn't make the other girls seem plain! It is better to have yellow hair than to be clever; this is a truth written in the Great Book of Women, wherein it is also said that one dimple is worth more to a woman than seventy years of learning. What was the use of being clever? Well, for one thing it is a good buckler over an unruly heart.

"So've I missed you," she said, with blackly deceitful frankness. "I haven't a thing to read."

"I will come driving a van loaded with the newest books," he promised, and then hurried back to the show building, where he missed Ross by just five minutes. Cissie got him again, and Esther Purrington grabbed him from Cissie almost by force majeure—Esther was dark and jolly and women called her bold—and he went the rounds like a box of bonbons at a *matinée* before he got away.

It seemed too solitary to Eileen to play all alone at her game of cross purposes when Lesley had left. She told every one indifferently that the journey had tired her, and went. In the motor she leaned back, pale under her bright hair, and did not speak. Ross wrapped her in rugs, though the night was pleasant. Only just before they reached the hotel she asked abruptly, without opening her eyes:

"Why did you tell them I'd studied with Cavallini?"

It was an indirect way of saying: "Why did you tell them we met in Paris?"

"Oh, I don't know," he said reflectively. "Mrs. Dupont looks rather like Cavallini; I fancy that put it in my head. She's a nice old thing—Cavallini, I mean. The first time I went abroad, at eighteen, she was in her prime; and I spent a month's allowance on one bouquet and sent it to her with a languishing note. And she must have guessed the kind of cub that sent it, for she let me call on her, and laughed me into common sense, and all the rest of my stay she was a sort of mother in Israel to me. So we've been friends ever since. She loves to hear me talk of her opera days, before she retired and began to teach." Eileen, watching through her long, curled eyelashes, was baffled. He had told her nothing, and had done it as delightfully as he did everything. But he could not very well tell her that he had been backing up an almost forgotten lie of her mother's, of which Eileen herself might never have heard.

"You had a great triumph," he added inconsequently.

"I knew I would," she said, "after I had tried it on you."

"Why, you minx," he said. "Was that why you called me out—to try it on the dog?"

"Of course," she said coolly, and turned her face away.

When they reached their apartment he insisted on ordering a glass of wine for her, charged Lucie to rub her mistress' brow with camphor, and held her bedroom door open for her to retire. Eileen extended her hand to him, her face still averted. He kissed it, and after a fractional hesitation said good-night.

But Eileen would not let her maid rub her head, nor do anything at all for her. She dismissed Lucie,

and sat with her chin on her hand, her brows drawn into two straight black lines with the crease between. After half an hour she rose, went softly into the sitting-room, looked at Ross's door, and went back to her own room quickly. Ross heard her. His hand was on the knob at the very moment she turned away. He heard her steps retreating, and withdrew it. She wanted something, he thought, but could not bring himself to intrude. She had her maid, of course. Later he thought of her as in bed, sleeping. But she was only lying on the coverlet, gazing at the ceiling, her arms extended, her filmy gown unheeded. It was four o'clock when she finally sat up, tore off her finery, and got beneath the sheets.

She could not understand her husband. She was like a debtor whose creditor does not send a bill, and who for that reason cannot put the bill out of mind. Life wasn't like that; it was "nothing for nothing, and damned little for sixpence." What, in Heaven's name, would his bill ultimately be? What could a man want—other than the obvious thing he never claimed?

Her pride smarted, for a reason she would not allow herself to examine. . . .

CHAPTER XXIV

LIFE has a way of going by fits and starts, letting months and years pass with an even flow, only to break unexpectedly into rapids and waterfalls over sudden rocks where the voyager crowds long memories into breathless hours. So uneventfully went more than a year with Lesley, and brought her past twenty-four.

It was not a dull year, for she had Eileen now, and she had Chan back again, not quite so much to herself as before because he had new friends, and lived in summer on the Chatfield ranch; but on the old terms. She was satisfied perforce.

She did not always have the Whittemores either. Naturally they went to Edmonton immediately after the Horse Show, Ross was inducted to his office and presented with a sword, a cocked hat and a black kimono, all with great gravity; and they established themselves fittingly in their new position. But they bought a cottage in Banff, and yet another in Lesley's city. A bigger house there would not have suited Eileen. When the Legislature adjourned, and she came South for the summer, she announced frankly that she did not want the bother of any more entertaining. But Lesley spent week-ends with her in Banff, dined at the town cottage every other day when assured there would be no other guests; and Eileen wrote when in Edmonton.

Chan lived in the Whittemores' town cottage when it was otherwise unoccupied. It was a tiny, quaintly ugly house close to the centre of the city, with prepos-

terous pretentious gables and high, doll-house windows. There was a dining-room and two bedrooms on an infinitesimal scale, and a surprisingly large drawing-room, big enough for a fireplace and a piano to dwell together amicably. Eileen furnished it delightfully in blue and white chintz, and black oak, with a Dutch tiled fireplace, Chinese rugs, sage green hangings, and pots of tulips. She had to put her trunks down in the cellar, and her maids slept out. Chan went to a hotel, but he might be said to live at the cottage, nevertheless. Mrs. Conway and the Judge came to dinner once a week regularly. They grew greatly attached to Ross, who treated them with a deference meant to act as a buffer between them and Eileen.

Chan admired Eileen, he liked her, he almost understood her, but he had never heard her story. No one quite dared to whisper it to him; he had his uncle's trick of putting people at their distance occasionally, and no one was very sure of him. Besides, he did not talk about women. But he did feel that there was something—well, strange, about his uncle's menage. It was none of his business, of course. That is the well-bred person's way of admitting things are out of joint.

It was only his daily intimacy gave him that inkling. People spoke, sentimentally or spitefully, of the Whittemores' happy marriage. Eileen's cold, bright beauty, Ross's detached devotion, were impenetrable to the scrutiny of the mob. And it was not an unhappy marriage, though to both it seemed something insubstantial and dreamlike. . . . The crux of it was, it was not a marriage at all. It was a play, put on by two who feared realities.

Of course no disclaimer of hospitable intent, other than actually barring the door, could have kept guests from invading the cottage, after Eileen's success was

signed and witnessed. She had an informal day once a week, as a compromise. Lesley forgot at least once, and blundered into the day. A special mission brought her.

Everybody came on that unlucky day. Chan was there when Lesley arrived at four; so was Ross. The three were close in talk when Lesley burst in, unannounced, since the door was open, and demanded a whiskbroom.

"A whiskey?" said Ross absently, rising to go to the sideboard.

Chan shouted, and Eileen fell back on the chintz-covered sofa, waving her hands feebly.

"No, no, please—a whiskbroom, a brush," Lesley begged, laying a restraining hand on his arm.

"My dear child, I beg your pardon. You do seem to need one; you look as if you'd been dragged at some one's chariot wheels." A maid came with the desired article, and Lesley explained while being brushed.

"It was nearly that," she said. "I was prancing along Stephen Avenue admiring the cloud effects, and I stubbed my toe on the cussed car-tracks. I saw the workmen there all last week, but somehow I didn't believe there were any car-tracks. I fell flat, I bowed and fell like Dagon; I was so *mad* I could have bitten a rail in two if I hadn't been in a hurry. Eighty-nine people rushed to pick me up, but I withered them with a glance and flew on. Eileen, may I go to the kitchen sink? Look at my hands!"

"The sceptic always stumbles over evidence," said Ross. "Now give three cheers for municipal ownership." Eileen was leading the way to a washbasin, but Lesley paused at this.

"*You* ought to be biting rails in two, instead of cheering," she said. "I'm sure, if you'd built it, you

wouldn't have left it lying around just where I'd be sure to fall over it."

"Do you think me a dog in the manger?" he said lightly. "If I am, I hope I'm an enlightened one; since I couldn't do it myself, I'd rather have the city do it than any other individual."

"Oh," Lesley's voice floated out of Eileen's tiny, lacy nest of a bedroom, where she was already splashing water into a Dresden bowl, "was that why you people at Edmonton stretched the city's credit so fast?" Every one had been surprised at the speed with which the city had organised and commenced the work on the car line after rejecting the proposals of Whittemore and the Winnipeg capitalists alike.

"That was why," said Whittemore. "Besides, I have some money in suburban properties; possibly I want to get it out."

"But," said Lesley excitedly, appearing at the door waving a towel—the bedroom opened off the drawing-room perforce, because there had been no room for a hall—"will the road go where you planned it? I never did know exactly where you meant it should go."

"It will have to go nearly the same routes." Lesley opened her mouth and closed it again. She had such a hazy idea of whether her own money had disappeared completely or not that she did not like to speak of it. It must have disappeared; she did not blame Jack Addison, but there were forfeited options and things like that which reduced money to thin air. Probably the street-car line meant nothing to her. She went back to the bedroom, kicking the door to with an abstracted air and shutting herself and Eileen in. There would not have been space for three.

"I want to talk to you a few minutes before I go," she said softly to Eileen.

"Of course," said Eileen. "Is it important? Shall I chase the men away?"

"No—I don't know if it's important—you can make an opportunity, can't you? We can go and look at your garden." The garden, behind the house, had a green trellised fence and a gravel walk, if there was no more than ten feet square of grass.

"Very well; after tea. And let me do up your hair. It's my day, you know; wait till the mob has come and gone. Oh, now, you don't get out this time; you'll stay and pour, young lady. Give everybody three lumps, no matter what they ask for, but be sure you ask them first, to make it really annoying. Give Mrs. Dupont four, if she comes; she's getting fatter all the time."

"Brute!" moaned Lesley, even while she obediently took up the gold comb and brush. "Oh, what shall I talk about?" She was debating desperately if she should tell Eileen now, the thing she had come to tell. But it might upset her, and—— Some one of the expected guests might mention it; that would be horrible. But surely they'd have enough sense not to. . . . She decided to postpone it. . . .

"They'll do the talking; never worry," said Eileen. "Say anything you like; I give you letters of marque and reprisal. No one will hear you anyway. There, you look very charming. No, you don't need to wear your hat, it's a fool custom. Come back and let Chan tell you something."

"Chan? What has he got to tell me? What have you got to tell me?" she demanded, irrupting once more into the drawing-room.

"It isn't certain," said Chan. "Has Eileen been putting me on toast?"

"Chan," said Ross deliberately, "is going to run for the Dominion Legislature in the fall. Yielding

to the urgency of his friends and the wish of the electorate and his own strong sense of duty, he will sacrifice——”

“Oh, *shut up!*” said Chan, enforcing his request by hooking an arm about Ross’s neck very neatly from behind. Ross tipped his chair backward into Chan’s ribs and rose with dignity.

“This isn’t a bearpit,” Eileen reminded them severely. “At least, not until the she-bears come—though they may be here any minute. Tell Lesley, quick.”

“It’s true, then?” Lesley asked eagerly.

“Well, they’re short of men,” said Chan dubiously; “at least, men who will bear even a cursory inspection. And Ross put me up to them at an informal and preliminary caucus yesterday, where he was chief conspirator. They think I might do for one of the forlorn-hope constituencies, to save a better man—if Ross makes his contribution big enough.”

“It was Geers mentioned you,” said Ross. “And I’ve always subscribed; it’s a hereditary habit; they know they’d get it, anyway. It is a forlorn hope they will offer you; but next time it won’t be . . .”

“I—I think it’s wonderful,” said Lesley, stricken to banality by surprise and admiration. “Really—really—— Just fancy! You’ll be the youngest member, won’t you?”

“The youngest candidate—in my district,” Chan corrected her. But, though he persisted in taking it as a joke, he was secretly deeply elated and impressed, not by his own importance, but by his opportunity. He did not count on being elected, but he counted on doing some work that would make his name stick, so that it would be heard in a future convention. Deep down he was very much in earnest; his whole heart was already engaged.

"You're still on our side?" asked Lesley. "For Reciprocity? The Government's formal announcement just came over the wire before I left the office. I had some dope already on the galleys, so I got away."

"Oh, yes, Reciprocity by all means!" laughed Chan. "I won't rat."

"Don't be surprised when you stub your toe again," Ross said lazily, turning his magnetic smile on Lesley. "There's the real forlorn hope. But the old order has always got to change; let it go down in a good cause."

"Go down? Why should it go down?"

"Money's the strongest thing in the modern world, and the money's all against us," Ross explained. "Never mind; put up your best fight——" The doorbell cut his phrase in two; he caught Eileen's eye commiseratingly, which pointed his words otherwise than he had intended.

Mrs. Dupont came first again. It was to be a field day.

"How do, Eileen? Oh, Miss Johns—isn't it? Well, Chan, are you going to pour? Eileen, you'll have to hold an overflow meeting. Every soul at Mrs. Varney's at home said they were coming on here; that's why I hurried. I wanted a sandwich; your maid makes the best in town." Mrs. Dupont, like a Futurist sunset cloud in a tight lavender mousseline, which suited her eyes if not her figure, sat down and fanned herself. It was July, and warm for an Alberta July.

"Oh, I forgot Mrs. Varney's At Home!" said Eileen. "Let 'em come; I'll climb up on the mantel, and they can have the house, and fight for refreshments."

"They will take you for a new piece of bric-à-brac,"

said Ross, looking at his wife. She wore an unfashionable but picturesque and Parisian Le Brun costume of cream mull, with yards of the finest lace on sleeves and bosom. Her hair was braided about her head and confined in a silver net at the back.

"A priceless article of 'bigotry and virtue,'" said Chan, singularly malapropos. He was looking out of the window, and added immediately: "There's the advance guard."

Eileen yawned behind a ringed hand quite unconsciously. She rose mechanically and took a negligent stand in an alcove by the door. Lesley, obedient to a look, wedged herself defensively behind a tea wagon and a low table. Soon after five the room was filled; by six it was jammed. Chan retreated at discretion to his uncle's bedroom and found a pipe for company. Ross stuck to his post like a soldier and a gentleman. Women squeezed and pushed; every one talked and no one listened. Eileen had never had such a crowd. She wished inwardly they might all choke on her justly praised sandwiches. Eileen could not see Lesley over the heads of the guests, but hoped she was not suffering unduly. As the press thinned slowly after six, she was aware that Lesley had got some one to listen to her, in defiance of prophecy. Eileen edged around, and listened also. Oh, it was Mrs. Ames' grandfather was on the tapis again—her grandfather the General. He had been with Wolfe, or something like that—or perhaps it was Queenston Heights. Anyway, no one was ever allowed to be in doubt that Mrs. Ames *had* had a grandfather, and he *had* been a General. What had really started the conversation was a reference to a newcomer who had been at Mrs. Varney's tea. Who was she, Mrs. Burdon wanted to know? Mrs. Dupont, who generally heard everything and

heard it first, explained; she was an Honourable; granddaughter, therefore, to an Earl, but apparently not excited over that fact, and quite content to settle down in the Northwest. But nice—oh, she and her husband both, such nice people. . . . Anyway, that had let in Mrs. Ames' grandfather; and somehow that extracted again the information that Mrs. Martin had been to Court, and Cissie was to be presented next year—if they went over. Lady Cumstuck, Mrs. Martin's cousin. . . . Those things did count—family—breeding—look at the difference between foreign and American men. They were all off, and Lesley silenced for the moment. Only for the moment, for Mrs. Ames' grandfather charged again, and Lesley met him full shock. . . . It was just at that moment Eileen got within hearing. . . . Mrs. Ames had a diamond-set miniature of the deceased gentleman, in a locket.

"Nice old duck; looks a bit apoplectic," Lesley was saying cheerfully. "Oh, I suppose it's his red coat; and then they wore such funny chokers. I remember my grandfather still wore two waistcoats—but it may have been to keep him warm. He *would* get drunk, and was out all night once, and might have frozen if he'd had only one. Of course he didn't get drunk *every night*. Perhaps grandmother drove him to it; she took morphine. But she was a dear old thing, just the same. She smoked a clay pipe, and wore the queerest shoes—pattens, didn't they call them? I just remember her; she died when I was five. I cried so. Grandfather was sober for a week. Some more tea, Mrs. Ames—oh, Eileen!" Lesley had the grace to look guilty. "Have some iced tea, Eileen, or some cake, or something; you look awfully tired."

"Yes, I will," said Eileen. "But do go on. What

about your other grandparents? Did you have only two?"

"Oh, they were Methodists; practically useless for conversational purposes," said Lesley airily.

"My grandmother," said Eileen seriously—she and Lesley had the conversation to themselves by now—"the one I got my hair from, was Irish, of course; she loved to go barefoot. She carried a kit on her head—you know, a three-cornered receptacle, to keep her hands free so she could knit while she walked. But I think she died before I was born; Aunt Jennie told me about her. Mrs. Dupont, you're a brick to stay all through. Now we can all have a chair, and some more cake."

"That's why I stayed," said Mrs. Dupont. "You had a most successful 'day.'"

"Yes, I'm nearly dead; it was quite like a Turkish bath during a panic an hour ago. Most successful. Mamie"—to the home-grown maid—"some more iced tea. Now you must tell me all the gossip; I've heard nothing but how-d'ye-do's for a whole afternoon." And they did talk, the noble band of survivors, so it was nearly seven before the last had gone, while Lesley sat on pins and needles for fear of some tactless and too well-informed lady forestalling her.

None did, and neither did Eileen forget to slip away to the garden with her at last, while Mamie and Lucie repaired the ravaged drawing-room, and Chan and Ross mixed a consolatory drink in the dining-room.

CHAPTER XXV

THE garden was the littlest bit of peace one could imagine, and Eileen walking in it, her white gown sweeping the grass, filled Lesley's soul with poetry. But there was a snake in the garden, as in the beginning. Lesley concealed it yet a while.

"You terror," said Eileen, "blaspheming all our poor little gods in my drawing-room. How much of that about your esteemed grandparents was true?"

"Oh, some of it," said Lesley cautiously. "I know, I was bad. They weren't your gods, anyway."

"Oh, but they are," said Eileen. "Didn't I eat my heart out in exile for this?"

"You were just as bad," Lesley defended herself. "Eileen, are you satisfied?"

"Why shouldn't I be?" asked Eileen idly. "It isn't every one has her heart's desire. *Io triumphe*. There wasn't anything else left for me, was there?"

Lesley pondered. She had always her work, but Eileen—— "Yes, it's true enough, your genius is beauty; *c'est ton metier*, if that's the phrase I want. But it all seemed so idiotic, I was just overcome, tempted of the devil. You understand, to see Mrs. Ames and her grandfather's miniature as a culmination of all the toils and privations of the pioneers, strong men who left the Old World and subdued the wilderness because they were sick of the iron yoke of caste. Mrs. McConach this afternoon was almost in tears of ecstasy because the Duke of Inverarie is buying an estate somewhere hereabouts. *Her* grand-

father was a crofter, turned out to make more room for deer on the Duke's grandfather's Scotch estate."

"Oh, certainly; but then the Duke's great-grandfather's grandfather was simply the most successful cattle thief on the border. It all comes to the same thing in the end. Don't go letting the sawdust out of your dolly that way; bring her to the party; be a child again and smack your lips over the cambric tea and bread and butter. We're all nice people together."

"It ought to be the motto under the beaver," said Lesley dreamily. "'Nice people.' Of course I'm just jealous and spiteful. If I had a few new gowns, I'd come to all the cambric tea parties—if I was asked."

"You'd be asked, if you had the gowns," said Eileen drily. "You would be anyway, if you'd let me——"

"No. No gowns." Lesley held up an admonitory finger. "I draw the line just beyond hats."

"So mean of you. Ross calls you Cinderella; says you'd be a stunner if you had a chance."

"Does he? I like Ross. Don't you?"

"Don't be so ingenuous, dear. Ross and I are excellent friends. He says he's too old for romance. And I—I'm too young!" He had never said that since the night he asked Eileen to marry him; but neither had she forgotten.

"Then it's because you want it that way," said Lesley, who had observed Ross. "It's none of my business; but he must—he couldn't help——"

"Oh, a man might! You think too much of my beauty. One other man resisted it, or got sick of it. Don't bother your sentimental little heart about us, Lesley; we are very well as we are; it suits us both." But there was dust in her mouth. Her beauty—it had mocked her twice.

"How can you go on feeling like that?" asked Lesley. "Will you always?"

"I hope so. Ross says cynicism is a drug—oh, how married I'm getting, with my everlasting 'Ross says.' Anyway, it's really a pleasant drug. One sees and hears, but doesn't feel."

"You don't seem married," Lesley mused.

Eileen was wrong; she could feel; she felt that. She thought it was her pride was hurt. Why should she seem married?

"What was it you wanted to tell me?" she asked abruptly. Lesley stopped, smitten afresh with horror, as if Eileen had laid her hand on a door behind which something evil waited. How could she tell Eileen? How could she thrust herself in, no matter how often Eileen had drawn the latch and bidden her enter.

"It was—— Do you know—— Have you heard——" She tried to get it over quickly, as if she were taking a stiff medicine, and it balked on her tongue.

"Tell me, quick," said Eileen, smiling. "Everything's happened to me, you know; it won't hurt. I'm drugged."

The garden was very quiet, a small quietness, that seemed to wait.

"Harry Garth is coming back—with his wife!" said Lesley.

"Is he?" said Eileen at last. She had looked so when she went to her father's house. It was Lesley who wanted to run away, who felt the tears in her throat. "That's interesting. Come into the house and see if there's any chance of dinner."

"I can't stay to dinner," said Lesley shakily. "Please. Can't I go now?"

"You're queer," said Eileen, staring at her. "Of

course, you shall go if you like. Telephone me tomorrow."

So Lesley went home, and cried, and cried. That sharp brightness of Eileen's seemed to pierce her heart. She fought against the cruelty of life with all the deep instinctive strength of her age. There is a very ache for happiness planted in the breast of all young creatures. They beat on the gate of heaven with their prayers for it; they will go down to the pit of hell in search of it. There must be happiness—there must—there must! If there be not, then the universe is a lie. And they are right, even if the universe must be wrong to prove it. They are life at war with death; they are love stronger than the grave.

Eileen shed no tears. She was merry at dinner. Chan kept wondering why Lesley wouldn't stay, and went away early because he felt extraordinarily *de trop*. Eileen was obviously interested only in her husband that evening.

After dinner, when Chan had gone, she sang to Ross all the old, simple, passionate songs she knew. She had turned off all the lights but the piano lamp, which made a halo round her head. The doors and windows were open to the dewy, cool air, which brought the odour of white clover from a wet lawn nearby. Her voice was uneven in quality, not sufficiently trained for absolute purity, and she was singing softly, so its contralto notes were muffled down to a low sweetness that was almost hoarse. Ross thought of how the Greeks used to thicken their wine with honey, for a simile.

Then she sprang up and declared she wanted to dance, and he played for her, and she did dance, improvising, while he watched her over his shoulder and struck innumerable false notes. Her white gown

fluttered in the dusk, and her white arms wove spells like Vivien's.

"Oh, I'm tired!" she cried at last, flinging herself into a deep chair. "Come here and fan me—no, wait a minute, this gown is too tight. Unhook me, please; I've sent Lucie home." He unfastened the short bodice, baring her pathetic shoulder blades, and feeling a sudden impulse to kiss them for their faults. She tipped her face back over her shoulder to watch him now, and squirmed gently, like a naughty child. He called himself a fool, while she vanished into her room, to reappear with incredible quickness in something golden and fluffy that fell in straight lines from shoulder to hem.

"Now fan me," she said, sinking back with a sigh. "No, bring me something to drink first. Some Burgundy; it's so warm and gorgeous." He obeyed and she waited, breathless in the dusk.

"But you've brought only one glass! You're to drink, too. Touch your glass to mine; I like to hear them ring—no, I'll kiss the rim. Give it to me." She stood up to offer it to him. She was so close the perfume of her mixed in his nostrils with the faint, stinging scent of the wine. He was pale; he drank quickly, and watched while she emptied her glass more deliberately, her head tipped back and her throat curved and tremulous. She filled his glass again, and pressed it into his hand. "Don't you like it?" she said. "I feel so to-night; I feel like doing something mad and splendid." He could never have guessed that under it all was terror, a fear of the world that had been so merciless once. Only Ross stood between her and a repetition of that cruelty, the silence and blankness that had been so hard to bear. If she could only know by what she held him, make sure of him forever. . . .

She did know that there is one way to make any man tell anything.

"Yes, I like it," he said in an undertone. "You're fey, Eily; you are a witch; you make me feel mad and splendid, too; you make me feel young."

"Be young," she said pleadingly. "You are young enough." Something changed in her; she was not acting any more, nor moved altogether by fear.

"You pretty thing," he said irrelevantly. "I will be anything you want. But you ought to go to bed; you're tiring yourself to death."

"I—I——" She felt repulsed, and made her last throw. "I—am tired—— Will you carry me in?"

He picked her up in his arms, very easily and lightly. But he did not move; only, with a choked sound like a sob, he hid his face in the laces at her breast. "Eily!" he whispered. "Eily!"

"Yes," she said softly.

"My little wife!"

"Yes," she said again.

He carried her in.

In the middle of the night Eileen had a dream. It was not clear even while she dreamed it, only she was ashamed and hurt, and she had abased herself for something that was her right; she had made some grievous mistake, and the dust was in her mouth again. Eileen was of a high-strung, nervous temperament, like a horse too finely bred, and when she was a child she had often walked in her sleep. Ross, who had not slept, was watching her, his eyes grown accustomed to the silvery dark of the room, where the moonlight flickered in a square pool on the ceiling. Perhaps it was the effect of the light, but she looked mortally weary. He wished he could carry her in his arms again to rest her.

Suddenly she sat up, throwing back her loose, heavy

hair, and looking at him with the wide eyes of the somnambulist.

"You made it so hard for me!" she cried reproachfully.

"I am sorry, dear," he said quietly. "Go to sleep. It is all right now."

"Yes," she said, with a long sigh, still staring. "I had to pay—I couldn't have everything for nothing——" He could not catch all she said; her voice sank to a tired, incoherent murmur. "Don't understand Ross," she ended, more clearly. "What does he want? Any man—— I've got to pay—— Lesley says I'm beautiful, but—that—isn't—any—use. . . ." She sank back heavily, flung an arm across her eyes, and slept again profoundly.

"God in heaven!" said Ross to himself. He had a physical sensation as if some one had closed a hand on his heart and gripped it tightly for a second. Aloud he said nothing, but his mind went on fumblingly picking up her words. "Was that why? She thought she ought to pay. . . . And she made me take her!" With a word spoken in sleep she had thrown him into the depths; she had made him a man again and broken him within a night.

He had known himself not insensible to her charm for a long time; but habit is a strong defence and he had forged it carefully, taught himself to look on her as a friend, a child, anything but a wife. She had broken through the barrier ruthlessly, from a distorted sense of justice; the quick of him was bared as it had been years before, and everything to suffer again.

Well, if she had made him a man, he must be one. He still watched her, for an hour, till the moon went down and the room was pitch-black, and then he felt for her hair, kissed it, and went out quietly. In

that moment he wished with ironic mirth that he had not stayed awake to look at his delight.

In the morning Eileen never knew that she had spoken at all. Somnambulists do not, unless they have been thoroughly awakened; and even then they do not know what they have said. She waked gropingly, to find herself alone. She huddled down and drew the coverlet up over her face, and was still.

CHAPTER XXVI

CHAN was nominated for one of the divisions of the city—which was divided into two constituencies—much more through a fluke than on his merits. It was just an instance of the luck of the beginner, to get such an important riding. That is, if it might be called luck to have as an opponent Edward Folsom, one of the strongest men the Conservatives had in the province. Another had been slated for the place, a prosperous citizen bitten late in life with a taste for public honours. He had asked for the nomination, got it; and in the very midst of the convention withdrew his name. A sudden emergency of business necessitated his changing his residence, and he put business first. The convention fell back on Chan in sheer desperation, and because his name came through Geers.

It was a forlorn hope, indeed, a novitiate in the arena at best. Folsom's own constituency, the same he had so lately won from the Liberals on the strength of his own personality, would not be likely to turn him down now. Not that he had made any shining record at Ottawa, but he had gained a good deal of publicity by some well-timed speeches. He had a ready tongue, and a little of the true fire of the orator; though on analysis one might have discovered his speeches to be mostly froth and sounding phrases, backed up by the skill of practice and sheer lung power.

Next, perhaps, to being born under the sign of Taurus, a public man might rejoice at a nativity in

the house of Pisces, for the red herring is a noble and useful animal, politically speaking. It has the power of the Philosopher's Stone in transmutation—which is mixing metaphors madly, but not more so than they were mixed in that impossible campaign which actually happened. Within a week after the campaign was fairly launched, Reciprocity, the issue on which it was fought, took on a form which must have amazed its sponsors, and left them aghast as was the fisherman in the presence of the Djinn he so carelessly let out of the bottle. Treason was the mildest name fastened by the Conservatives to the efforts of the party in power to redeem the very pledge which had first won them place. It was an effort to disrupt the British Empire; it was a plot to contract an unholy alliance with the unspeakable United States. The money, as Ross had so casually predicted, aligned solidly on the side of things as they were. Special newspapers were started for the benefit of the "British born"; the flag was torn to tatters in defence of a suddenly sacred tariff; and Reason and Fact retired to a cave in the mountains for a spell of meditation. The moral of all this probably is that sixteen years is too long to wait for a promise to be kept.

Chan, not having hoped, did not especially despair. He flung himself with zest into the task of acquainting his improbable constituents with his personal appearance and future intentions. He gained poise and assurance, if not votes, though indeed he was liked.

He and Geers, who, like Folsom, was reasonably assured of his seat—for the other city constituency—again worked together when possible, which helped Chan in a way. At least, it brought him hearers. However, those seldom lack at a Canadian political meeting. They still take their politics straight in

Canada, without any mollifying admixture of sociology or class feeling; convictions are inherited like any other possession; and money is still respectable. There are no "bosses," because wealth, with simple and unostentatious dignity, does its own bossing, and saves the expense of a middleman.

It was Lesley who remained astounded and unrecconciled at the turn of the tide of popular emotion against her side. She sat at her typewriter like the sentinel at the gates of Pompeii, repeating her beliefs until she could have recited them backwards. Cresswell derived much amusement from her earnestness. But Cresswell did not know that the cause was not only hers, but Chan's. Lesley would not join Chan in his sweet reasonableness; she wanted him to win whether he had any chance or not. All her ardour was really inspired by that hope. She attended meetings like a revivalist convert; she studied dreary and confusing schedules of "articles to be admitted free" with a gusto that nothing else could have given; and when Chan had time to come and talk it over with her, she could not have been more thrilled had he read Browning and brought her flowers.

Being so busy, she did not see quite so much of Eileen, but she had an accumulating sense of strain in the Whittemore household. Eileen got thinner, and her gaiety was feverish. Ross had the advantage of a longer training in masking his feelings. He induced Eileen to spend much of the time in Banff—he had a remarkable gift of diplomacy, and could usually get people to do as he wanted without their even knowing what he did want—but the mountain air only stimulated her to greater restlessness; and she rode and danced and swum to the point of exhaustion, where his diplomacy failed, and she kept on

dancing and riding and swimming. He was perplexed beyond words, for she avoided him whenever she could, yet if he went away her relief at his return was unmistakable. She wanted to be alone, and not alone; she wanted him near, and out of sight. Things were very ill with them.

Lesley hoped, or feared, for a time that Eileen would give her some further confidences, but in vain. She would, indeed, have been hard put to name any tangible thing on which she based her disquiet. Perhaps it was because Ross urged her more than once that she visit them often. It could not, Lesley decided, be Harry Garth's return, because the Garths had not yet arrived. They would not come till early winter, society whispered. . . .

The Garths had just been married, at long last, and were honeymooning somewhere. Mrs. Garth was the girl Harry Garth had been engaged to when . . .

Lesley still got her news from Cresswell. She heard that Garth was coming back to take over the managership of the wholesale business built up by Burrage as agent for the manufacturing firm Mrs. Garth's father controlled in the East. Burrage was going into business for himself. He and Cresswell were intimates.

The importance of this diminished with time, and Eileen's coolness. After all, what could Harry Garth do, present or absent? He had a damned cheek, Cresswell remarked, to come back at all; but with a new bride to live up to, he would certainly be as glad as Eileen to forget. It wasn't what he might do that was dangerous; it was the chance of renewed gossip reaching Whittemore. That would be fatal, in case there was already a rift within the lute. Or was it that he had, already, heard something? On thinking it over, Lesley decided it was unlikely any one

would have the courage of such an indiscretion.

Anyhow, Lesley concluded, she could not save the country and direct Eileen's affairs at the same time; and with this jibe at herself tried to put it all out of mind.

As the heat of summer waned, the fervour of the campaign waxed. July, August, and September passed, and still the country was hanging precariously in the balance.

Intrinsically the whole campaign made dull and hopeless work. Lesley had a headache from reading Rudyard Kipling's remarkable telegram apropos of the issue of Reciprocity, and was nevertheless reading it doggedly again, trying to make sense of it, one afternoon late in the autumn, when Cresswell came out of the inner office and stood looking over her shoulder with a quizzical air. He had just been in conference with Duncombe, the owner of the *Recorder*.

"Will you miss me when I'm gone, Johnny?" he enquired in lugubrious accents.

"I might, if you'd give me a chance," she retorted ungraciously. "And, while you're gone, you may kill off Champ Clark, and one or two professional pests. And Mr. Cresswell, please, please tell the foreman I must have final proofs every time. He's driving me mad."

"Tell him yourself, Johnny; he doesn't have to listen to me any more."

"Whatever is the matter with you?" she asked, looking him over suspiciously.

"Not what you think," he said, his bright blue eyes twinkling in their setting of concentric wrinkles. "Will you keep it to yourself for a matter of a few days if I tell you?"

"I guess so. What is it?"

"We're sold out, my dear, body and boots. Gone

over to the Conservatives. I had a hunch that Duncombe had been offered a good price a while ago, but he held off. Now he's decided he wants to retire. Oh, well, he's nursed this bally sheet for twenty-five years, and I don't blame him. Man's got a right to sell his own paper. It's a clean business proposition; he gets clear out. New owner; dummy, of course; the party is the real owner. He offered to include me in the good-will—but my opinions aren't so active and supple as when I was young, and I hate eating my words. I'll be on my way in a week."

"B-but—what's to become of me?" shrieked Lesley.

"Well, I can't possibly take you along," said Cresswell soothingly; "people are so censorious. Don't yell like that, Johnny; this isn't an extra; this is confidential. There, cheer up; you'll be all right. The tail goes with the hide. I spoke about you; they want Mary Jane. I believe, in fact, that they'll ask you to get out a woman's page."

"You pig!" said Lesley disrespectfully. "I don't believe a word of it." Cresswell dropped his bantering air.

"Seriously, I'm telling you the truth. But it won't make any difference to you—only, of course, the country won't be saved!"

"What will you do?" said Lesley, beginning to realise that she would be extremely sorry to lose Cresswell.

"I think I'll go to Chi. The new editor of the *Tribune* there happens to be one of my best friends. He sent me word a while ago that I could come on any time I wanted. Think you'd like Chicago?"

"No, I don't think so," said Lesley unheedingly. "Why?"

"Because, if I saw a place for you, I could send you word——"

"Oh, do, do!" Chicago—anywhere—rather than the loathed and feared Woman's Page. "Will you? No, you'll forget all about it."

"No, I won't. You've got the stuff; I'll remember. Back to the Big Game. It sounds good. Sorry I can't ask you to come out and have a drink, Johnny. I'll be around for a few days, anyway." So he left her, to digest the news.

It was true. The formal announcement came three days later. Champ Clark's studiously injudicious speech about annexation was used as a peg to hang the turned coat on. Cresswell made his exit, but stayed in town for a few days, offering libations in farewell to his friends. There was a new Pharaoh, who knew not Joseph, in his place; he stripped Lesley of her editorial dignities and gave her odd jobs to fill out her spare time. He was a quiet, amiable, able man, who did not need to be told her value. He explained that he wanted her to stay, and promised to map out her work more definitely when the campaign was over.

Of course, there were cheers and jeers from the other newspapers. Lesley almost wept over her enforced defection, when she saw Chan, and she was inclined to be offended when he told her smilingly that his prospects could hardly be worsened by the change. It was not he who had alarmed the Opposition into securing a new organ; they wouldn't kill a fly with a sledgehammer. The whole province was one of the most difficult for the Conservatives to capture, owing to its lack of manufactories and the nature of its products. There was also a strong American element to be considered, who naturally were not greatly placated by the frequent wantonly insulting

references to their country—although, with the reticence of the Anglo-Saxon breed when confronted with another's domestic squabbles, they forbore from any united demonstration or manifesto.

With this cold comfort, Lesley perforce sat back, folded her hands, and waited for judgment.

So it happened that, a little at loose ends, she found herself on a Friday noon planning to leave the office early. She thought she might run up to Banff. The foreman had forgotten to bring her proofs of Mary Jane's latest wisdom. She wandered into the composing-room, dodging trucks and compositors expertly. They were just locking the forms; no one had even half a second to spare for her. She looked over the galleys for her stuff, which came out on Saturday. There were no proofs of it on the hooks. She found it, muttered a polite oath over the cussedness of compositors in not having pulled a proof, and began the task herself. Lesley had a fondness for the grimy, busy, composing-room; even the smell of ink was not distasteful to her; and the foreman loved to explain technicalities to her. She could read the type, in its queer looking-glass form, almost as easily as proof. Her eye had the natural affinity for the printed word which makes the born reader.

It was an easy matter to ink the type and run the roller over it. Unconsciously, she glanced down the article standing in the next galley, read a sentence or two, and stopped, smudging the wet proof in her hand into a ball. She looked about the room quickly. Every one was feverishly busy, sending the locked forms down to the presses; they were already fifteen minutes late. Only one compositor caught her eye and flung her a hasty word as he rushed by with a truck.

"Want something?" he called.

"No, thanks, I've got it," she said hastily. With trembling fingers she inked the other galley, got a proof, and left the room slowly, while her feet ached to run. She hid her proofs in a newspaper, got her hat, and went on out, to a tea-shop where she sometimes lunched. She felt like a conspirator, or a highwayman.

It was not until she was well hidden behind her newspaper, a pot of tea and some buns, that she read on and discovered the stolen article was only half present. Still there was quite enough to give her the gist of it.

Chan's chickens were coming home to roost very early. Somehow his letters to Burrage, from Banff, about Whittemore's hoped-for charter, had fallen into the hands of the enemy. It meant a double stroke for them. Oddly enough, Curtin was the man picked to succeed Geers in his Provincial seat. And here, in cold black and white, was a case of attempted bribery; one prospective candidate to another prospective candidate. Even a note from Curtin was among the lot, so he couldn't plead ignorance of the plan. Burrage's name was carefully elided, but that did not matter; the story remained fatally intact. Even the blank transfer was duly noted and made the most and worst of.

Lesley's moral sense might have been outraged if it had not protested at the very time the deed was contemplated, and been soothed by its abandonment.

She had wiped the slate long since. Now she could only see Chan defeated and discredited. Not even a ray of humour penetrated to illuminate her desperate feeling of responsibility for his happiness. It seemed to be her business to save him. It is always a woman's business to look after the man she loves,

in her estimation. He appears to her as a large and rather unusually stupid child that *will* fall down and bump its silly nose unless watched.

She had to save him alone. If it had not meant delay, she would have sent for him and consulted with him; but he had been obliged to go to the ranch that morning. Even Ross was in Banff. Clearly she had to hold the bridge herself; and she cast about wildly in her mind for some last-minute expedient to avert the disaster. How had they got those letters? Who had the originals now? Where could she find out?

Where, but from Cresswell, her perennial source of news? She flew to the telephone and left urgent calls for him at every hotel in town, even though she was not sure but that he had already gone to Chicago. Then she sat down again behind her teapot and waited an hour.

Not in vain. A waitress summoned her to the telephone, and lingered casually to listen to the conversation.

"Mr. Cresswell, this is me, Johnny, Miss Johns. I want to see you—right away—this minute—I don't care; I simply must see you. Come over—come over to my house. It's horribly important, I tell you." She gave him the number.

"Oh, all right, all right!" he yielded good-naturally, the first remark she had allowed him to finish. It was not far to go; she was ahead of him, waiting at the door, and took him promptly to the privacy of her room, regardless of what he might think.

"This where you live?" he asked interestedly. "Funny to see a girl's room again; they don't give me that privilege like they used. Well, what is it? Going to ask me to fly with you?"

"Read this," she ordered, heedless of his pleasantries, and handed him the proof.

He read it. "Um-m," he said. "Where did you get it?"

"I stole it," said Lesley impatiently. "From the composing-room. Where did they get it? Who was Ross Whittemore's agent in that business?"

"They probably got it the way you did," he hazarded. "Who was—— Why, it was Walter Buraage! Now I wonder why he never told me—— Did he give them the letters?"

"That's what I want to know," she said. "I want you to find out for me quick, before they can publish it."

He had been gazing thoughtfully at the proof, and noticed the initials at the top, which indicated the compositor who set it up. "I see Carman handled it himself," he said. Carman was the foreman of the composing-room, a trusted man who had been in the place for years. "That means they're keeping it quiet; didn't want it to leak. I guess they want to use it for a roorback, and not give time for it to be refuted or explained away. Why do you want to know?"

"I want it stopped," she said. Her manner might have been Elizabeth's consigning a refractory courier to the Tower.

"Oh, you do, do you? Well, you are ambitious, little sister. What's the idea? Never knew you had any interest in Alderman Curtin."

"I want Chan Herrick to be elected," she said, with hauteur. "The—the Whittemores are my dearest friends, and—and—— Find out for me who gave the *Recorder* those letters. You can; you must!"

"I'm all packed up; starting for Chicago in two hours," he said.

"Then you can unpack," she retorted. "Oh, don't you see no one else can manage it for me?"

"And for the Whittemores," he supplemented. Tears of exasperation came into her eyes. She stormed him with entreaties; she fastened on him all her supple will, which could twine and cling to its object, feel its way to any crevice in another's mind for a vantage, like a strong, growing ivy.

He pretended to resist merely for the amusement of being coaxed, and then, as she had known he would, yielded at last. He had long had a genuine affection for Lesley.

"Herrick hasn't got the ghost of a chance, anyway, you know," he reminded her. "Folsom is so strong he turned down Frankland's help to-day. There was pretty near a free-for-all over it; rather funny. Did you hear about it?"

"No; what do you mean? Frankland *has* been supporting him."

Frankland was a more than local celebrity, owner and editor of a small semi-occasional sheet, a newspaper by courtesy, named the *Onlooker*. He wrote all his own copy. He was the wittiest man in Canada, with a bent for stinging satire truly Swiftian, and that is even rarer than wit. Frankland might have been famous in either the Old World or the New if he could have held his familiar Daemon in check. But in spite of his private weaknesses he was a power in politics; stronger, perhaps, in opposition than in advocacy. He was Irish-Scotch, and disliked Americans intensely, which made him an imperialist willy-nilly. Lesley knew him slightly, "the mildest-mannered man that ever cut a throat," or flayed an enemy with the dagger-edge of ridicule. She read his paper, when it issued, with pure enjoyment of the man's talent, and a reluctant merriment

over the Rabelaisian passages which, like all great satirists, he seemed unable to resist inserting whether apropos or not.

"Yes, I know he's been supporting Folsom," said Cresswell; "that's why it made him so mad. Well—Frankland heard yesterday that Folsom's partner had taken Jim Kane's damage case against the *Onlooker*. You remember how Frankland panned Kane last year—about his oil company that never struck oil? Frankland went and looked up Folsom, told him he thought it was a—pardon me—damned unfriendly thing to do, while the *Onlooker* was helping elect him. Folsom told Frankland superciliously that he could be elected without his help, and if he couldn't, he'd as soon lose. Said he hadn't asked for Frankland's support, and didn't consider it an aid to a public man, anyway. Wow! Frankland wanted to punch him; but we jumped in and led 'em away. I believe the real reason Folsom disclaimed him is because of the church crowd; you know how strong he is on Y. M. C. A. speeches and such things—slimy old hypocrite. I could tell you some tales about him, if they were fit for your young ears. But there it is; if he can afford to antagonise Frankland, he must have things in his pocket. I think he made a mistake. I'd as soon get a rattlesnake down on me as Frankland. But you should worry; I like young Herrick myself, but he'll never get in."

"I don't care," said Lesley obstinately. "Even if he doesn't this time . . . I want to know, and I'm going to stop that article."

"I believe you'll burn down the plant, if everything else fails," said Cresswell, laughing. "For sheer unscrupulousness, I hand it to a woman."

"Yes, yes; but do go and find out," said Lesley anxiously. "Just 'phone me who has the letters, and

I'll tell you if I want you to do anything else. I'll wait here."

"All right; I'm on my way. Taking orders—from the cub I taught. . . ." She pushed him out uncereemoniously. Then she roamed about the house for hours, like a caged panther, hardly able to sit still long enough to eat her dinner.

It was ten o'clock before he telephoned and made his brief report.

"Burrage gave those letters to Jack Addison, at the time they were written," he said.

"To *whom*?"

"Addison—Jack Addison. Don't you remember Jack Addison was running the real-estate end of the thing? I don't know if he's actually let them out of his possession yet or not. Want me to ask Burrage to find out? He'll probably smell a rat; he doesn't know the *Recorder's* planning that story at all."

"No, never mind. That's enough," she said hastily. "You've been awfully good. Good-bye!" She heard a faint chuckle come over the wire.

"Oh, all right; I'm a squeezed lemon," he said. "Good-bye, Johnny! I hope you get what you want; all you want. I'll back you to do it, if you go after it. So long!"

She was immediately conscience-stricken for ingratitude, but he had hung up and gone, and there was no time to pursue him with apologies. She had other business on hand.

CHAPTER XXVII

JACK ADDISON was at home, by some accident ; Lesley had no trouble finding him by telephone. She could hear faint masculine talk and laughter in the background of his voice when he answered. ". . . Hello ! who is it ?"

"It's Lesley Johns," she said. There was a silence, save for the dim voices ; the wire hummed in her ear. "It's me," she repeated.

"Lesley !" he said, in a surprised, inexplicably defensive, puzzled voice. "Where are you ? Do you want me ?" She felt the chill of imminent failure strike through her.

"You made me a promise," she said.

"Yes, I did." Ah, he had not forgotten. "All right. Tell me what to do. I'm glad you called." There was that much assured ; he was obviously ready to discharge himself of the old obligation.

"I'll have to see you to tell you. Come—come to the station. . . ." It was too late to ask him to the house, and she couldn't think of any place else. The station was so very public it was private. Any one might be at the station on their lawful occasions. They could walk in the railway gardens and talk. "All right," he said again. "I'll come at once."

He was there before her, though she hurried. He was sauntering up and down, watching for her from another direction ; she had never seen him look so thoughtful, but he smiled rather quizzically as he swung around to greet her. He was very debonair . . . she might have loved him . . . might have . . .

They found a seat in the gloom of the evergreen shrubberies. She felt like a ghost meeting another ghost she had known in the flesh; so, perhaps, did he.

"The half of my kingdom," he said at last, after waiting vainly for her to speak.

"I want Chan Herrick's letters," she said abruptly, with that pretty, breathless lilt to her high voice which marked suppressed excitement. "His letters about the street-car franchise. I don't want them published."

He whistled softly, and then said something under his breath that sounded like, "I'll be damned!" "And where," he asked, aloud, "did you hear I had 'em?"

"I can't tell you that. Will you give them to me?"

"Are you," he asked, "going to—marry Herrick?"

"No," she said. "I'm going home." And she rose.

"Sit down again," he begged. "You win. And I think you're more than even. Do sit down. You shall have them." She sank onto the bench again, growing hot and cold by turns. He began to laugh. "I suppose I can't say anything at all, without making you mad?" he asked.

"Of course. I didn't mean—— I will tell you how I first heard; I stole a proof from the composing-room this afternoon."

"Then Herrick doesn't know?" he asked. She flared up without knowing why.

"No, of course he doesn't. And I want you to promise you'll never tell—that it was I who got them from you."

He was overcome at that. "Cæsar's ghost! Do you suppose I would?" he enquired feelingly. "Do you think I want to be a joke to every man in Canada? Oh, Lord!" He rocked back and forth, chuckling, until passersby paused and peered at them. "Women," he said, "are weird; but you—you are

wonderful!" She felt sulky; her dignity ruffled itself.

"Can I have them now?" she asked coldly.

"I haven't them with me. Won't to-morrow do as well?"

"If you're sure," she said doubtfully. "Can you stop the story?"

"Sure I can. If they haven't got the letters, and I tell 'em I'll deny everything—it's open and shut. What can they do? They'd never have had sense enough to photograph the letters. Oh, well, I don't mind if it is stopped; I suppose it was a dirty trick. They were confidential letters, even if Whittemore did leave me to hold the sack." He had not actually cherished any grudge against Whittemore; nor, in fact, against Chan.

"Why did you?" she asked, leaving the sentence even mentally unfinished.

"I wanted to soak Curtin," he explained. Her vanity, rebuked, crept away out of sight. Romantically she had imagined him swearing a vendetta against Chan for her sake; and she gave herself a passing flick of scorn for it. "Curtin never did forgive us for not coming through and buying his worthless gas stock. So he tried to get back at me through the council; and he nearly kept the car lines from running to my property. I meant to hand him a reminder—in the neck. You know, I thought it was about that you wanted to see me. I was going to send you word pretty soon myself."

"Word about what?"

"The Crescent Hill lots," he said. "By next spring I'll have most of our money out of it, four times over . . ."

"Do you mean," she asked, "that I'm to get my money back?"

"Why, of course. Did you ever think you wouldn't?"

"I thought," she stammered, "I thought it was lost—when there weren't to be any cars, I thought it all went. You never said anything . . ."

"I'm sorry you thought so badly of me. I wouldn't let you lose money, at least." He seemed determinedly amused. "How soon do you want it?"

"Oh—when you get it—any time," she murmured. "I don't care."

"It depends on you. If you want me to pick out a couple of good lots for you and hold on to 'em till most of the rest are sold, it will pile up to ten times what you put in. If you're in a hurry, I can double it pretty quick, and close you out. It's a question of, say, two months or eighteen. I was going to write you about it soon."

"Oh, keep it as long—as long as you think best," she stammered. "Two years—any time. I—I didn't think badly of you; I was sure it wasn't your fault; I thought you lost money, too, and—and——"

"And what?" Well, she had thought if she pressed him he might make it up out of his own pocket, but she would not tell him that.

"Oh, nothing; I'm getting all wound up. I must go. Will you—to-morrow—can I have——"

"That'll be all right," he assured her. "To-morrow morning."

"Will you bring them to me?" she asked anxiously.

"I'll send them," he assured her.

"No, please bring them," she insisted. "At—at ten o'clock I'll be at Legard's candy shop." She was afraid to let them pass into any intermediary hands.

"Very well," he said, with a touch of resignation. "At ten."

She wanted to thank him, but the embarrassment

which had been growing on her all through the interview tied her tongue. "I must go now," she said, and again he hesitated before saying he would certainly see her home.

"You needn't bother," she said.

"But I must; really, I can't let you run about alone at this hour." He walked beside her, singularly silent, for he was usually fluent if nothing else; and he made no attempt to detain her at the gate.

"Guess I'll go back and see if those Indians have left any of my furniture intact," he said in farewell.

"Did I take you away from your guests?"

"Oh, just some of the bunch; they'll never miss me as long as the supplies hold out. Good-night!"

And again, in her room, she suffered that inexplicable sense of loss. She was strangely weary, also, instead of being triumphant; she felt heavy with the melancholy of a fact accomplished. It is the dregs of success, that ennui which comes in the moment of cessation of effort. "'Vanity, all is vanity, saith the preacher,'" she quoted oracularly to Hilda through the veil of her loosened hair.

"What's the matter now, Lady Macbeth?" asked Hilda placidly. "Is it your hair you're vain of?"

"My poor hair," said Lesley, laughing and holding it out to its brief length. It had never been long, though it was lustrous and soft, of that burnt black which is sometimes brown. "So mean of you to sneer at it. I guess I'd better buy a switch, so when the Prince comes to my window and says, 'Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair,' I can hang on to one end of the switch and let him climb up. Wouldn't that be romantic?"

"Any enterprising Prince would bring a hook and ladder," said Hilda prosaically. "What nice shoulders you've got, Lesley."

"Umph!" said Lesley, feeling the uselessness of shoulders which could not be seen as against hair which could not be concealed. Just her luck! She went to bed crossly, and accused Hilda of taking all the bedclothes. Later she said she was suffocating with heat; and finally went to sleep murmuring that her pillow was hard.

Before ten o'clock next morning she was in a fever of anxiety lest Jack Addison should go back on his word, and when he arrived at the rendezvous five minutes late she was furious. He seemed not to have stopped smiling; at least, it was the very same smile he gave her in greeting as he dropped into the little iron chair across the round glass-topped table.

"Here's your pound of flesh," he said softly, spinning a thin packet across to her as if he were dealing cards. She slipped it down into her lap, and wished she could bolt. A waitress came up and stood on one foot tentatively, waiting for an order and yawning.

"What would you like?" asked Addison.

"I don't want anything," said Lesley.

"We've got to pay rent for the table. An ice-cream soda?" She nodded, and when the mess was brought, regarded it with fearful loathing while Addison consumed his. His healthy and indiscriminating appetite was doubtless typical of him. She got away at last, somehow, certainly without any further effort on his part to detain her, and with the letters crammed into an inner pocket of her coat, where they bulged portentously. Addison she parted with at the door, and could feel his eyes on her retreating form. He had an unfair advantage, for she greatly desired a backward, unseen scrutiny of him, though she did not venture it. It seemed as if she might have surprised in his unguarded face the

secret of his change toward her, and the reason for her sense of loss. Experience would have told her the two elements she missed; the approval of affection, however hot and misdirected; and still more strongly, the sense of power, most intoxicating of emotions. Very bitterly she envied him for his escape. She was still thrall; the letters in her pocket burnt her for a sign. No hopelessness could cure her silly infatuation for Chan—so, in her moment of unavailing revolt, she styled it.

She hurried home, meaning to burn the letters. Only the lack of a fire made her reconsider; and then the idea struck her as unwise. Perhaps she had not got them all. She began to read them over, and realised that would not help; she could not possibly tell if they were all present. How, then? Inspired to a solution, she seized her suitcase, hurled some necessities into it, and rushed downtown again, where she caught the early through train for Banff by virtue of her long legs and a final, undignified burst of speed. She would give the letters to Eileen to give to Ross, with strict injunctions of secrecy as to their immediate source.

The motion of the train calmed her. She loved the sensation of travelling, and the country, prairie gradually merging into foothills, is lovely in a meagre, austere way during summer and autumn. The train puffed along importantly; cross-continent travellers began to rouse from their torpor at the present prospect of Banff and a stop-over for stretching. Several agreeable-looking men made occasion to pass Lesley slowly and give her tentatively friendly looks. Ordinarily she would have seized and devoured one for refreshment—the long distances of travel in the West make for informal sociability as on shipboard—but she was still smarting and baffled over Jack

Addison, and kept her eyes out of the window. Why had he changed so? Why couldn't she change? Cresswell had said he would back her to get what she wanted, but . . .

High River. . . . Five minutes' stop, two or three travellers coming aboard. The last one, popping out from the ticket office in a mighty hurry, was rushing past her vantage window before she recognised him.

"Chan!" she shrieked involuntarily. He nearly missed the train by looking around to see who had called, but just in time he discovered her, grinned, and swung up on the steps of her coach as it moved by him.

"What luck!" he remarked, stopping by her section. "May I sit down? Thanks. Going up to see Eileen? Why didn't you send me word?"

"I didn't know I was coming. Why didn't you?"

"For the same excellent reason. I oughtn't to, at that, with election only two weeks off—but I'll give 'em absent treatment! I fancy it won't make much difference. Are you going to meet the Grand Cham, too?"

"To meet whom?"

"Our Chief. He's on his way back, you know, from stumping British Columbia; at least, he spoke in Vancouver and Victoria. Must be feeling defeat ahead, I'm afraid, and making his last stand. He is to stay with Ross overnight, at least; and Ross wired me to hurry if I wanted to meet him, informally——"

"Do you mean the Premier?" asked Lesley incredulously. "Good heavens, why didn't I stay at home?"

"Why should you? Start gathering reminiscences, to write when you are eighty. . . ." He rattled on, apparently in the best of spirits, for another hour,

but at last they fell into the silence which always overtakes travellers nearing a stop, and she saw that he looked thoroughly fatigued and perplexed. That moved her. What could be troubling him? She kept a fast hold on the letters in her pocket, wondering with some subdued mirth what he would say if she should drop them into his hand. But she had no real temptation to do it; indeed, she had become dangerously inured to keeping things from Chan; it was small wonder if he had always felt her to be, in the last analysis, unapproachable, and had stayed courteously on the further side of the line she drew.

"You don't think," she asked suddenly, out of their reverie, "that you'll win?"

"Scarcely, short of a miracle," he said. "You know I never expected to. Good thing, probably; I'm afraid I'd be a pitiful object in the House. Not but what I'd like to—I'd try—— I suppose you're noticing my gloom; I'm just tired of tilting at windmills. It makes one doubt democracy."

She revived to her old spirit. "I know," she said, with mischievous sympathy; "there are times when one knows so much better than any one else." He laughed unreservedly.

"Oh, yes, I didn't mean it precisely. Only I feel as if I'd been beating a bladder, or a pan of dough, or a sofa pillow, for weeks and weeks. Sentimentality is the vice of the age. By Jove! to hear the Conservatives talk you'd not only think they had a patent on patriotism, but that every man, woman and child in the British Isles was our individual grandmother, and we ought to revere the old lady. Funny, you know, I used to rather like the idea of a living unity like the Empire, the thing that grew—before we really called it an Empire and began to spout. . . . Now I feel the same as I do when a man prates about

how he loves his wife, or about his own honesty, or a woman who . . . They're hawking it about, asking for bids on this priceless patriotism of theirs. Makes me sick. Of course it got into English politics first. Chamberlain was a clever man to realise how big a thing could be used for a personal end. Must have got his idea from religion. . . . And how the sheep have followed him. Can't we think for ourselves? 'The British born'—my eye! They keep the Hindoos out of British Columbia just the same; and you don't find these carpet-baggers like Hawke objecting, as long as they get in themselves. That's whom they mean by the British born; just themselves. But they're playing with fire. Make this a political issue once, and it will crop up again. The end of kingly prerogative in England began when a Royal party appeared. . . . Oh, well, you'd better throw the switch, Lesley. I'm falling for this *idée fixe* just like everybody else; and we're there—I mean, we're here. Give me that suitcase."

It was too late to back out, though Lesley got stage-fright again as they approached the log cottage which sat back among the pines a quarter mile from the station. Eileen nor Ross did not come to meet them because they did not expect Lesley and they did not think it necessary to desert their distinguished guest for Chan. Chan and Lesley gave their hand baggage to a porter, and walked. Many summer cottagers, and week-end visitors, were abroad on the forest paths. Chan was greeted a number of times, and one young man, silently insistent on an introduction to Lesley, turned and walked with them. Warmed by the admiring curiosity of his gaze, Lesley, who had passed him on the city streets a thousand times but not met him before for lack of opportunity, felt wistful and cheated. She might have

found some consolation, might not be clinging so forlornly to a fruitless dream, if Fate had been a little kinder and set her in the gates. In spite of her occasional shyness, she had the gifts of friendliness and tact, and could win liking instantly. The young man, whose name was Charles Dixon, otherwise "Tod," had ingenuous blue, wide-open eyes, hair the colour of wheat straw in August, and the frame of a young Hercules, which draped even his serviceable tweeds to the powerful grace of line Millet caught in his labouring peasants. He was very popular, and had the qualities of that defect.

"How's business?" he asked Chan. "I hear you're the hope of the party. Went to hear you speak the other night—good stuff. Little bit fed up on the 'British born,' aren't you? So'm I. It's a quick change from our 'no English need apply' advertisements."

"Oh, well, I don't want to bring prejudice in," said Chan dubiously. "It's so irrelevant, and extraneous; that's what gravels me."

"The flowers that bloom in the spring, tra-la," hummed Tod. "Quite so; and if they gravel me much more, I'll— By Jiminy, give me six hundred men—men like myself, eh?—and I'll put Canada on her own feet. We're getting a little too much advice about how to be Canadians. 'And Ireland shall be free, said the Shan van Voght.' Do you know," he turned a quizzical eye on the other two, "it could be done."

"That's what Aaron Burr thought," said Lesley.

"It's what George Washington thought," said Tod cheerfully, "the irreverent old rebel—what? But I won't argue with you, Miss Johns; I've heard about you; too clever for me. When I get my six hundred, 'men that can shoot and ride,' I'll convince you. I'm beginning to convince myself. So long; no, I can't

stop, going to the Murdochs' for tea. Staying over? See you again—if I may."

"I wonder," Chan muttered to himself as they mounted the porch steps, "if there is any significance in the fact that he could think that, even as a big joke? Fifty years more—— Hello, Eileen! you look like a dryad. Hello, Ross!——"

There was another occupant of the dim, redwood-panelled living-room; a tall, elegant, white-crested figure, before whom Chan waited respectfully for a greeting. Lesley wondered if she ought to bow or shake hands. Perhaps the Premier of her country required a courtesy. She shook hands, because the distinguished guest offered his hand. He had a warm, strong, magnetic clasp, brilliant black eyes under drooping, wrinkled lids like "Dizzy's," and the large, firm mouth of the orator. In five minutes Lesley had quite forgotten to be shy.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THEY dined very informally, and to save Lesley from feeling shabby Eileen wore a simple afternoon gown, but after dinner the two women withdrew in English fashion. Eileen had caught Lesley's unspoken request for a word alone. They strolled out on the verandah, where they could still hear faint snatches of deep-toned talk from within. Lesley fell gratefully into a hammock; Eileen disposed herself in a grass chair under a Chinese lantern, with her unfailing instinct for effect. Her copery hair glowed in the light of the green and amber globe above it, as one would have sworn she "taught the candle to burn bright," and that the Chinese lantern was but a reflection. Lesley was so æsthetically gratified she forgot the letters until Eileen spoke.

"Have you some more pleasant news?" she asked. Lesley actually shivered at her tone.

"No, not like that. . . . I have something I want you to give to Ross, if you'll promise not to say who gave it to you."

"Tell me first," said Eileen doubtfully. "Then if I don't want to promise, you can give it to him some other way. I can't imagine . . ."

"It's something you've probably never heard of," agreed Lesley, and recited her carefully prepared tale. It had to be carefully prepared, to get smoothly past the reason for Jack Addison giving her the letters. Even for Eileen, Lesley didn't care to dig up that particular bit of ancient history. But Eileen did not seem to notice any inconsistency; and ap-

peared willing to accept the fortuitous appearance of Jack in the story as the disinterested act of a noble friend.

"The letters are in my coat pocket," Lesley finished; "and what I really want is that Chan shouldn't ever know. I'd feel so silly and meddlesome, and he might—— Oh, you can see how stupid it would be, can't you?"

"I shall have to tell Ross," said Eileen. "But he needn't tell Chan. Won't that do? How clever you are, Lesley—you never offend people; you can be all things to all men, I believe. Oh, you certainly would have been a marvellous intrigante, in other circumstances. Madame de Maintenon, say?"

"Not religious enough; besides, I should have hated the king. I want freedom, not power."

"The two are really the same, unless you have the temperament of a Thoreau, and can do without the world," said Eileen, biting her petulant red lip. Ah! she had meant to forget, but she never forgot, not for a moment. . . . "Come into my room, and you can give me the letters; Ross will be coming out in a minute if we don't." They went in by a side door; Lesley rid herself of her hard-won trophy, and watched Eileen drop the packet into a big jewel-box and lock it with a little gold key. The lavishness of her personal appointments always filled Lesley with astonishment too great for envy—those gold-stoppered bottles of crystal, the gold-backed mirror, the perfumes and *bijouterie* and vellum-bound *bibelots*; the closets overflowing with lacy and ribbony things. . . . Barring the last, they were almost all Ross's immediate gifts.

"There, that's settled," said Eileen. "I'll get Ross alone, to-morrow. . . ." Lesley gave her a quick look. "You'll have to sleep with me," Eileen went on, "and

Chan will have to take a cot; or we won't have room for Sir Lucien. Do you mind?"

"Oh, not if you don't! I've got to go back in the morning, you know."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Eileen, and peeped into the living-room. The men had come from the table, and Ross was looking out of the window for Eileen. The distinguished guest was talking to Chan; his suave, musical voice had some power of carrying conviction even to one who could not make out the words.

". . . Excellent discipline, to lose your first contest," he was saying. "You fly high, anyway; I served twelve years in the provincial assembly before I got a look at the Dominion House at all."

"Oh, well, it wasn't my fault," protested Chan uncomfortably. "I know I'm riding on Ross's shoulders; and then, as you say, I'm bound to lose."

"No, I didn't say that," said Sir Lucien kindly. "All my hopes are the other way; though of course Folsom is a remarkably good talker."

"Not even a good speaker?" interjected Ross. "You do praise him with faint damns. I call him a blather-skite; vulgar but excellent word."

"Very excellent," agreed Sir Lucien gravely. "But it's often an able type."

"Yes, able in its own behalf, if not creative—take Winston Churchill as the apotheosis of it."

"Words are a power, you must remember," said Sir Lucien. "Even words without actual ideas, if they convey an image, or have a ringing sound. I may speak from experience. There is nothing an unconsidered word may not do. What else lost Blaine the presidency?"

"Yes," said Chan. "Six hundred men——"

"Pardon me," said Sir Lucien doubtfully.

"That was a phrase I heard this afternoon," Chan

explained. He repeated, with a smile, Tod Dixon's aimless remarks. Sir Lucien listened, with his hand concealing his expressive mouth.

"It made an impression on me," said Chan hesitantly, at last. "I don't know why; certainly he was only joking."

Ross looked at Sir Lucien. "Does it, then, survive, like a lost river, underground?" he asked cryptically.

"I fancy the spring is dry," said Sir Lucien.

"Did you think so at the first Imperial Conference?" Ross persisted. Now Sir Lucien smiled.

"Everything I thought there is on the records," he said.

"But, you know, it isn't impossible?" said Chan tentatively.

"Nothing is impossible," said Sir Lucien, "only to the old, who will not live to see the new. And I am old. 'The young men see visions,' you remember; the old men only dream dreams."

"It was not a young man who blocked Imperial Federation," Ross thrust again.

"I only asked for a workable proposition," said Sir Lucien quietly. "I cannot see one yet—for Imperial Federation, I mean. And if it were tried and did not work, it might bring great difficulties and evils, whereas now everything goes very smoothly. Draw a bond too tight and it breaks. It was the others there who dreamed dreams." But he gave an impression of impenetrable reserves.

"I should say they did," remarked Ross. "To fancy they could get from the aristocratic classes of England what the people of England themselves have never won! I mean the control of England's foreign policy. That was very young and sanguine . . . or else it meant a hope that we and Australia might create an aristocratic class to share without dimin-

ishing that privilege. But aristocrats are jealous; they need to be. They won't share."

"They will," said Sir Lucien, "if it is share or die."

"We've got a couple of peers now," said Chan. "Just a white chip."

"No one," said Ross, "has ever noted the important fact that our peers are both childless. Nothing given there that time won't take back. For the rest Canada has not even attained to a baronetcy. It's like Sydney Smith's way of coaxing a donkey with a carrot tied to its headstall." They dissipated gravity with a general laugh, and Eileen and Lesley, who had been listening with considerable interest, came in. The talk fell on music, books, and people. Eileen played and sang; Sir Lucien relaxed and took his ease. His stopover was practically incognito; and Ross had told the few who knew of it that he had been advised by his physicians to refuse visitors, so no one came to call. Sir Lucien's entourage had tactfully stopped off at Lake Louise, where Sir Lucien himself was supposed to be in temporary retirement.

Lesley felt as if she were lapped in a pleasant dream. This was life at its best; or at least at its softest. The flower, perhaps, if not the root nor the fruit. It was the couch of rose leaves. With the weariness of the day's work on her, she could not even imagine use so blunting her enjoyment that she might detect the crumpled petal and complain. She wanted most intensely to stay here, where she was so comfortable; she realised subconsciously that there is actually no spiritual pain that may not be drugged by material opiates, and was almost ready to take this quintessence of comfort, bodily and mental, as a sufficient goal. And then the curious back action of the small, strong Puritan fibre in her made her recall and

cling to her decision to go back in the morning. She still wanted to stay, but . . . She had not won even to this goal; why cheat herself even for an hour?

She went. Eileen managed to slip off to go to the station with her, and Lesley made her reiterate her promise not to let Chan know the part she, Lesley, was playing as *Deus ex Machina*.

"Of course I won't tell him," said Eileen. "'Bye, dear. Oh, here's Chan after all! He'll put you on the train; I hate the crowd." And Eileen went back to find Ross and execute her commission.

Her manner was very cold when she asked him quietly for a word by themselves. But she was always cold and constrained now when they were alone together, which was seldom. Pride and shame had cankered in her. Ross thought she hated him because necessity had driven her to yield to him even once. He wondered why he did not hate her for the brand she had put on him; evidently she had judged him as one with Simon Mage, who would buy the gift of the Holy Ghost. A man may have a deep and obstinate pride in preserving the decencies of passion, whether spiritual or fleshly. "Is thy servant a dog," his heart demanded silently of her, "that he should do this thing?" Nevertheless, or because of what was between them, there was nothing she could have asked him that he could have withheld. And she did not hate him; his basic premise was wrong. They did not hate each other at all; they only felt each other's presence so keenly, they both remembered so blindingly, that every nerve vibrated beyond that pitch where pleasure turns to pain.

He came, at her request, to her small cedar-scented chamber. As he entered, she lifted her head, with a peculiar shrugging motion of her shoulders, and her eyelids lowered and her mouth wried; an expres-

sion he often noted passing over her like a flash when she thought herself unobserved. It made him think of a child tasting something bitter. He knew well enough it was some ambush of memory brought that shudder to her—and he wondered each time: *which* memory?

She laid the packet of letters in his hand. "I got these," she explained promptly, "from Lesley. She wants you to see if they're all there; if there's something more to look out for. And you mustn't tell Chan where you got them; you mustn't tell him anything; but you may do anything else you like with the letters. I promised Lesley he shouldn't be told."

Ross looked the letters over with bewildered comprehension, and had to be told again how they came into Eileen's possession.

"You know what they're about?" he asked.

"I didn't read them, but Lesley told me. I think I understand. Are they all there?" He noted them carefully.

"Yes," he said. "You say Lesley got these from Cresswell, or Addison? It doesn't matter; I understand—the *Recorder* had them. Lesley has the makings of a remarkable woman. Why doesn't she want me to tell Chan?"

Eileen smiled enigmatically. "Because," she said, "Chan is a great fool." She turned away and picked up her hand-mirror, yawning delicately into it.

"Oh! Yes. Yes, he certainly is," agreed Ross slowly.

"Men," said Eileen, "are all fools." She had her back to him fairly by now; he could not see that she was watching him in the little gold-backed toy she held. He merely looked resigned and tired.

"Credo," he said. "But we don't always mean badly, Eily." She did not turn. "Thank you, and

Lesley," he said, and went out. He could not leave Sir Lucien alone much longer without rudeness.

Anyway, Chan remained in blissful ignorance.

From force of habit, even though her weapon had been wrested from her, Lesley followed the fortunes of the fight as closely as before. She still went to all the meetings she could compass, and orated fiercely to Chan and Hilda on the perverse course of affairs. That meant a lot of meetings, now the campaign was reaching its climax.

The truly climacteric meeting was a joint debate, between Geers and Folsom, two weeks later. Chan was also billed to speak, in his first humble status.

The Whittemores went, and Lesley was with them instead of at the press table again, and sat in a box. Chan spoke well. The audience, not yet suffocated with close air and smoke, was noisily appreciative. Chan was no longer embarrassed, his voice had improved, he even looked much older and more responsible, and his earnestness was indubitable. Lesley felt that his brief exposition was nothing short of masterly. Any one who wouldn't be convinced by such a speech was—well, a little lacking. But as a matter of fact it was really too close reasoned for the crowd. In spite of his random training, Chan had retained an executive, correlative mind, a passion for demonstrable facts, and an impatience of the emotional appeal in practical matters. Without charm, he would have been lost; but he did have charm of a kind, the straightforward, man-to-man kind. The most critical member of his audience, Ross Whittemore, was the most satisfied at the close. At last he was sure that Chan was a three-dimensioned person, a man, not a weathercock. He had the essential solidity which discounts luck in a public career; and Whittemore knew already that he would rather

work than talk. The prospect of talking did not elate him, even if he did obviously enjoy the quickened mental processes developed in the actual moment of it. In fifteen minutes he managed to cover the whole ground—the growing chauvinism of Canada, the alarming class solidarity and power of the country's financial men, the absurdity of that mare's nest of annexation—annexation, by a nation whose foreign policy is dictated by the man in the street, who hardly knows whether Canada is a town or a cocktail, and whose interest in territorial acquisitions is absolutely nil and in taxes paramount—and the real, clear, candid issue, entirely domestic, of a lowering of the tariff. If they didn't want the tariff lowered, well and good; they might go on paying for their fancy; if they did, why turn the country into a vast nursery wailing over a bogey? Very lucid and terse—and his hearers liked young Herrick—good-looking, wasn't he? the few women whispered—the men said he didn't put on any side and was certainly a comer in business and a great little mixer, regularly one of the boys, but not a booze-fighter, oh, no!—and his uncle was rotten with money—married the Conway girl, that red-headed woman there in the box; damn funny, wasn't it?—did you ever hear—

So they clapped very heartily, and gave him a few hurrahs for good measure, even if he had not just . . . The fact was they actually missed the fustian and bombast. They *wanted* emotional appeal, steam to get the load of facts under way.

They were to be satisfied soon. Folsom was next, and he gave them steam enough, so much they never noticed he was running in ballast. He had a powerful, ringing voice, of a good tone, so that his immensely nervous delivery never sounded staccato; he could pile up metaphors as clouds tower on a June

day, to darken and discharge in a Jovian explosion of question or statement; there was something irresistible about the way he recited statistics, which he handled in a manner to recall Modjeska's famous feat of bringing tears to her auditors' eyes by declaiming the Polish alphabet. And his patriotism—it burned, oh, indeed, it went up in fireworks that left trails of glory down the lowering sky! One could see him repelling an imaginary enemy at the point of a lance—well, no, hardly that, but one could see a band of gallant youths doing the repelling, while Folsom waited with decorations and wreaths well in the rear.

That was what the audience wanted. They yelled and stamped and cheered; they glowed and breathed heavily. It was Folsom they wanted; a man to do them credit at Ottawa. He had the experience, too. Like Geers, whose partisans still waited patiently for him.

In the meanwhile, Folsom took a final drink of water, mopped his tall, glistening brow once more, and was about to seat himself when some one unobtrusively slid on to the platform from the wings and gave him something—a folded paper.

"But what did he really say, after all?" demanded Lesley, loftily critical. "Told us his grandmother was a U. E. Loyalist—well, so was mine—my great-grandmother, I mean——"

"If you're going to bring out those versatile progenitors of yours, I refuse to enter into a discussion," said Eileen warningly.

"Well, she was, just the same," Lesley repeated. "Doesn't he know Queen Anne's dead? And he told us the price of oats here and in Chicago. I could tell him the price of shoes—— Mr. Whittemore, what is that he's reading?"

"Who's reading? I beg your pardon," said Ross, who had been secretly watching his wife. It had grown into a habit, an obsession; he couldn't keep his eyes off her, and she would never, never look at him. Only when he wasn't looking . . .

"Mr. Folsom," explained Lesley, in a tense whisper, leaning forward over the velvet railing. "He's got some bad news; something's gone wrong. . . . It's a newspaper. Look at his face! No, he's put the paper away, but his face . . ."

"I fancy he's done up; been campaigning pretty strenuously for the last month," said Whittemore. "He appears to be wearing his usual face."

"Oh," said Lesley, wriggling with impatience, "can't you *see*? I tell you there was something—something—— It was in a newspaper; I'm going right out and get me a newspaper and find out. That man's just *sick* inside; he wants to kill some one; I can *feel* it." She was getting to her feet, simultaneously with Geers on the platform. Folsom was sitting quietly enough. Whittemore was too polite to show his real astonishment; he only touched Lesley gently on the arm.

"Please do sit down," he murmured. "I will go. Certainly I will; it's a good excuse for a smoke." He disappeared down the aisle. Eileen whispered: "Now do be quiet, dear, or they'll throw us out. Chan's wondering if you are having a fit." Lesley sank back, exchanging a smile with Chan. But she had not heard a word of Geers' peroration when Whittemore came very quietly into the box again, ten minutes later.

She lifted her expressive, narrow eyebrows at him, and he nodded gravely.

"You were right," he said, sotto voce.

"How?" asked Eileen behind her fan.

"Folsom's done for," said Whittemore.

"Let me see," hissed Lesley, and reached around to draw a folded newspaper from Ross's pocket. He made to stop her, and then desisted with some brief movement of his head that conveyed what a shrug might have.

"It isn't reading for young ladies," he said—he had taken his seat in the very back of the box, and they were all tensely quiet; no one noticed their repressed excitement unless Chan, who looked across the dead footlights like an intelligent pointer scenting game, very evidently bored by his isolated grandeur.—"But you'll undoubtedly read it, anyway," Whittemore continued. Of course she would; she had it half skimmed over already.

Most indubitably, Folsom was done for! The paper was the *Onlooker*; and without headlines or blackface type the front page yet screamed that fact.

Scandal—the kind of scandal a public man cannot survive—a baldly ugly story about a woman. . . . No mere hints nor innuendoes, all of a most stark and damnatory explicitness. . . .

To recount it were merely sordid. Frankland had revenged the affront Folsom had put on him. As Cresswell had thought, Folsom had made a terrible mistake.

Lesley got to the end, and Eileen took the paper from her casually. Again Whittemore seemed about to recapture it, but again he let it go.

"Will it lose him the election?" whispered Lesley.

"Bound to," Whittemore nodded. "Poor devil."

Eileen dropped the paper on the floor of the box. She looked bored and cold.

"Then—then," Lesley whispered again, "Chan will get in?"

Whittemore nodded again.

"Chan will get in?" murmured Eileen. "Fancy—

"I didn't think of that!" She did not say what she had been thinking of. "Isn't it libel?" she asked.

"Certainly, but Folsom won't dare prosecute. There's his wife—and the other woman's husband. His course will be to say nothing, ignore it. But it's all over for him." The story was skilfully written with a confessedly false name given to the woman involved, while no other detail, place nor date, was omitted. And Frankland had been careful to state that the missing name, too, would be given on demand from Folsom.

"I'd like to get out," Lesley whispered feverishly, "but I suppose we must stay to the end. Oh, well! . . ." They all sat silent through the interminable remainder of the evening. Eileen pushed the paper to the edge of the box with her foot. Lesley sat with clenched hands. Whittemore looked grim and sad.

It was over at last. They hurried out, and found Chan ahead of them. He met them at the door, cramming another copy of the *Onlooker* into his pocket hastily. It struck Lesley as strange that he should look so horribly depressed, almost angry. Ross could understand that, and put his hand on Chan's shoulder sympathetically.

"I liked your speech, Chan," said Eileen, speaking first. Truly she had the social instinct. "It was excellent; and you know how easily bored I am. I suppose you've heard—the news?"

"Seen it," said Chan curtly. "Excuse me, Eileen, I feel upset. . . ."

"Why, it means everything to you," said Lesley wonderingly.

"That's just it," said Chan, and excused himself in order to excuse himself again to some members of his committee who wanted to seize and perhaps

congratulate him. Then he came back and climbed hastily into the automobile, emitting a sigh of relief as the car started. "It's a rotten way to win," he burst out.

"One sometimes has to accept a game by default," said Ross.

"There doesn't seem to be any other way in politics," growled Chan. "This whole election's going by default, by a fluke. Just raving prejudice. . . . Do they think they're voting on Folsom's private life, the American accent, or tariff reduction?"

"The tale is as old as Troy," said Ross. "No use bucking a basic fact in human nature. Human nature's your raw material now; learn to use it. You've got work ahead of you."

"Yes," he said, brightening. "The talking is over for a while. Of course I can't expect to do any real work at first, but there must be some chance for a plain pick-and-shovel man." He always set his teeth with a kind of dogged enjoyment at the prospect of some tangible thing to do; and but for the means he would certainly have been glowing over his prospective victory. As it was, losing would not have been half so hard as this fortuitous winning; and then, he felt for Folsom a touch of "There, but for the grace of God, go I." Perhaps it is that secret sense of guilt in common makes for the solidarity of men as a sex; they are all outlaws together. Only women have ever been classifiable into the sheep and the goats. Give them the saving sense of being sinners in common and they, too, will be comradely.

"Really," said Ross, "hate is the fulcrum Archimedes was looking for. You can always swing the world on that. Hate and hunger have made nations out of tribes, and tamed the desert."

"I'm sorry for Folsom, anyway," said Chan, who

could not philosophise just then. He sank into gloom again.

"I'm not; it serves him right," said Lesley, subtly irritated by Chan's behaviour.

"You women always turn down your thumbs," said Chan. Lesley yearned to slap him.

Only Whittemore recognised that it wasn't because she was a woman, nor even through innate cruelty; but because she at least had no dark places to fear the light. She was an innocent little Pharisee, but no hypocrite. But he did not say so.

"Oh, go on; sit on your haunches and howl if you want to," said Lesley, in a burst of honest rage that touched off an explosion of laughter among them and cleared the air. Was it strange if she wanted to rejoice?

Whittemore appreciated that; he said to her aside, as he got out of the car: "It would have been a stand-off, anyway, if you hadn't rescued those letters. They would have been a backfire against Folsom's blazing scandal. After all, you've elected him." He did not give her time to deny it; he and Eileen went into the cottage and left Chan to take Lesley home.

"Aren't you glad at all, Chan?" she asked mournfully.

He turned to her, his face flashing into the old boyish smile she had hardly seen for a year or more, for her lugubrious tone, taken from his own, had touched and tickled the natural man.

"You bet I am," he said. "I really am sorry for Folsom, but just on my own account I'd like to give a few war whoops. I'm sorry I was a crab before you and Eileen—and after the way you've worked, too. Please excuse me. By George, Lesley! I wish you were going to be in Ottawa. I've got to like it here; I'll hate to leave. But—hurrah for success!"

She *had* helped get him what he wanted! And her reward? Oh, he was sorry to leave—the town, Cissie Martin, perhaps even herself. He “wished” she would be in Ottawa. . . .

Well, in the name of wonder, what else had she worked for? She had done her best to send him away, and now was ready to whimper at his going. Amazing—she had never really thought of that end to her labours and scheming! Now she would lose him altogether. . . .

Why not, she asked herself heavily, as she went to her room? Face to face with her position, could she see any other sensible thing to do? Send him away—put him out of her life. Build her life around its own centre, not around him. Oh, yes, it must be for the best. . . .

She had got it by heart by the time election was over; and still she repeated it valiantly.

They had been justified in speaking with such certainty of Chan's return. Folsom went back to private life a discredited man; Reciprocity was a great deal deader than Queen Anne, since it had never been alive; and gallant old Sir Lucien, turned out of his keep with a few faithful men-at-arms, was a free lance once more.

And after these considerable happenings, one girl sat, staring out of her window at the snowy, sleepy streets and too lonely and dejected to seek company. Chan had gone East that day, and she had been to the station, with Eileen and Ross, to see him off; and had cried afterward in the kindly privacy of her room. For all she was such a Spartan pupil of adversity, she cried a long time before arising to arm her spirit for a quite fresh start. Her spirit was already galled with harness, and decidedly restive.

Funny to think Chan was a Member of Parliament now—an Honourable—and she had boxed his ears once! But that was ages ago, reckoning in that at least a century had passed since his train pulled out that morning with him on the rear platform waving good-bye.

CHAPTER XXIX

LESLEY reached for her hat with one hand, and with the other took a letter from her desk. She was in a tremendous hurry to be gone from the office, nevertheless she would not resist opening the letter for one more look at the slip of greenish paper it contained. She stood gloating just another minute.

It shared with an earlier letter, received the week before, the honour of being in Lesley's estimation the most important event of the summer. And yet that was the summer of 1914. . . .

But it was only July when the letters came.

Doubtless other things had happened to other people. For instance, in some remote, unheard-of village with a queer foreign name, two royal personages had come to a violent end. Lesley had read of that in her morning paper; and had asked for another cup of coffee and remarked that the day promised fair. Radical that she was, she thought royalty passé and even rather tedious. It would have been grotesque to imagine that those two royal personages must go down to the Shades accompanied by a vast, unaccountable multitude of other reluctant and tragically astounded souls. . . . She may have been too soon in thinking royalty passé. There is something to it still; a state procession like that may not be despised.

It is not a new thing for men to go about their business under the shadow of Pelee or Vesuvius, buying and selling and marrying and getting children, while

Death stands by with a grin and his bony hand crooked for the clutch. But then Death always stands so; it is every man's end, and he must be about his business.

This was most particularly Lesley's business. At last she was ready to put her folly away in lavender—not rosemary if she could help it—and take up her old plan. The letter was from Jack Addison; it was very formal and businesslike, but it enclosed a check for five hundred dollars. First payment on her investment, he explained. He had turned it twice for her, and now, by the successful speculator's sixth sense, was closing her out at the top of the market.

It removed her last anxiety about the answer she had sent to the letter of the week before, which came from Cresswell.

Cresswell, too, had redeemed his promise. After a year and a half, when she had really almost forgotten him, he had written. In the autumn, the journalistic time of change, he said he could give her a place on his paper, if she would take it.

How that would have delighted her once! Mere pride forbade hesitation; she accepted. But now she could feel at ease, no longer fearful about leaving her mother and climbing out of her rut, which threatened to become dully comfortable and to engulf her definitely.

She went out into the dry, hot afternoon; to tell Eileen. It was necessary to tell some one. Scorning the street-cars, she turned her face toward the Whittemore cottage, a haven of peace to her forward-looking fancy. The city sprawled naked before heaven; bigger, noisier, and even less beautiful than it had always been. Lesley hurried, regardless of the heat, wishing to get off the clattering streets, but almost unconscious of her surroundings. It is a merciful

thing that accustomed ugliness becomes almost invisible. She turned into the cut beneath the railway crossing, after passing the enormous new hotel. Years before, she had often been obliged to wait fifteen minutes at that crossing for an insolent freight train to move out of the way; or else, as she had been seen to do, swing up and scramble over the couplings between the cars, careless of danger.

"It has changed. . . . I wonder why Jack didn't bring the cheque himself, so that I could thank him. . . . He must hate me for making him give me those letters. . . . Well, it won't matter now; I'll never see—any one—after next month. . . . No, I won't write to Chan. . . . What's the use? I'll tell Eileen not to tell him. Unless . . . he comes back soon. . . . Chicago can't be any uglier than this. Pouf!" She wiped the dust out of her eyes, while her brain still shuttled back and forward. No, decidedly she would not write to Chan, not till afterward. For the first time since he had gone East, a letter of his lay unanswered. She meant it should, as a sign. He must never take first place again. She was going to need a free mind now. His mind was free enough, that scrappy note proclaimed. Perhaps she had hoped absence might work some magic, but it had not. . . . As for why she would not tell him—and so would not write at all until Chicago had swallowed her—that was a bit of unreasoned superstition. Once before she had told him, and been disappointed; and from what had come of it lingered a strange feeling of disaster. Their one quarrel and year-long later estrangement; the erection of some barrier within herself upon which her heart had beaten in vain to reach him. . . .

The cottage was cool indeed, and odorous of potpourri. Eileen, in a delicate green gown, shone

in the chintzy drawing-room like a flower. She kissed Lesley unwontedly, and pulled off her hat, and rang for something iced to drink. What was more, she appreciated the vast importance of the cheque. Though she had learned to spend money frantically, merely as an occupation, she had not lost her sense of proportion.

"How perfectly splendid," she said. "Ross," she summoned him through the open door from the back garden, "would you believe it, Lesley's got five hundred dollars! What are you going to do with it? Did you say Jack Addison made it for you? Have you got him in your pocket? You produce him so mysteriously at just the right time; I never guessed you knew him so well."

"I—I used to," said Lesley. "I really never see him now; it's years since I gave him that money. It was to gamble on Ross's street-cars."

"I didn't know I was robbing widows and orphans," said Ross apologetically.

"This doesn't look like robbery to me," said Lesley contentedly, and went on to answer Eileen's question as to its ultimate uses.

Ross looked unexpectedly disquieted at her announcement, but Eileen seemed dismayed. "Oh, I think that's detestable!" she cried, "—no, of course, it's nice for you; but why should I ever come back if you're gone?" Lesley knew the Whittemores had meant to spend the late summer abroad.

"Would you rather not come back?" asked Ross. Eileen was calm again.

"Oh, it doesn't matter," she said. "Besides, you'll have to, so that you can finish out your term and be knighted on the next Birthday."

One felt a shrug in Ross's answer. "I never yearned to be elevated to equality with a London grocer,"

he said drily, and hastened to add: "Not unless you wish it?"

"To be a groceress?" she countered. "No, thanks."

With silent intensity he wished that she would want something. Time had wrought another alteration in Eileen. Her cold vivacity was disappearing; she seemed tired and distraught always, yielding everything with indifference. And that wrung his heart. He had loved her dainty arrogance and spirit . . . and he could never forget how like a flame she had been, on their belated bridal night, which was like the "little book" of the prophet, honey on the tongue and gall to the aftertaste. How could she have counterfeited so well? There was much he had forgotten, in the dead years her fire had consumed, else he would have known she could not. She had the gift of passion, which is not every woman's; and it was starved in her; small wonder if she grew pale and listless. But he thought she had even ceased to hate him. How empty-handed it left him toward her. If she desired nothing, what could he give her? This, this was like watching her die. Had it been all in vain; had he not saved her after all? Would the hard contact with life through work have been better for her than this? And was it too late to rectify such a stupendous mistake?

"I wish—" said Lesley, breaking the thread of his thoughts off short, "I wish you wouldn't go—abroad."

"Why not?" asked Eileen, putting down her frosted glass of iced tea in astonishment.

"I don't know—I just wish——"

"Really, this must be a conspiracy," said Eileen, looking from Ross to Lesley again. "We aren't going; at least, not yet. Ross says he doesn't like the European situation. I didn't know there was one; but, anyway, we are only going to Maine. Chan will be

in Bar Harbor with a party next month, and we'll join him there, and go no further if the European situation insists." Ross had a few foreign correspondents who still remembered him.

"Then Chan isn't coming back this summer?" said Lesley, with studied calm.

"Probably not; he appears to be quite exhausted with his labours helping to block Borden's donation party. You know, the thirty-five million gift to the English Admiralty. I'm sure he must have favoured you with his view on it more than once."

"Oh, yes," said Lesley absently, "he wanted to know if I wished to become a helot, paying tribute for protection. I assured him that I didn't, even if I'm not quite sure what a helot is."

"In principle he's right," said Ross, "but in fact we have to go it blind anyway, and support England in any event—but it may be best to seem to keep a choice, even if we haven't really a word to say beforehand of any quarrel we must inevitably share. Half measures——"

"I have a brilliant plan," Eileen broke in suddenly. She had not been listening, having heard quite enough of the helots some time since. "Lesley can marry Jack Addison and stay here, so I can come back after all. That will be much nicer than Chicago," she smiled at Lesley.

"Well, but what am I going to do with his wife?" demanded Lesley indignantly.

"She's attending to that, dear. She got her interlocutory decree two weeks ago—dear me, didn't you know she is in California getting a divorce? I did hope, when you mentioned him, that you could give me his side of it. Now don't deny everything; leave me a little hope."

"It's the very first I've heard," protested Lesley. "I

thought you were hinting at polygamy. Don't startle me like that again."

"But men say they are all polygamists at heart; why be startled? I am sure Jack has polygamous instincts."

"Men have always talked a great deal of nonsense to excuse themselves," said Ross unexpectedly. "That's some of it."

"Then they aren't?" asked Lesley meekly.

"Polygamists? Not any more than women. You hear them say that in a sort of aside, as if they meant to spare women's feelings; as if you were soft creatures that can't stand the truth. Actually, only women ever have faced that fact, put up with the natural man, made the best of him. Men have locked women up in harems, ostracised them, bow-stringed them, everything, to keep from facing the same fact by making women over to suit their theories. To say that we're all polygamists is a crude and rather misrepresentative statement. You hear it from the kind of people who, like Robert Service, are 'never afraid to call a spade a murderous, hellish plough.' " Lesley snickered and checked herself to listen. "The trouble is," Ross went on detachedly, "that in all passionate love there's a hard, insatiable core, that nothing could fully satisfy, so it always burns beneath the ash of fulfilled desire. No man or woman is quite absolutely enough for any other woman or man. Neither would a world of them be. Six husbands or wives wouldn't be better than one, because, as I say, that demand is insatiable; it's a little bottomless pit we all possess. I fancy it is merely Nature's safeguard against 'battle, murder and sudden death.' Sentimentalists want us to believe in one mate for each of us, and that may be so in the long run, and we may find that mate—but here and now, the human

race wouldn't last two generations if Nature listened to that nonsense. Think of the chance of finding your mate among the billions of earth's population!"

"Then you think one person will do as well as another?" asked Eileen smoothly, while an old, unanswered question reared its poisonous head in her bosom. Why had he married her?

"No," said Ross, still more gently.

They sat in a vibrant, electric silence. A hot, honey-eyed scent of clover came in the window, as on a night two years before. Lesley felt a strong intuitive impulsion to go. But when she rose, Eileen sprang up also, with a strange, short catch of her breath, and seized Lesley's hand.

"You're not going!" she cried. "No—I don't care; I'll be vexed if you don't stay for dinner. I won't see you at all soon. Sit down."

"Of course she will stay for dinner—unless you expect some one at home?" said Ross persuasively. Lesley looked at him helplessly, feeling herself drawn one way and another by conflicting wills and instincts, and sat down.

"I'll stay if you want me," she said, "and I don't expect any one—even if Mrs. Callender did call on me yesterday. I meant to ask you, Eileen, if you know what she wanted. I wasn't in; she left her card. It must have been a mistake; I don't know her from Adam. Does she think I'm the society editor?"

"I sent her," said Eileen, with a quick sparkle of mischief.

"You sent her? Why? Do you like her so much?"

"She's a nice little ninny," said Eileen coolly, conjuring up to Lesley's mind a picture of the lady in question—a small, fair woman with a neat figure and a pretty, negative face; always fashionably and charm-

ingly dressed, with great pearls in her ears and a diamond bracelet showing over her white-gloved wrist—a newcomer, comparatively, and a social *soupirant*. “I sent her to ask you to her housewarming ball; you’ll get a card soon. She came to get me to help her receive, just when Ross had decided he didn’t like the European situation”—there was always something faintly, yet not unpleasingly, mocking about Eileen’s mention of Ross in his presence. It was impossible to say if she were coquetting with him or jeering at him. “I was so at loose ends I said I would; besides, I’m tired of watching her struggle. It will be a relief to boost her in. The worst that can be said of her is that she wears those pearls even with a riding habit. . . . But I must have your moral support; I refuse to do it alone.”

Lesley had not even heard of the ball previously, and had not the slightest interest in Mrs. Callender. “But I don’t want to go,” she protested. “I haven’t got a gown——”

“Piffle,” said Eileen calmly. “You have five hundred dollars. Lucie shall take your measurements, and I’ll write to Jacquin in New York. If the result doesn’t fit, Lucie can alter it. Just shut your eyes and don’t bother me, and you’ll make Solomon in all his glory look like a basque in an Empire season. No, it won’t cost tons of money—it will cost—it will cost forty dollars; I’ll put that limit on Jacquin.” Lesley, in her simplicity, had never heard of Jacquin either, and so accepted this preposterous statement. She subsided feebly, with a treacherous intention of leaving for Chicago at the last moment. The ball was not to be until September, when Mrs. Callender’s new house would be finished.

“I don’t see,” she protested weakly, “how you’ll be alone . . . if I don’t go . . .”

"You know what Carlyle said of London: 'Three millions, mostly fools.' What could be worse than to be alone with two hundred of them? . . . Lesley, why don't you have a real holiday before Chicago, and come to Bar Harbor with us?"

"No," said Lesley, with unpremeditated and unalterable decision, "I can't—I just can't." And she stayed by that for the rest of the evening, though it was the first time she had refused any request of Eileen's. Yet she never mentioned the one real reason, that of a sudden her will had triumphed, after a struggle five years' long, over her heart. Her bruised pride had risen when Eileen told her Chan would not come back that summer. All in a moment, she never wanted to see him again. Some inchoate feeling, stirred gradually at first by his negligent and diminishing letters, crystallised into hard resolve. She had said she would be free. She *was* free.

CHAPTER XXX

THERE was storm in the sky. The air was thick, and carried little swirls of dust about the street. When the sun disappeared behind a cloud the wind blew cold, though it was but the first week in September. Lesley struggled with an enveloping oppression, which had thickened about her ever since those terrible August days when the world went mad. It is not difficult to recall, despite that man's memory is so brief, how sensitive hearts were stunned by that stupendous clash of arms; what an abyss of blackness and terror opened to the imaginative spirit; how the moral vision was darkened by the fume of hatred and frenzied lies which ascended to heaven like the smoke of the pit. Lesley wandered in it as through a nightmare, for days, before she was able to think again of her own affairs, absorbing as they had been just previously.

The thought that her personal plans might be deranged by the general catastrophe occurred to her at last, and stung her into a more endurable and human irritation. It was simply the last straw. From feeling the weight of the whole world's woe, she came down to consideration of her own difficulties. Therewith she telegraphed to Cresswell, to ask if his offer still held.

She was never more astonished in her life than when he replied that it did.

The telegram had just arrived; so had a telephone message from Eileen Whittemore, asking her to come over early for tea. Eileen gave some reason—some-

thing about a new dress. Anyway, it was always a relief to go to the Whittemores. Ross eased her aching mind by talking intelligently of conditions abroad, instead of repeating phrases parroted from the daily press. She was glad the Whittemores had not gone away. They had put off leaving for the East until it was clear their European journey must be definitely cancelled. Then they had gone to Edmonton instead, where it appeared Ross had discovered something to do, organising for the Red Cross, or equipment for the Rough Riders, or something.

With a hopeless sigh, and a queer shake of her shoulders, like a bird that ruffles its plumage, she put the telegram absently into a hairpin dish and prepared for the street. Eileen had asked her to hurry. She hurried, like a leaf blown ahead of the early equinoctial storm.

It almost caught her. The screen door of the cottage banged viciously behind her, and the rain began spattering softly on the walk. She heard Eileen's voice before she could see into the interior of the drawing-room, which was shrouded in a peculiar artificial darkness due to the storm.

"*Here* she is," Eileen called. "Now Chan can stop fussing about you getting wet——"

"Chan!" The name struck her oddly. For the first time since she had known him, he had not been in her mind for days. "Why, he isn't—here——"

"Oh, yes, he is!" Chan answered for himself, towering up all in a moment over Eileen's shoulder, as Lesley's eyes accustomed themselves to the soft gloom.

He looked . . . taller . . . no, older, more mature, graver—no, not that at all—how extraordinary! He looked like a stranger, a mere acquaintance rather. . . . Her heart fluttered and steadied. . . . She had

done it; she had got free at last. . . . She held out her hand to him, with a laugh of sheer relief, as one does laugh after a shock that does not hurt. The dreaded event had happened; he had come back . . . and it did not matter in the least.

"How do you do—and why didn't you let us know you were coming?"

"Mostly because I didn't know," he said. "Besides, you had stopped writing, and I was on my dignity."

"But why so sudden?" she asked, sinking into a chair, without even attempting to defend herself from his charge.

"Oh, I don't know," he looked involuntarily at Ross. "I may find out after I've been here a while. Why didn't you write?"

"I'm sorry," she said vaguely. "Look at the storm——" A peal of thunder seemed to shake the house. "There, I feel better; don't you, Eileen? Almost anything is a relief—can you think of anything but the war?" she turned to Chan again.

"Not very much," he confessed, knitting his brows. He looked much older then.

"One can't," said Ross. "I have a kind of waking vision of it; I can see a colossal pyramid that men have been building for years out of fear and vanity and greed and gullibility. And on the apex stands one man, chosen of himself as most fitly representative to crown it. A little man, an inflated pygmy—plucking at the stars and calling on God to be his servant. Then God hears him—and overturns the pyramid, leaving the little man to carry it on his shoulders if he can. Then I feel the earth shake with the ruin of its fall." His low, toneless voice in the dusk sounded uncanny. It evoked the vision to them all. He had promised to be a speaker of the first rank before he left public life, and the impress

of his brief training was visible whenever he spoke more than a casual sentence.

"Yes, that's it," said Lesley, after a silence. "I couldn't express it. I thought of an earthquake, or a tidal wave—but that wasn't clear. . . . Oh, I *wish* I could think of something else! My nerves are in rags." She spoke with a sharp, strained note of appeal, and then, disregarding her own wish: "You're furnishing a Red Cross unit, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Ross. "I really haven't anything to give but money. Too old to volunteer."

"Would you volunteer?" asked Eileen.

He hesitated. . . . "Might be a way out," ran his thoughts. "Probably," he said, aloud, misliking the too common habit of those exempt, of wanting credit for good intentions.

"Well . . . anyway, you can't," said Eileen, in an unreadable voice. He wished he could see her face clearly.

"Jack Addison's been accepted," said Lesley, in an unconsciously melancholy voice.

"Cheer up, dear, I'm sure he'll come back," said Eileen, with patent meaning.

"Oh, shut up!" said Lesley disgustedly. With painful surprise, Chan saw that she was embarrassed and startled into the rudeness. "I was just counting how many from here," she explained. "He's the only one I know."

"Jim Kane is going; you know him, don't you?"

"No. He's Mrs. Callender's brother, isn't he?"

"Yes. And by the way, you unnatural female, why haven't you asked to see your dress? It came this morning."

"My dress?"

"For Mrs. Callender's ball. Don't tell me you forgot!"

"Is some one giving a ball?" asked Chan.

"Cynthia Callender is, next Tuesday. She planned it for a housewarming; it's to be a farewell instead; she says she wants Jim to have a cheerful send-off. I must tell her you're here. She's following a classic example, isn't she?"

"Well, why not?" asked Ross.

"I don't want to go to the ball," said Lesley inconsequently. She had forgotten it, in truth.

"Darling, *please* don't bother me," said Eileen patiently. "We're all going out in a blaze of glory, if the end of the world does come. Come and look at your dress." The two women vanished, and through the transom Ross and Chan heard an exclamation of surprise and delight.

"Lot of good fellows going," said Chan, with seeming irrelevance. "Rotten business, isn't it? But we've got to go through with it."

"Yes," said Ross. "Must go through with it. Talking is grotesque, now."

"What was the use of finding a New World, if we can't cut loose from all that sickening business of kings and intrigue and old, stupid hates?" said Chan. "Dragging it after us like a ball and chain—I wish I could think straight for an hour. I thought I'd like to see you. . . ."

"I don't think I can help you," said Ross. "But I'm glad you came." They fell into another silence. "I wonder," said Ross measuredly, "if this is one of Time's revenges for the South African War. Yes, the bill is coming in. I fancy God has a sense of humour, don't you?"

"Or the devil," said Chan. ". . . So Jim Kane and Addison are going! Did Eileen say that Lesley—I thought Jack had a wife."

"He had, but he hasn't. Divorced," explained Ross

briefly, but with a contemplative scrutiny which Chan missed. He recalled something else Eileen had said, long before. "I believe," he added, "that Addison has been . . . But, in fact, I don't know; and Lesley is very capable of attending to her own affairs. She must have had plenty of men in love with her, anyway. Very good-looking girl, if you take time to notice it; not showy, that's all." Chan was scowling thoughtfully. He got up and looked for a match, with a needless appearance of perplexity, for the matches were in plain sight over the mantel.

"Addison's such a chaser," he said irritably.

"He puts his cards on the table," said Ross, with the suspicion of a smile. "By the way, would you like us to ask the Martins for dinner to-morrow?"

"The Martins—why, I suppose Eileen knows who she wants—— What in blazes are you driving at?"

Unfortunately, he got no answer, for Eileen and Lesley came back; lights and tea were ordered, and they all fell into a long discussion of the Red Cross work. That feeling of things unspoken and yet half understood vanished with the dusk. Nevertheless, the afternoon left Chan with an added feeling of dissatisfaction. He was already struggling with a grave problem, and he realised with surprise that he had meant to put it before Lesley and talk it over with her. And she was—changed. Her silence of the past few months became pointed by her manner.

Experience had taught him that there was one thing that could always be counted on to crowd out old interests. A love affair never failed. He did not know just where he had learned that. . . .

Jack Addison had been attracted to her once. It had seemed to him negligible at the time. Well, what of it? He didn't know; he just felt dog-in-the-mangerish generally. Lesley was talking to Ross

while Chan bit his cigarette-holder and thought about these things. She did not look at him as she had used; that bright understanding glance which had been wont to answer better than words. . . . Ross absorbed her completely.

"I am afraid I cannot reassure you; Chicago is to me most like the antechamber of hell," Ross was saying. "But you are too young to care."

"I hope it will be the antechamber of New York for me," Lesley smiled. So did Ross.

"That's what I said," he agreed. "It's——"

"Are you going to Chicago?" Chan cut in, regardless of interrupting Ross. Lesley turned a startled, defensive glance on him.

"Yes," she said. "I've had a place offered me on a newspaper there. Going about the fifteenth."

Overhearing any conversation is a mistake. There is inherent in it a sense of injury to the eavesdropper, however innocently he may become one. It is not that listeners never hear good of themselves; it is merely that to overhear a piece of news communicated to another touches our self-love by showing us to ourselves as left out, not the first to be considered and enlightened. Chan did not know exactly why he had that sense of sustaining a blow—his mind only prodded him with: "And she never even told me!" He was about to say so, when he caught Eileen's blue eyes bent on him with gentle malice.

"Till the war is over, at least," said Eileen.

"Eileen!" said Lesley, exasperated, and rose and marched off in search of her hat. She had been about to go in any event, but the action seemed to Chan unmistakable in its significance. And—she did not want him to walk home with her. The storm had cleared, and Ross and Eileen wanted him for dinner; that was a good excuse.

He simply could not mistake it; she was avoiding him purposely. That was the longest time he was to see her until the night of the dance. She had a subconscious fear of disturbing that priceless sense of freedom. Everything was settled; she was calmly eager for her new start, despite the all-pervading depression; and she would risk nothing.

Psychologists, who claim to know us better than we know ourselves, tell us that the half of fear is desire. . . .

She did think of him, with some secret sense of expectancy, while she dressed, at the cottage, in the new gown; why not? He might arrive any minute; he and Ross had been ordered to dine at the club once more, leaving the field clear for the battle of the chiffons.

"I hope you enjoy it," said Eileen, sitting on the bed to direct like a general the coiffing of Lesley's hair. "Poor Mrs. Callender has cried her eyes out and worked like a Trojan alternately; and she's done wonders. Simply tons of flowers for decorations; I was up this afternoon—and the sitting-out places are positively strokes of genius. But it will be a jam; absolutely everybody will be there. I suppose Jack Addison is coming?"

Lesley fell into the trap. "Yes," she said absently, and then looked the more vexed and guilty that she was really quite innocent. She had heard from Addison, but only about winding up their financial transactions. He had telephoned to say he needed to see her, only that morning; and when she said she would not be in for the evening, he told her he also would be going to the ball. "Save me a dance," he had said, with something of his old manner. And that was all; there was no need for Eileen to keep harping on his name. Which she explained to Eileen, quite fruit-

lessly. Eileen only told Lucie to hurry, for they must go early so Eileen could help receive.

If Lesley was more than a little pleased when Lucie had finished and she saw herself cap-à-pie in the long gold-framed mirror in the drawing-room, she had some cause. Her gown, which had taken her breath to see, was all of glistening silver tissue, made à la Josephine, held over the shoulders, Eileen said, "by the grace of God, a little court-plaster, and a string of beads." There were sleeves, which came down over her hands to the thumb, making her long fingers look surprisingly delicate. But at the top the sleeves ended at the edge of the bodice, so the exquisite line of her shoulders and flat back, which dimpled faintly when she moved, was unbroken. Despite the newer fashion, the skirt was not wide, but when she walked it parted over an underdress of black chiffon, a startling combination, carried out in the strands of jet that upheld the bodice. The brilliant-set tortoiseshell combs in her hair carried the glitter to a climax above her low, smooth brow. The black and white set off her face like a cameo and brought out the Japanesey clearness of her eyes and brows. It was bizarre—perhaps; it was beautiful undoubtedly.

She leaned to the mirror with arms outstretched, touching the gilt frame on either side, her pink upper lip lifted in a smile of the most disarming childish delight. "Oh, Eileen," she said wistfully, "I do look nice, don't I?" And she read her answer in another face in the mirror that was not Eileen's nor hers. Eileen had gone back to finish her own toilette.

"You look—you look wonderful!" said Chan, taking a deep breath. Manlike, he had never dreamed of the transformation clothes might make in a woman. He felt like a fool; he had never appreciated her, never. . . . Odd, that in that very moment he re-

membered, for the first time in months, years maybe, that he had kissed her once. . . . And he had very candid, even telltale, eyes.

Now, verily, he was a stranger; for Chan had never looked at her like that.

"T-thank you," she stammered. "I—I must get my coat——" She disappeared in confusion, and when she came out again Eileen was with her.

It is a frightful injustice, to say the least, that modern male evening dress is only becoming to one who has almost every advantage of appearance without it. And yet there is a distinct artistic value in the massed blacks and whites it displays, if the line is good; and there Chan's thin flanks and broad shoulders served him well. His was a different kind of good looks from Ross's, who had a hint of a less brusque, more courtly age in his bearing and his impressive, ascetic features—you could imagine him saving a lace cuff from contact with a gold snuff-box. Certainly Ross was handsome, and Chan hardly so—but is that not superfluous when a man is under thirty-five, successful, and six feet tall?

CHAPTER XXXI

THE Duchess of Richmond once gave a ball, at Brussels. So did Mrs. Callender, a hundred years later and six thousand miles away. Let the censorious carp at either; surely it is a good deed to add to the gaiety of nations when that commodity is at its lowest.

Lights and laughter, flowers and flirting, the quickening beat of frothy, foolish, catchy music, the subtly stupefying and yet exciting odours of perfumes shaken out of floating gowns and powder blown off bare shoulders; and faces, faces, faces, all smiling, all repeating the same expressions of stereotyped delight—"How lovely . . . charming . . . exquisite . . . what wonderful flowers . . . how nice you look, dear Mrs. Callender . . . what a sweet gown . . . so glad to be here . . ." and more smiles, more faces, until the giver of the feast becomes a mere automaton in the midst of a merry-go-round, knowing her right hand from her left only because it aches from too many greetings. So does a hostess enjoy herself.

Eileen, standing resolutely beside her, less dazzling but more delicately beautiful than usual in a full short frock of unrelieved black chiffon, leaned wearily against the smilax-draped stair rail by which they stood to receive, and smiled in sympathetic misery. "There can't be many more," she murmured, under cover of the orchestra. "What time is it? Only eleven! Mrs. Callender, your dance will be talked about for years."

"Do you really think it's going off well?" Mrs. Callender heaved a deep sigh and shifted her weight from one pink-satin foot to the other. "No, I'm sure there won't be many more, Mrs. Whittemore; and I wish you would go and rest, and have a glass of champagne."

"My dear"—Mrs. Callender revived under the endearment—"I am rooted to the spot; I kicked off my slippers an hour ago, and I can't get into them again. I advise you to do the same, and then we'll sit down on the floor. I'll stay as long as you do."

"How clever of you! But do go and have a sandwich—Mrs. Conway, I am trying to coax your daughter to rest." Mrs. Conway, ample and stately in grey satin and cut steel beads, hurried up at the moment. She looked singularly distressed and agitated.

"Do come, Eileen," she urged, though still timidly. "I—I want you to—Miss Johns wants you——" Her eyes, which would not meet Eileen's, fell on Lesley at the moment, dancing with Tod Dixon, her silvery skirt flashing and falling with the movement of her feet, her shapely dark head plain above the other women. She was smiling; she had let go of care—in fine, she was flirting furiously.

"Lesley wants me?" Even over the music, Lesley must have heard; she drew Tod off the floor and came to Eileen.

"Are you enjoying yourself?" asked Eileen. "Yes, mother—what is it——"

"Oh, gorgeously," Lesley's flute notes rang out. "It is too wonderful. . . . Oh, how do you do?" She gave a very formal bow to Jack Addison, for Eileen's benefit, and he asked her for a dance. They were all talking at once; and Mrs. Conway plucked at Eileen's filmy sleeve.

"Do come, dear," she repeated in a whisper. "It's something—I can't tell you here——" Eileen, perplexed, crushed her slippers on somehow and followed her mother. They skirted the dancers, Eileen answering a greeting at every step. "But what is it, mother?" she repeated for a third time, and turned to look back at Lesley. Mrs. Conway, with a smothered, choking sound, caught at her arm to draw her out of range, but Eileen saw.

It was nothing—nothing she had not expected for years. Only Harry Garth, with a girl on his arm—his wife, of course—entering; the familiar smile on his face, his sleek, fair hair immaculate; everything about him tame, correct, commonplace. Eileen stood gazing, with a pucker between her brows, her pupils expanding, her mouth curling faintly at the corners, until her mother touched her again, and then she shivered and turned away. "Yes, I see," she said. Her mother drew her into the nearest door, into the pantry it happened—they were dancing in the drawing-room and the dining-room, which had been left in one for the purpose. The pantry was empty. Mrs. Conway held her daughter's hand convulsively and her face worked; two tears gathered slowly in her dim eyes.

"Yes," said Eileen. "Oh, mother, don't, don't cry! Dear mother, thank you; it was kind of you; but you see it doesn't matter. . . . Mother . . ." She put her arm about Mrs. Conway's plump, bare shoulders, and the grey head went down on her breast; her young, smooth breast. "Thank you, mother," she repeated.

"I just heard they were coming," Mrs. Conway moaned, as if exculpating herself. "Mrs. Callender didn't know, of course—she hasn't been here long. I didn't want you to see him——"

"But I should probably have seen him some other time," said Eileen. "Mother, it doesn't matter at all: can't you see? It's all so long ago—and it does not hurt me now——"

"It's cruel," sobbed Mrs. Conway; "it's cruel—my little girl—after you suffered so. . . . Eily, you think I wasn't kind to you; you've never forgiven me—but we didn't know what to do—I—your father—— If we could just have killed him——" Her gentle mother!

"Father?" asked Eileen grotesquely.

"No—no—that—that beast—oh, oh!" Her shoulders heaved.

"Mother," said Eileen with gentle firmness, "you must stop—for my sake." Mrs. Conway drew herself up pathetically. "We mustn't have people talking," Eileen continued soothingly.

"I know—but it made me sick to see him—I *hate* him so."

"I'm sorry, mammy, but for my sake——" Suddenly Eileen's red mouth trembled, and Mrs. Conway saw the jewel-bright eyes fill with tears. "Oh, mother, can't we forget?" said Eileen. "I—I am sorry, too."

"Dear heart," said Mrs. Conway, leaving her own eyes overflowing to sop Eileen's with her soaking handkerchief, "dear childie, don't you feel bad. S-sh, some one might come—there—there——" Now her sore heart was eased; she was a mother again, come into her own; she could comfort her child.

"You see, mammy," said Eileen, "this isn't any place to cry, is it?" A strain from the newest waltz floated to them in sweet mockery. "Shall we go back? You understand, I have got to, just as if it were nothing. . . . Help me, mother, won't you?" Mrs. Conway's tears ceased; a sad dignity informed her heavy, age-weighted figure and round, wrinkled face, whence

the powder had been washed away in streaks. "Come this way," Eileen continued; "we can get to Mrs. Candler's bedroom up the back way, and get some powder. I must go back soon, if only for Lesley . . ." She drew her mother hastily through the kitchen, where a couple of sleepy maids had barely time to stare.

She need not have troubled about Lesley; indeed, she passed very close to that young lady on the upper landing, without knowing it.

Neither did Lesley. She was occupied in settling herself inconspicuously behind a great bank of palms, carefully arranging her gown so that she might not have to speak first to Jack Addison. Since he had requested the tête-à-tête, he might fairly begin it. But she had to look up at last, and meet his smile and that abrupt, unrevealing glance she had come to know.

"Well?" she said. "I thought—you wanted to talk to me?"

"I wonder what you did think?" he returned. "Never mind; you certainly won't tell me. Do you know I'm going away with my regiment, Lesley?"

"Yes," she said. "I hope——" She stopped, and began again, confused by some inexplicable shade of melancholy that brushed her like a cool wind. "I'm sorry," she said instead.

"Are you really?" he asked slowly. "I used to think you were a hard-hearted creature—but—— How could you understand?"

"You didn't give me much chance," she said resentfully, for she felt her gaiety departing, and it left some sort of an ache. "I—I always wanted to be friendly—it was you that wouldn't——"

He looked at her, with a kind of doglike appeal, mixed with humour, in his brown eyes. "I'm afraid,"

he said, "that it isn't in me to be just—friendly with a pretty woman. So, on the whole, I guess it was better for me to stay away."

"Oh!" she said. "Did you—try to stay away?"

"I certainly did. I believed you meant what you said. If I'd thought I had any chance, I wouldn't have given up—but you don't suppose I enjoy wanting what I can't get? I always try to make the best of things," he smiled. "And I've nearly cured myself, you see."

"Yes," she murmured, "I see. . . . Tell me something."

"Go ahead; but be warned, I'll probably tell the truth."

"Could I do it again?" she ventured. "Get you back?"

"By God, I believe you could, but I'm not going to let you—unless——" He did not miss her slight involuntary movement of withdrawal. "You see!"

But she had an object, and pursued it. "Why did you want—me, just me—so much?" She was asking, like many another woman, for the secret of attraction, which Nature alone holds and will not yield.

"How can I tell?" he said. "For every man there are certain women—one if the first one takes and holds him—that go to his head, make him drunk with wanting 'em, send his senses spinning. You got me like that. Oh, I like women; I've loved lots of women, in a way; but nobody'd got me that way since I was nineteen and in love for the first time. She was ten years older—and married—she thought it was funny. I don't know why with her, either; she wasn't so devilish pretty, not as pretty as you; and there are prettier women than you—though you're stunning to-night. But I'd have got down and let you walk on me, kissed your feet—— Come away, my dear, this

isn't good for me. I've got the next dance with Mrs. Healy. . . ."

"Very well; I didn't mean to bother you," said Lesley, rising. It was a very small corner behind the palms; her shoulder brushed his, and the flame she used to know came into his eyes.

"Lesley," he said, in a level whisper, as a gambler might name his stake, "will you kiss me? It isn't much, after everything—I'd like it to remember when I'm too old for love,—or if I never come back——" Laughter flickered just beneath his voice. She did not consider, nor pause; he had spoken at the one right moment. Now there was no one else, no shadowy third.

She put her arms about his neck, a shimmering circlet in their silver sleeves, and he bent to her like one who quenches a long thirst. All her blood drew from her heart to his warm, asking mouth, like a spring tide; her senses mutinied and left her dizzy and faint, and she withdrew from his arms by sheer strength of will. Even so his eyes still possessed her; triumph looked out of them, though he was very white.

"So—I could have!" he said shortly, after a pause.

She understood, and made a gesture of refusal; and as he had made no move to touch her, he laughed. "No," she said. "No. That wasn't me—it was—any woman. There's—something more. That you couldn't have got."

"It was good enough," he said. He had summed up his own philosophy; and certainly he had not often been unhappy with it. "Don't you think, after all, you've missed a lot?"

"Nobody can tell," she said, for indeed she dared not face the issue then. "No—I can't do it—again!" She put her hands on his breast and held him off,

and he saw at last a real terror in her eyes. "Because I ask you!" she cried. "I've got to go on, my own way!"

"But are you sorry?" he insisted.

"No," she said generously, meeting his eyes. He did not know why, but that conquered him.

"Well—then we'd better—go back." He stooped for her handkerchief; and when he lifted his face again some change had come to it; he was as she had always known him. His passion had its lyric heights, too.

Now he was no more troubling to her than he had always been. She went past him, and was surprised when he stopped her once more.

"Wait a minute," he said. "You made me forget—that's a bad habit of yours, isn't it? Here is what I had to see you about." From the pocket of his white waistcoat he produced a bit of paper. She saw that it was another cheque. "This is your balance," he said. "Now we're quits—aren't we? Here's the account, too."

Without reading the last she thrust them down into her bodice, after a dazzled glance at the amount on the cheque. It had his own name on it, but she never noticed that, nor knew that he had really taken the account over himself, desiring to set his house in order before he left. His word satisfied her.

"Oh, yes!" she said. "I want to thank you for—all that. You couldn't ever know how much it means to me. But I must go back—no, wait a minute." Stepping out of their nook, she saw Cissie Martin's goldy head and white chifions fluttering down the stairs; and across the room, Chan looking about. He joined Cissie. Lesley walked around the gallery, keeping out of sight, and they came down to the strains of a dance just beginning, in the general confusion

of searching for mislaid partners. Tod Dixon had the next dance with her, his third. But she refused to flirt with him any more, and looked obstinately over his shoulder at nothing in particular.

It was Lesley Chan was looking for. He had got his dance card mixed, and thought he had the next with her. With masculine brutality and singleness of purpose he did not see the demure Cissie until she was under his very nose. She was petite, and enhanced it with a fascinating pout, which unfortunately Chan knew by heart. Earlier in the evening she had pouted at the War, since when he had fled from her. She made him think of the women who helped make the French Revolution merely by the things they did not understand.

"What have you lost?" she enquired.

"My partner," he paused politely, his glance still roving. "Have you seen Miss Johns?"

"Yes," with a little tinkling laugh, "but I won't tell you where. It would be mean to disturb her."

"Don't say she's asleep," said Chan at random.

"Asleep!" She choked a giggle into her handkerchief. "Oh, dear, how funny! Cross your heart, and I will tell you——" Chan was attending now. "She's up in the gallery saying good-bye to Jack Addison. Do you suppose," Cissie stood on tiptoe confidentially, "do you suppose they're engaged? Wouldn't it be romantic? Jim Kane wanted me to be engaged to him so he'd have some one to think of in the trenches, he said; but I didn't care enough for him, and then Esther Purrington told me he asked her just the same thing. So I wouldn't dance with him at all to-night——"

"Engaged? Why do you think they are engaged?" He was pumping the little featherbrain; he knew it, and he did not care.

"Well, he gave her something, I didn't see what—and——"

"And——?"

Cissie blushed with excellent effect. "Oh, I think you might guess," she said. "You just ask her; there she goes now, on the floor with Tod Dixon. . . ." Mercifully, some one claimed Cissie for the dance. Chan, suddenly out of sorts with the music and brightness and all the mere froth that the many Cissie Martins in his life had typified, tried to escape and have a smoke. Confound it, he had not come all the way from the Atlantic coast to go to a dance. He had come to think something out. Why he could not have thought it out any nearer the same Atlantic was not very clear. He had nearly got away when Eileen jerked him back with a beck of her fan.

He could not but observe the utter fatigue in her purple shadowed eyes, the nervous movements of her slim, pale hands. She was answering mechanically Mrs. Callender's urgings of a sandwich or a glass of punch. "Oh, thanks, but I couldn't; my head aches quite stupidly. Chan, have you seen Ross or Lesley?"

"Lesley is dancing," said Chan. "Aren't you going to?"

"I haven't, but you might ask me." Chan put his arm about her slim waist and swept her on to the floor. "I wanted an excuse to get away," she whispered. "I like Mrs. Callender, in homœopathic doses; and if I had danced with any one but you, I'd have had to dance with every one. Half an hour of her, and I want to scream. Now we're out of sight, let's sit down. Do you think Lesley is having a good time?"

"A very good time," Chan assured her grimly. Eileen leaned back suddenly and closed her eyes, to shut out the sight of Harry Garth. She felt very ill, and as if something inside her were crumbling to

ashes. For the first time since the dreadful night when Lesley's sympathy had released her tears, another had got behind her defences. Her mother's unspoken apology had penetrated deep. . . . She had read somewhere of mummies brought to the light after ages of interment, which seemed fresh and perfect to a momentary first view, and fell to dust at a touch. Yes, that was what she felt like. . . . And she was a coward, too. She had put Ross between herself and what she had done. It was not that she had wronged him; she had wronged herself. owned herself worthless and broken, else why had she traded on a lie? False pride; false coin. . . . Had there been nothing left of her very self that she must creep into marriage like a wreck into harbour? Yes, she had lied tacitly from fear, not because she was her own; if it had even been to save Ross's feelings, she could now have forgiven herself.

Chan worried a loose button of his glove until it came off, and then spoke, apparently to the button.

"Is Lesley engaged to Jack Addison?" he asked.

The intrusion of his voice hurt Eileen, in her secret and self-centred misery. "Why do you ask that?" she enquired sharply.

"Because—oh, I just heard some gossip," he answered lamely. The word was unlucky. With a mad impatience tearing at her heart, an impatience of concealments and evasions and stupidities, Eileen sat upright and spoke very clearly. "I don't think they are engaged, but I am sure he is in love with her. If he hadn't been, he would never have given her your letters, and if she had, she wouldn't have asked him for them. Why don't you ask her?"

"Given her my letters? What letters?"

"The letters you wrote from Banff, about the street-car franchise, when you meant to bribe Alderman

Curtin. The *Recorder* got them, and was about to publish them just before you were elected. Lesley made Jack get them back for her, and she gave them to Ross. She elected you, really. I don't know why she did that, either; but you see the gossips don't know everything. So I don't think you need listen to them any more." Her onslaught was so savage and so totally unlooked for, Chan was stunned for a moment before he felt the sting of it.

"That wasn't very sporting, Eileen," was all he said, in a carefully subdued voice, but with a cold anger in his green-grey eyes. "Still, I'm obliged to you. Will you excuse me?" He rose.

"Chan!" He hesitated. "Chan, wait a moment. You are quite right—" the flare went as it came and she was numb enough to see clearly once more—"but forget the way I said it. I broke my word to tell you. Wouldn't you rather know?"

"Oh—I understand," he said slowly. "Yes, I would."

"Are you going to say you had it from me? I'm—fond of Lesley, and she might not forgive me."

"Of course I won't." She held out her hand to him on the impulse of reconciliation, and he found it deadly cold. But his brain was too busy on his own affairs to note the danger signals flown by her exhausted nerves and temper. She was fit for anything, and knew it; and she wondered if she would get through the evening without disaster. Perhaps it was disaster enough to have so flagrantly and needlessly broken her word to Lesley.

"Can't you find Ross for me?" she begged. As usual, when he was not in sight she wanted him. Chan went off obediently, still astounded and with a slower anger, like his second wind of rage, beginning.

Eileen closed her eyes again. She sat in a retired nook under the stairs, out of view of the main floor; one saw only her slim black-satin feet and the bouffant edge of her skirt beyond a Japanese screen which hid a large window. She felt, rather than heard, an intruder, and lifted her lashes haughtily.

"Eileen," said Harry Garth hastily, and he could not meet her steady, icy stare, never dreaming that it was only a cloak for frantic fear, "can I speak to you a minute?" Her silence disconcerted him; he stammered, and blurted out: "I know you hate me, and I was a—— I treated you badly; but I was in a tight corner—— We were too young to have any sense then; but now we're older, and both married, and if we've got to meet each other sometimes, why should we start people gossiping? I'm glad you've done so well——"

The fear vanished; she could have laughed in his face. "Don't call me Eileen again," she said. "What do you want?"

"Just to let bygones be bygones," he repeated, with a touch of that ineffectual sulkiness—ineffectual when he was himself the suppliant—which she remembered. "If you should meet my wife——"

"I am not likely to meet your wife," said Eileen, with a composure that surprised herself. "And I do not see any reason for this conversation."

"But you might meet her," he persisted amazingly. "Or if you don't, she'll wonder. . . . She did wonder why you didn't go to Mrs. Johnson's tea that was given for her. . . ." A white light flooded Eileen's brain. Much as she had hated him once, before he became too negligible for her hatred, she had not thought him so infinitely contemptible as this. He *wanted* her to meet his wife; his wife unsuspectingly desired it also. The same simple, greedy snobbery that had

made him hold to his engagement to the daughter of a wealthy father in spite of honour, sent him creeping back soliciting the favour of the girl he had thrown aside, now she was important enough. . . .

"Go away," said Eileen, in a small, deadly voice, rising to her feet. Fool—fool—fool—echoed in her mind, but she hardly knew if it meant herself or him. Oh, incredible, that she should once have cared for—this!

"But——"

"I believe you wanted me, Eileen?" Ross's voice cut between them; and Eileen put out her hand instinctively, as if to a sure support.

"Oh . . . yes," she said, in a half whisper. "Yes, I think you might take me to supper." She took his arm. With a grave, slight inclination of his head, Ross stood aside for Garth to pass. Flushed with chagrin, biting his lip, Garth went.

"You look tired," Eileen heard Ross's kind voice, the inflection that she knew so well. "Do you think you should stay late?"

"No." She could not talk. Her eyes wandered about mechanically; she felt like an automaton, or as if she had been dead a long time and but now realised it. The immense stupidity of things was pressing down on her like a coffin lid. The crystal chandelier, flooding the waxed floor with light, the competing brilliance from silvery sconces on the walls, all twinkling on beads and buckles and combs and bracelets in women's toilettes, gleaming back again from the round Colonial mirrors over the mantel and door, struck at Eileen's eyes pitilessly, reminding her that this was what she had faced and accepted that night at the opera—this endless glitter, those admiring-
envious glances, no softness, never any peace. . . . She had her reward.

"Oh, look at that!" A burst of delighted laughter from some of the dancers, who stopped and crowded toward the stairs, made her glance upward. On the upper landing a two-year-old girl baby, deliciously shapeless in a Teddy-bear sleeping suit, and blinking with solemn joy at the gala scene, was wriggling down from the top step, bent on joining the festivities. It was young Edith Callender, escaped from the nursery.

"She will fall!" said Eileen, dropping Ross's arm, and flying upstairs. So the little thing would have, but Eileen caught her in the nick of time. But she was not afraid, not even of the lovely stranger. "Bye-bye," she cooed airily, and waved her dimpled fist at her mother, who was swooping—if one may swoop upward—upon her also.

"Oh, naughty, bad girl," said Mrs. Callender severely, offering to take the offender. But Eileen could see down the hall the quiet nursery, with only its little night light burning; it offered a moment's refuge from the crowd.

"Let me carry her in," she said. Mrs. Callender, secretly and tenderly gratified, led the way, laughing in spite of herself, and relating a worse exploit of the week before, when wee Edith had come down at tea time, escaping from her nurse in a state of complete nudity and nonchalance, in the face of half a dozen guests.

"She just loves company," said the mother apologetically. Eileen put her down, leaving a wisp of black chiffon in the baby's grasp. She bit her lip and her shoulders quivered before she faced the light again; and turning, found Ross at her elbow. He had seen, though she was unaware of it. All Eileen wanted was strength enough to get through supper, and then home; but it was not strange if he read her otherwise, seeing

her stoop again over the rebellious cherub in the white crib. "Night, sweetheart," she said, and got a wet kiss on her chin. Then Mrs. Callender reappeared with a nurse, and they all went to supper, followed by an unrepentant wail from Edith.

Eileen saw Harry Garth at another table, beside his bride—rather an envious little bride, who looked at Eileen's diamonds quite wistfully—and saw also that Harry would not trouble her again. She wished nothing might ever trouble her again, not even Ross's kindness. So she got home somehow, immediately after supper, having arranged with Mrs. Dupont to take Lesley home. Ordinarily she would have left that to Chan, but it did not seem the wisest thing now.

CHAPTER XXXII

ROSS heard the muffled chiming of a French clock in the drawing-room. Three o'clock. He shifted in his chair and threw his dead cigar out of the window. He had lit it two hours before, but there was not half an inch of ash to show on it. For over an hour he had not moved. Before that he could hear, by listening painfully, soft small noises from his wife's room, as of the dropping of a slipper or putting down a brush or a book. Since then, silence, so he might have thought her asleep. But if she slept, why had she left her light burning? From his own dark window he could see it streaming across the lawn.

At first he had tried to read; he did not know what. But why put off any longer the settlement that must come? It was necessary to get to a clear understanding with himself. Something must remain for him to do

He had recognised Harry Garth. Now if he could kill him. . . . There was no melodrama there; he wanted to do it, in a peculiarly matter-of-fact way. Not for any ancient grudge of the possessive male, any sense of having been cheated of his *droit de seigneur*, the husbandly prerogative which old law did not blush to name, though our more reticent and shame-faced age dare not require it save by indirection. Perhaps there was a time when he too would have made the immemorial demand; but the Sultan in him had died by violence, with his hot youth. No, he wanted to kill the other man because he could even

now make Eileen look as she had looked, when she said good night. . . .

Better to consider possibilities, of which there were at least two. He still stared at the patch of light on the lawn.

Suddenly he turned as if he could see through the wall into the dark drawing-room. Somewhere a door had opened gently. Eileen's door; she might be walking in her sleep. . . . Her high-heeled Spanish mules shuffled whisperingly across the space of polished floor that surrounded the Chinese rug. . . . He could almost see her. Then there was a small stumbling crash and a low plaintive exclamation as of a sick child. He could not bear it.

As he turned the light on she winced, turning her head away, as if she could do no more. She was leaning on the back of a tall oak chair, which had tripped her in the dark; clinging as if without that support she must have fallen. All her hair hung in a heavy tangle about her shoulders and over her eyes, as if she had fought and smothered in it; her beauty was in eclipse, the geranium red of her curved mouth sodden and pale, her eyes swollen with weeping and her cheeks still wet and of a streaked whiteness. A smudge of dust or fleck of soot had got on her chin and been rubbed across heedlessly. A filmy dressing gown trailed out behind her nightrobe, half on, half off, and she had lost one of the useless, ornamental slippers.

Without a word, Ross stripped off the black burnous he had on coming home substituted for his evening coat, and threw it around her. The night was not cold, but she looked so utterly forlorn, his action was instinctive. Then he picked her up—she did not resist, and he put her on the wide sofa. Her head fell back, but he could see, by her eyes following him, that she had not fainted.

"There was something you wanted?" he asked quietly.

"A drink—of water," she said, in the flat voice of one who has wept to exhaustion. "I got so thirsty . . . I fell over a chair; that was all." He brought water, and held it for her to drink. She felt better. The smarting memories that had flooded her had grown to a physical fever. All that the mere shell of her disdainful pride had kept back in the actual presence of the man she despised, had found her out in retrospect. The vinegary lees of a wine that had once intoxicated her was pressed to her lips. The horrible, minute memories. . . . Her flesh and blood was ashamed to its last nerve and cell. A spiritual nausea like the ghost of its prototype had racked her. Much better if she had worn her regrets out in patience, instead of locking them so long apart to grow monstrous and distorted in the dark. Suppressed emotion takes an exquisite revenge.

"Thank you," she whispered, and pushed the glass away. He sat by her, gripping her hands. The pressure was grateful to her.

"Can I get you something more?"

"No."

"You don't want to talk, do you?" Her eyes opened wider. He could feel her exhausted brain grappling with the present.

"You mean—you want to say something? I don't mind." She felt acquiescent. Get it over with.

"Not until you are ready."

"Say it. I'd rather you did."

"You aren't happy, Eileen?" But she only watched him. "No," he went on quietly, "that was a stupid question. I have failed."

"You?" she whispered.

"Yes. I meant to make you happy. I thought I

could give you freedom, but it hasn't been freedom. I've only shut you up, kept you from living. Eileen, do you want to be free?"

"How could I be free?" she asked. "Do you want me to go away?"

"It's what you want; I want you to have it. Perhaps—if you were free, you might—find some one——" He hesitated. Her eyes closed momentarily. He released her hands, and walked across the room and back. "Some one you could care for . . ." he said.

She struggled up to a sitting posture, put back her hair, and looked at him with blank eyes. It had reached her, but he could not guess how.

"No, no. Not some one else," she said. Another . . . oh, horrible! More memories. . . .

"But I will go away," she added. "That's what you mean, isn't it?"

"My God," he said roughly, the golden lights in his eyes sparkling, his thin handsome face free of its mask for once, drawn with pain that looked like anger, "will you stop bothering about what I want? What right have I——? Is there nothing at all that you want?"

She was silent, but he saw in her gaze that suppressed purpose, timid and unhopeful now, yet alive. He sat down beside her again, and put his hands over her eyes. His finger tips remembered much that his brain cells had forgotten; he had the hands of the born lover. "There is something," he said. "Tell me. Or take it without telling me. I know I made a mistake, to offer such a life to a girl of your age. But we don't need to go on this way. You can be free if you want to; you shall be. Or if you don't want that—if it is only—— Listen, Eileen, would you care to adopt a child? If you know of one . . . you need

not explain to me at all. . . ." She flung away from him.

"Is it my fault," she cried, in a voice he scarcely knew, "if we have no children?"

"What?" he said slowly, not knowing that he spoke, nor that he put out his arms for her.

"No—wait—wait——" she panted, retreating, panic stricken. "What did you mean?"

"I don't know—nothing at all. Eily!" He was willing enough to beg; he preferred infinitely the part of the suppliant lover to that of the husband insisting on his rights. But she was steeled against his mere kindness; and she refused to credit the message of his finger tips or the caressing ghostly charm of his voice, or even the signal of her own blood in answer. Still she stood back, and her look was enough of a barrier; he did not need more from any woman.

"Yes, you did—you did! Why did you say that about—adopting. . . . You meant something else. You know. . . . Don't you know? How long have you known? Oh, I won't lie any more, and neither shall you. How long?"

"I always knew," he said.

"Ah!" Less than ever did she understand now.

"It was stupid of me," he added gently, "but until I saw you in Mrs. Callender's nursery to-night, I never thought how you must have longed for your own child. Why should we not adopt it?"

"She died," Eileen said. Still they stood staring, as if they would reach each other's souls. "I was glad, then," she added. "For her own sake. . . . She was so pretty, too; only how could I want her to live, and be unhappy? Now will you tell me why? . . . If you always knew, didn't it make any difference?"

"Not to me."

"Why not?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"I think I have—a right to that. Afterward, I'll go away, or—anything you like."

"You shall do anything you like," he repeated. "Sit down . . . dear. Do you know that it is difficult to tell an old story one has never told? . . . How old are you, Eileen?" It was singular, but he did not know exactly. "Twenty-three? I was twenty-five—then. That's nineteen years ago. I was in love. First love. She was twenty. Dark and—slim and sweet, like you. So much alive. . . . She was married to a man twice her age, too. Always a mistake, I dare say. He used to be away a great deal; he was a rough, hearty, outdoor man—very rich, that was why she married him, but, you understand, she was quite a child, and dazzled; indeed, she didn't know what marriage was at all. His money was in timber; he used to be away on business—I said that, didn't I? Well . . . I had always had everything I wanted—and, you know, I loved her, too. I suppose first love can't help being selfish.

"One night she came to me; she was wild, begged me to take her away. He was returning home, after a long trip. We had been in a fool's paradise. She cried terribly; she couldn't bear ever to see him again, she said, after everything. . . . Of course I said I would; I wanted to. We planned how we would go, the next day, and she went away laughing.

"The next day I called on my sister Laura, just to say good-bye; and somehow Laura guessed. She had seen Rose, only an hour before, and then she had always suspected. She pinned me down, wouldn't listen to any denial, and told me I was mad. Why not wait, let Rose get a divorce, instead of giving up everything and putting ourselves outside the pale? I don't know if she hoped delay would wear it out; perhaps

not, she was fond of Rose, too. She said she wanted to be able to welcome her as a sister. And she made me sit down and write a sensible letter to Rose. *Sensible*. . . . Full of prudent plans, you know. Oh, I did it." Eileen saw his hands clench, and his mouth twist as if he tasted something bitter. "The next day," he went on, without any change in his voice, "I heard that Rose was dead. She had killed herself. I wanted to do the same, but Laura kept me from it; Laura brought me the news. But she didn't know everything; not the worst. I heard that whispered, weeks later, when I was strong enough to stand more. They said that Rose hadn't been quite herself . . . they said women weren't always responsible, you know. . . . She had been expecting our child—mine. That was why she wanted to go at once. Only she hadn't been able to tell me. I understood quite clearly, you see, when it was too late. Of course, no one else ever knew. . . . You're the first. Now you know."

He bowed his face in his hands. Eileen, sitting stiffly upright, gripping the arms of the sofa, had not moved while he talked.

"You loved her so much?" she asked in a queer dry voice—dry after so many tears.

"Yes, I did. And I killed her. That was what it amounted to. Part of myself—most of myself, too."

"More than you ever loved any one else?" said Eileen.

"More? I suppose I had felt some fancies before I ever met her; I forget. I was just an ordinary young man. But do you think that afterward I could have taken a woman in my arms——"

Their eyes met; a dark, unbecoming wave of color flooded Eileen's face and throat.

"Only you," he said. He was the born lover; he knew when it were better not to speak. He gathered

her in his arms, dishevelled, spent, forlorn, and kissed her tangled hair, and pressed her hot eyelids down with kisses.

"You loved me a little, too," she asked at length, with a deep, quivering sigh, "when you asked me to marry you?"

If he knew when not to speak, he knew also when to lie.

"Yes," he said. "I have been waiting for you to care."

"But when I did—when I did——" she stammered.

He told her what she had said in her sleep, and she hid her face.

"It wasn't true," she said courageously. "I tried to make myself believe that, but—— Do you want me to tell you—that I used to dream of you even—— You did make it hard for me——"

Mercifully, he stopped her mouth. What had he expected? he asked himself. To make a nun of her? At her age, with her ardent spirit and warm blood, to be held in a kind of bodiless captivity by the power of a few words which gratitude and a sense of honour made unbreakable! If honour would not yield, she must; he had seen her fading. That she had turned to him, first and last, was more than he deserved. His savage, gigantic joke on society might have been more grimly upon himself. Well if he could smile at it now. How inexpressibly marvellous to hold her in his arms, feel her wild heart beating against his, after those barren years. His very denial had kept his feelings fresh, retained in them the strangeness and wonder which is the portion of youth. Something of this he tried to tell her, whispering, hushing her with tender words. She relaxed in his arms.

"Yes," she said, "yes. Say it again—that it doesn't matter. We can both—forget. You'll help me. Say

—you love me.” Her bright head sank against his breast; her voice broke off drowsily. She was asleep.

The black robe had fallen away from one bare foot. Carefully, so that he might not disturb her, he covered it up. Poor little feet! She breathed deeply and evenly. Her breath was sweet; her whole body was fragrant. He did not dare to kiss her, for fear of waking her. He held her until morning, and she never stirred till she opened her eyes to the daylight.

CHAPTER XXXIII

NOTHING is so unreasoningly sad as the hour following on pleasure. Lesley, snatched from her last partner's arms by inexorable Fate in the portly person of Mrs. Dupont, plunged into this melancholy only with the opening of her own front door. In the motor with the Duponts there had still been talk and laughter, like a lingering echo. Mrs. Dupont was brusque and jolly and cheerfully apologetic for leaving so early. It was half past three, a good hour before the end; once she would have danced the sun up. Now she declared she must think of her beauty sleep; a little late, for her beauty was gone. But it had been a very splendid ball, and Mrs. Callender was at last officially "in," and every one ought to be satisfied.

Lesley agreed with Mrs. Dupont about everything; and there was her own house. She thanked the Duponts sincerely and got out and waved good-bye from the steps with her latch key. Then she let herself in and felt her way cautiously up the narrow stairs in the dark, remembering the two odd steps at the top, and got into her own room without even a creak of the door. Hilda screwed up her face at the light without waking. Lesley threw off her cloak. The dead cold air before the dawn crinkled her smooth shoulders into gooseflesh, but she sat still a while, looking listlessly at her pale face in the mirror, noting some new maturity in the shadowed cheek and the droop of her piquant mouth. There was no sign of Jack Addison's farewell kiss upon it—a virginal close mouth. Was

she sorry that all her freshness, all the golden possibilities of her youth, should go for nothing but that one kiss? Even now she did not know.

Less poetically, she was a little sorry that she had not had a chance to say good night to Chan. Three times she had seen him start across the floor to her; she was sure it was for her; and each time some one detained him, or another took her out to dance. There was something tantalising about that. He had only danced with her once, though he had asked her for another and missed it.

She took off her slippers mournfully, and stooping, knocked a book from the edge of the bed. Hilda was wont to read in bed. Hilda woke.

"Huh! Oh—'s you—'dje have a nice time?" mumbled Hilda, rubbing her eyes and preparing to be very wide awake and interested.

"A lovely time," said Lesley lugubriously. "I'll tell you all about it to-morrow, Hilda. Please unhook me now; I'm so cold. And tell Mrs. Holt I'll kill any one who wakes me in the morning. I'm not going to work." She wriggled out of her silvery panoply like a snake and threw it across a chair, and crept into the soft bed. How tired she was, all suddenly! The last dance, that had been playing when she left, sang in her head; it had some repeated thrumming chord in it, like the characteristic note of a guitar—something Spanish and delicately sensuous and sad. And Chan was looking for her, but always across the room. . . . Hilda spoke to her twice, and she did not answer; she was fathoms deep in sleep.

The next she knew some one was shaking her by the shoulder, and Mrs. Holt's pleasant, broad-vowelled Irish voice was repeating:

"Wake up—wake up, ye unnatural girl. There's a young man to see you, downstairs."

"Chan!" said Lesley, starting up in bed. She had dreamed the same dream again.

"He said he was Mr. Herrick," Mrs. Holt replied, and Lesley was covered with confusion as with a garment. Why should she sit up screaming Chan's name like that? She did not think he could have heard, however. "What time is it?" she asked, and would hardly believe it was two o'clock. "It must have been the claret cup," was her guilty thought. In fact, she had only been more tired than she knew, and quite unused to late hours. "Tell him I'll be right down," she said, climbing out and beginning to hunt for her clothes. They seemed to have disappeared, and Chan waited well over half an hour before she came into Mrs. Holt's parlour, still heavy-eyed and hardly alive to the workaday world.

He was sitting tentatively on a slippery horsehair-covered sofa, holding his hat and scowling out of the window. He did not look at home, as he had used to do at Mrs. Cranston's, and some access of shyness at his altered exterior overcame her, so that she withdrew the hand she was extending to him and looked at him doubtfully. Cinderella was back by the hearth again, wearing her blue serge, and a white blouse she had evidently worn the day before.

"You didn't expect me?" he asked.

"No, I didn't expect any one—well, how could I? I was sound asleep," she confessed.

"Did I wake you? I'm sorry; I was just going by, and there was something I wanted to see you about. You enjoyed the dance?"

"Yes, of course."

"I thought you did," he said moodily. He wanted to ask her about the letters; he had come for that; but his mind kept reverting to another matter.

"Didn't you want me to?" asked Lesley. It was sig-

nificant how things had changed between them, that she wondered just what he had come for.

"Why, of course. But I thought you might be feeling badly to-day——"

"About what?"

"Oh, I don't know—that is, I heard—I understood——"

"For pity's sake, Chan, say it! I haven't heard nor understood anything."

"I heard you might be engaged," he said, though it was the last thing in the world he had meant to say. He had always thought it detestable, almost caddish, to force a confidence.

"To whom?"

"To Jack Addison." He was in so far; he could not draw back.

"Well, I'm not. Who told you that? Why did you think so?" Her directness was only the expression of a vast confusion.

"Then I beg your pardon."

"But you've got to tell me why you thought so."

The devil was in Chan's tongue; he could not stop it. How had this idiotic, maddening conversation started? He knew that look in Lesley's eye; she would not be diverted now. Still he tried his poor best. "Oh, it was nothing; some one saw you both up in the gallery, last night. I shouldn't have mentioned it, but I wanted to ask you about him——"

"Why shouldn't we have been in the gallery? What do you mean they saw?"

She *would* have it; he had been through her cross-examinations once or twice before. It was desperation as much as some other unnamed motive, a motive that had knocked for recognition at the threshold of consciousness for days, that answered her for him.

"Saw him kiss you. Now I beg your pardon again."

"Did you see us?" Neither did she want nor mean to say that; but it gave her a pang to think he might have seen. Something revived in her at the image; something put aside and shamed, that protested.

"No. Please don't ask me who told me. I don't want to make you tell me; I only wanted to say——"

"But you did," she retorted, not realising the inferential admission until too late.

"Then it is true?"

"*What* is true? I'm not engaged to him——"

"No, but you did let him——" Good heavens, they were quarrelling now! Why could he not get to his own business—the letters?

"Well, if I did—I don't care; I'm not——"

"But I thought that must be why——"

"It wasn't. It was because—because—— I don't know why. Because he was going away, and he'd wanted to for years—— You talk as if you'd never kissed any one! Why should you come here and nag me about it anyway?" She was almost in tears; she felt as if they must both have suddenly gone mad.

"Because," said Chan, a great light suddenly breaking on him, so that he spoke slowly while he looked and looked again at the bewildering truth, "I wanted that kiss myself."

Lesley felt weak, almost stunned. He was looking at her again as he had looked the night before, with those new eyes that saw the woman where the friend had been; she felt that she was desirable—and now she was not arrayed for admiration; she was only herself, in her crumpled cheap blouse, and pale in the glare of noon. There was a flooding warmth about her heart, and her breath came short. Chan put his hands in his pockets, with a quick tense motion, and stood waiting, biting his lip. He could have faced the

guns with more composure—he did, when the time came—but he did not show it.

“I suppose,” she said, half tearfully, “that you think we ought to sit around with our hands folded until you get through with your kissing. . . . I don’t care; he’s going away to fight, and he probably won’t come back at all. . . .” She stopped, wishing she had not said that, for in the old mysterious way she knew it was true.

“So am I,” said Chan.

“What?”

“Going away. I volunteered by wire yesterday; and in fact, there was a commission waiting for me. . . .”

“Not you!” she cried, and knew that she had not changed at all. “Why must you go?”

“Why not me as well as the others? I came West this time to make up my mind. I’ve decided that it’s too late to think now; we must fight. I’d like to help pay the bill; then I may have a right to think. So I’m going. Now—will you kiss me, too, since I’m going away and may never come back?”

“No—no——” she said, though she did not mean that at all; and since she was already in his arms, he knew that very well.

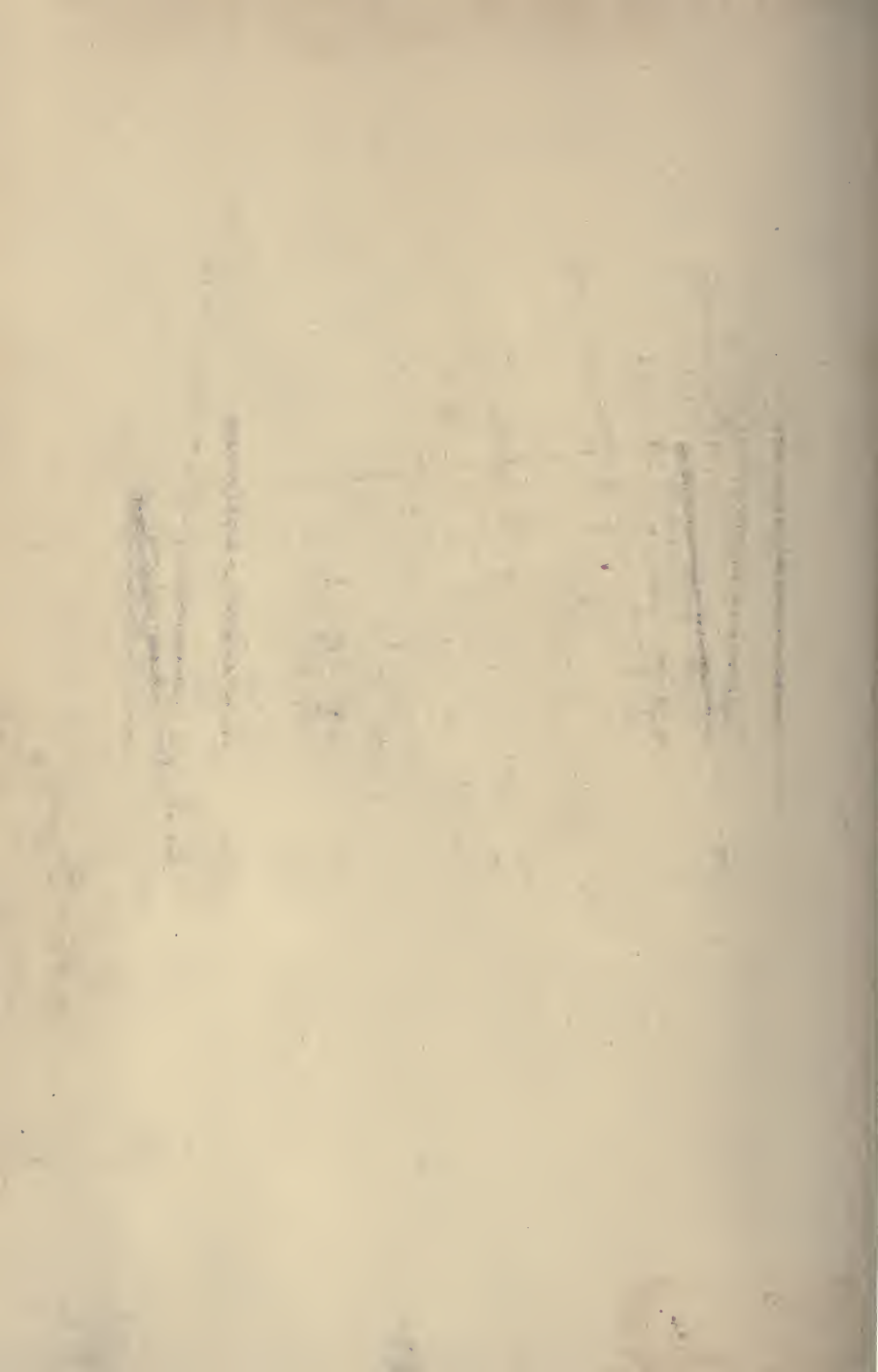
“You won’t?” he asked, with tender raillery, holding her away yet a moment so he could see her face.

With a great effort, she drew the fateful curtains of her secret prescient mind, and though her soul quailed with fear that it might see too much sorrow, she dared. Her eyes for a moment were remote.

“But you will come back,” she said, “only it will be so long. . . .” The sentence was never completed, and neither did he ever remember to ask her about the letters. Along with a great many other things, they did not matter particularly.







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