A MAN'S HEARTH



ELSIE FELT THE GLANCE PASS ACROSS HER AND REST ON ANTHONY

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ELEANOR M. INGRAM

AUTHOR OF

"FROM THE CAR BEHIND," "THE UNAFRAID," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR BY

EDMUND FREDERICK



PHILADELPHIA & LONDON

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A MAN'S HEARTH

CHAPTER I

TONY ADRIANCE—"MILLIONS, YOU KNOW!"

The man who had taken shelter in the stone pavilion hesitated before taking a place on the curved bench before him. He had the air of awaiting some sign of welcome or dismissal from the seat's occupant; receiving none, he sat down and turned his gaze toward the broad Drive, where people were scattering before the sudden flurry of rain. It suggested spring rather than autumn, this shower that had swept out of a wind-blown cloud and was already passing.

After a moment he drew a cigar-case from his pocket, then paused. Obviously, he was not familiar with the etiquette of the public parks, with their freedom and lack of formalities. He was beside a woman—a girl. He had no wish to be inconsiderate, yet, to speak—in suspicious, sardonic New York—that was to invite misconstruction, or a flirtation. Still——

"May I smoke?" he suddenly and brusquely shot his question.

The girl turned towards him. Her eyes were as gray as the rain; heavily shadowed by their lashes, their expression had a misted aloofness suggesting thoughts hastily recalled from remote distances. He realized that he might have come, smoked, and gone without drawing her notice any more than a blowing leaf. She was not a beauty, but he liked the clearing frankness of the glance with which she judged him, and judged aright. He liked it, too, that she did not smile, and that her steadfast regard showed neither invitation nor hostility.

"Thank you," she answered. "Please do."

The form of her reply seemed to him peculiarly gracious and unexpected, as if she gave with both hands instead of doling out the merely necessary. He never had known a woman who gave; they always took, in his experience. Unconsciously he lifted his hat in acknowledgment of the tone rather than the permission. That was all, of course. She returned to her study of river and sky, while he drew out his cigar. But afterward he looked at her, unobtrusively.

She was dressed altogether in black, but not the black of mourning, he judged. The costume, plain but not shabby, conventional without being up-to-date, touched him with a vague sense of familiarity, yet escaped recognition. It should have told him something of her, but it did not, except that she had not much money for frocks. He was only slightly interested; he might not have glanced her way again if he had not been struck by her rapt absorption in the sunset panorama before them. She had gone back to that place of thought from which his speech had called her; withdrawn from all around her as one who goes into a secret room and closes a door against the world.

And she looked happy, or at least serenely at peace with her dreams. The man sighed with envious impatience, striving to follow her gaze and share the enchantment.

The enchantment was not for him. The brief storm had left tumbled masses of purple cloud hanging in the deep-rose tinted sky, in airy mockery and imitation of the purplish wall of the Palisades standing knee-deep in the rosy waters of the Hudson. Along the crest of the great rock walls lights blossomed like flowers through the violet mist, at the walls' base half-seen buildings flashed with lighted windows. He saw that it was all very pretty, but he had seen it so a hundred times without especial emotion.

His cigar was finished, yet the girl had not once moved. Abruptly, as before, he spoke to her, as he moved to leave.

"What are you looking at?" he demanded. "Oh, I'm not trying to be impertinent—I would like to know what you see worth while? You have not moved for half an hour. I wish you could show me something worth that."

Again she turned and considered him with grave attention. His tired young face bore the scrutiny; she answered him.

"I am seeing all the things I have not got."

"Over there?"

She yielded his lack of imagination.

"Well, yes; over there. Don't you know it is always Faeryland—the place over there?"

"It is only Jersey—?"

She corrected him.

"The place out of reach. The place between which and ourselves flows a river, or rises a cliff. One can imagine anything to be there. See that grim, unreal castle, there in the shadows, its windows all gleaming with light from within. Well, it is a factory where they make soap-powder, but from here I can see Fair Rosamond leaning from its arched windows, if I choose, or armored and plumed knights riding into its gates."

"Oh!" Disappointment made the exclamation listless. "Story-making, you were? I am afraid I can't see that way, thank you; I haven't the head for it."

For the first time she smiled, with a warm lighting of her rain-gray eyes and a Madonna-like protectiveness of expression. He felt as distinct an impression as if she had laid her hand on his arm with an actual touch of sympathy.

"But I do not see that way, either," she explained. "That was an illustration. I mean that one can make pictures there of all the *real* things that are not real for one's self; at least, not yet real. It is a game to play, I suppose, while one waits."

"I do not understand."

She made a gesture of resignation, and was mute. He comprehended that confidence would go no farther.

"Thank you," he accepted the rebuke. "It was good of you to put up with my curiosity and—not to misunderstand my speaking."

"Oh, no! I hate to misunderstand, ever; it is so stupid."

Although he had risen, he did not go at once. The evening colors faded, first from river, then from sky. With autumn's suddenness, dusk swept down. Playing children, groups of young people and promenaders passed by the little pavilion in a gay current; automobiles multiplied with the homing hour of the city. New York thought of dining, simply or superbly, as might be.

The silent tête-à-tête in the pavilion was broken by the softest sound in the world—a baby's drowsy, gurgling chuckle of awakening. Instantly the girl in black started from revery, and then the man first noticed that a white-and-gold baby carriage stood at her end of the curved seat. Astonished, incredulous, he saw her throw back miniature coverlets of frost-white eiderdown and bend over the little face, pink as a hollyhock, nestled there. For the first time in his life he witnessed the pretty byplay of the nursery—dropped kisses, the answering pats of chubby, useless hands, love-words and replying baby speech, inarticulate, adorable.

The scene struck deeply into inner places of thought he had never known lay at the back of consciousness. He never had thought very profoundly, until the last few weeks. And even yet he was struggling, turning in a mental circle of doubt, rather than thinking. The girl and the child flung open a door through which he glimpsed strange vistas, startling in their forbidden possibilities. He stood watching, dumb, until she turned to him. Her face was kindled and laughing; she looked infinitely candid and good. But—she looked maid, not mother. Somehow he felt that.

"You are married?" he questioned, almost roughly. "I did not suppose—— You are married, then?"

Into her expression swept scorn for his dulness, compassion for his ignorance, fused by the flaring fire of some intense feeling far beyond his ken.

"Married? No. Or I would not be here!"

"Why? Where would you be?"

The baby was standing upright in its coach. The girl passed an arm about the tottering form to steady the fat little feet, and retorted on her questioner.

"Where? Home, of course, making ready for my man! If I lived there,"—with a gesture toward the tall, luxurious apartment houses on the Drive, behind them, "I would be choosing my prettiest frock and coiling my hair the way he liked best. If I lived there, across the river in one of those little houses, I would be making the house bright with lamps; wearing my whitest apron and making the supper hot—very hot, for there is frost in the air and he would be cold and tired and hungry. And I would

have his chair ready and draw the curtains because he was inside and no one else mattered." She paused, drawing a deep breath. "That is where I would be," she concluded, as one patiently lessoning a dull pupil, and reseated the baby in its coach in obvious preparation for departure.

The man had stood quite still, dazed. But when she turned away, with a bend of her dark little head by way of farewell, he roused himself and overtook her in a stride.

"Thank you," he said, "I mean for letting me know anyone could feel like that. I suppose a great many people do, only I have not met that kind? No, never mind answering; how should you know? But, thank you. May I—if I see you again—may I speak to you?"

She surveyed him gravely, as if with clairvoyant ability to read a history from his face, a face open-browed and planned for strength, by its square outlines, but that somehow only succeeded in being pleasant and passively agreeable. It was the face of a man who never had been brought against conflict or any need for stern decision, whose true character was a sword never yet drawn from the sheath. And now, he was in trouble; so much lay plain to see. He was in bitter trouble and, she guessed, alone with the trouble.

He stood in mute acceptance of her scrutiny, recognizing her right, since he had asked so much. Before she spoke, he knew her answer, seeing it foreshadowed in the gray eyes.

"If you wish to very much. But—not too soon again."

She stepped from the curb, allowing no reply, but without apparent haste, pushing the carriage in which the baby chuckled and twisted to peep back at her. He watched her thread her way through the rushing lines of pleasure traffic; saw her reach the other side and disappear behind a knoll clothed with turf and evergreens that rose between them. The woman from whose presence he had come to this chance encounter once had told him that any human being looked absurd propelling a baby-coach. He recalled that statement now, and did not find it true. It was such a sane thing to do, so natural and good. At least, it seemed so when this girl did it. He envied the man, whoever he might be, who did, or would love her; envied him the clean simplicity she would make of life and the absence of hateful complications.

People were glancing curiously at his motionless figure; he aroused himself and walked on. He had chosen his own way of living, he angrily told himself; there was no excuse for whining if he did not like the place where free-will had led him. Yet—had he? Or had he, instead, been trapped? The doubt was ugly. He walked faster to escape it, but it ran at his heels like one of those sinister demon-animals of medieval legend.

Across the blackening river electric signs were flashing into view; gigantic affairs insolently shouldering themselves into the unwilling attention, as indeed they were designed to do by Jersey's desire for the greater city's patronage. Looking toward one of these, the man read it with a sullen distaste: "Adriance's Paper." That simple

announcement marked an industry, even a monopoly, great enough to have been subjected more than once to the futile investigations of an uneasy government.

The family name was sufficiently unusual, the family fortune sufficiently well known to have been bracketted together for him wherever he had gone. In school, in college, and later, always he had found a courier whisper running officiously before him, "Young Adriance—paper, you know. Millions!" And always it had led him into trouble; at twenty-six he was just commencing to realize that fact. The trouble never had been very serious until now. He never had committed anything his mother's church would have called a mortal sin. Even yet he stood only on the verge of commission. But he could not draw back; he was like a man being inexorably pushed into a dark place.

The house toward which he turned did not arrest the eye by any ostentatious display. In fact, it was remarkable only for being one of the very few houses on lower Riverside Drive which possessed lawns and verandas. Set in a small town, or a suburb, the gray stone villa would have been merely "very handsome." Here, it gained the value of an exotic. To Anthony Adriance, junior, as he climbed the steps that night, it seemed to stare arrogantly from its score of blinking windows at the glittering sign on the opposite shore. Cause and effect, they duly acknowledge each other. The man paused to glance at them both, then let his gaze fall to the avenue below the terraced lawn. That way the black-gowned girl had gone. Probably she had turned across into the city; her dress was hardly that of a resident of the neighborhood.

The man who took his hat and coat deferentially breathed a message. Mr. Adriance was in the library and desired to know if his son was dining at home.

"Yes," was the prompt, even eager reply. "Certainly, if he wishes it. Or—never mind; I will go in, myself."

The inquiry was unusual. It was not Mr. Adriance's habit to question his son's movements. One might have said they did not interest him. He and "Tony" were very good acquaintances and lived quite without friction. He was too busy, too self-centred and ultra-modern to desire any warmer relation. Affection was a sentimentality never mentioned in that household; a mutilated household, for Mrs. Adriance had died twenty years before Tony's majority.

But it was not curiosity, rather an odd, faintly flickering hope that lighted the younger man's eyes as he entered the room and returned his father's nod of greeting. The two were not unlike, at a first glance; definitely good features: eyes so dark that they were frequently mistaken for black instead of blue, upright figures that made the most of their moderate height,—these they had in common. The great difference between them was in expression; the difference between untempered and tempered metal. No one would ever have nicknamed the elder Anthony "Tony."

"I shall be glad to dine with you," the younger Anthony opened, at once. "I'll go change, and be back. Were you going to try the new Trot tonight—I think you said so?"

"No. I had an hour this afternoon," Mr. Adriance stated, picking up a pen from the table and turning it in his fingers. He had a habit of playing with small articles at times—to distract his listener's attention rather than his own, said those who knew him well. Neither to his son nor to himself did it occur as incongruous that he should discuss a lesson in dancing with the matter-of-fact decision that made his speech cold and sharp as the crackle of a step on a frost-bound road. "It is not so difficult as the tango, though more fatiguing. Where had you intended to dine, tonight? At the Mastersons'?"

Tony Adriance colored a slow, painful red that burned over face and neck like a flame scar.

"Fred asked me," he made difficult work of the reply. "I couldn't get out of it very well, but I am glad of an excuse to stay away. It is early enough to 'phone."

Mr. Adriance turned the pen around.

"If Masterson was to be there, you might safely have gone," he pronounced.

"If——"

"Exactly. Dining with Mrs. Masterson will no longer do. Am I speaking to a full-grown man or a boy? If Mrs. Masterson chooses to get a divorce, and you afterward marry her, very good. It is done; divorce is accepted among us. But there must be no gossip concerning the lady."

"There is no cause for any," retorted the other, but the defense lacked fire. He looked suddenly haggard, and the shamed red scorched still deeper. "She—isn't that kind."

"No. She is very clever." He laid down the pen and took up a book. "I was cautioning you. Will you hurry your dressing a little? I have an early engagement down-town this evening."

The dry retort was not resented. The younger man did not retreat, although way was shown to him. Since the subject had been dragged into the open ground of speech, he had more to say, with whatever reluctance.

"You don't seem to consider Fred," he finally said.

"Why should I?" Mr. Adriance looked up perfunctorily. "Masterson is nothing to me. You have not considered him."

"I have! At least, I tried to stop this—after I understood. I never meant——"

There was a pause, during which Mr. Adriance turned a page. The sentence was not completed, but Tony Adriance lingered as if in expectation of some reply to it; an expectation half eager, half defiant. No reply was made; finally it became evident there was to be none.

"I thought you might object." He forced a laugh with the avowal, but his eyes denied the lightness. "Parents do in books and plays, you know. I thought you might tell me

—— Oh, well, to pull out of this and bring home a woman of my own instead of some other man's woman. It isn't very pretty!"

Mr. Adriance looked up with a certain curiosity.

"You have a sentimental streak, Tony? I never suspected it. Why should I object to an affair so suitable? You have been following Mrs. Masterson about for a year; she is altogether charming and will make a good hostess here—a great lack in our household. I admire her myself, more than any débutante I ever saw. I am very well satisfied. Suppose you had brought home some milkmaid romance, a wife to stumble over the rugs and defer to the servants? No, no; manage this properly, that is all my advice. Meanwhile, do you know it is after seven o'clock? Unless you hurry——"

"Oh, I'll hurry," was the dry promise. "And I am much obliged for the advice. But I fancy a good many of us may defer to the milkmaids, after we are dead."

He swung the door shut with unnecessary force, as he went out. While he climbed the broad, darkly-lustrous stairs, he was aware that his father was turning another page of the book; and as a pendant to that picture had a mental glimpse of Lucille Masterson, lovely, perfect in every line of costume and tint of color, waiting for a man who was not her husband. What would the girl in black think of that, he wondered? Yet Lucille was altogether beyond reproach. She had every right to contemplate a divorce, in view of Fred Masterson's undoubted wildness and extravagance. If only she had not discussed it with him, Tony Adriance, he thought impatiently. If only she had announced her intention to her husband and the world, instead of broaching it secretly to the admirer she had chosen for her second husband! It was horrible to meet Masterson with this knowledge thrust like a stone blocking the way of intercourse. Certainly she lacked delicacy.

Of course he must go on gracefully. It was very like climbing these stairs; one step taken implied taking the next. But he wished that he had not met the girl in the pavilion.

CHAPTER II

His Neighbor's Wife

During the next few days, Tony Adriance several times saw the girl in black. But he did not venture to approach or speak to her. It was too soon; moreover, he was not altogether certain that he wished to be with her. She was too disturbing, too concrete an evidence of other possibilities in life than those he had been taught. He remembered the story of the Grecian lake that was only muddy when stirred. Probably those who lived within view of its waters seldom "disturbed Comarina."

Nevertheless, he always regarded the girl with a keen interest he could not have explained even to himself. He would glimpse her from his automobile in passing, or observe her from the opposite sidewalk as he went in or out of his father's house. She always had the child with her, and always wore the same frock. Usually, she was to be found in the white stone pavilion, established on the curved stone bench with a bit of sewing or a book. He never had imagined so quietly monotonous a life as hers seemed to be.

It was at the end of the first week after their meeting that Adriance, riding slowly along the bridle-path through the park, saw an itinerant vendor of toy balloons and pinwheels wander into the pavilion where girl and baby were ensconced.

The sunlight glittered bravely on the gaudy colors of fluted paper wheels, the plump striped sides of bobbing globes, and the sleepy, brown face of the Syrian pedler who mutely presented his wares. The girl lifted her smiling eyes to meet the man's questioning glance, and shook her head with a pretty gesture that somehow implied admiration and a gay friendliness which made her refusal more gracious than another's purchase. The pedler smiled, also, and lingered to hoist the straps supporting his tray into a new position upon his bent, velveteen-clad shoulders, before moving on his way.

The baby had not been consulted. But his attention had been none the less enchained. Those pink and yellow things set spinning by the fresh morning breeze, those red balloons tugging at their cords like unwilling captives hungry for the clear upper spaces of blue—to see all this radiance departing was too much! He spread wide both chubby arms and plunged in pursuit.

"Holly!" the girl cried, arresting his flight from the coach. "Why, Holly?"

Holly hurled himself into magnificent rage. Halted by the outburst, the Syrian turned back with an air of experienced victory.

"*Now* you buy?" he interrogated.

The girl shook her head, struggling to appease the young insurrectionist.

"No, no. Please go away, and he will forget."

The man took a step away. The baby's screams redoubled; he stamped with small, fat feet and brandished small, fat fists.

"You buy?" the pedler blandly insisted.

"No!" the girl panted. "Please do go. I cannot; I have no money with me. Holly, dear ——!"

Adriance had found a boy to hold his horse, and came up in time to overhear the last statement. He halted the Syrian with a gesture.

"I have," he made his presence known to the combatants. "Won't you let me gratify a fellowman? Here, bring those things nearer. Which shall it be, young chap—or both?"

The girl turned to him with candid relief warming her surprise.

"Oh!" she exclaimed her recognition. "You are very good. I am afraid, really afraid it will have to be both. *Oh*——!"

Holly had deliberately lunged forward and clutched a double handful of the alluring wares.

By the time calm was re-established and the amused Adriance had paid, it seemed altogether natural that he should take his place on the seat beside the girl; as natural as the pedler's placid departure. Holly lay back on his cushions in vast content, two balloons floating from their tethers at the foot of his coach and a pinwheel clasped in his hand.

"I should like to say that he is not often like this," remarked the girl, gathering together her scattered sewing, "But he likes having his own way as much as Maît' Raoul Galvez; and everyone knows what *he* raised."

"I don't," Adriance confessed. He noticed for the first time a softening of her words, not enough to be called an accent, far less a lisp, but yet a trick of speech, unfamiliar to him. "What did he raise?"

"Satan," she gravely told him. "Maît' Raoul knew more about voodooism and black magic than any white man ever should. It is said he vowed that he would have the devil up in person to play cards with him, or never be content on earth or under it. And he did, although he knew well enough Satan never gambles except for souls."

"Who won?"

"Satan did. Yet he lost again, for Maît' Raoul tricked him in the contract so cleverly that it did not bind and the soul was free. There is a great split rock near Galvez Bayou where they say the demon stamped in his rage so fiercely the stone burst."

"Then Maître Raoul escaped Hades, after all?"

"Oh, no! He went there, but merely as a point of honor. He was a gambler, but he always paid his losses."

Adriance laughed, yet winced a little, too. A baffled, helpless bitterness darkened across his expression, as it had done on the evening of their first meeting. He looked down at the pavement as if in fear of accidentally encountering his companion's clear glance.

"I never read that story," he acknowledged. "Thank you."

"I fancy it never was written," she returned. "There is a song about it; a sleepy, creepy song which should never be sung between midnight and dawn."

He watched her draw the thread in and out, for a space. She was embroidering an intricate monogram in the centre of a square of fine linen, working with nice exactitude and daintiness.

"What is it?" he wondered, finally.

Her glance traced the direction of his.

"A net for goldfish," she replied.

It was not until long afterward he understood she had told him that she sold her work.

The river glittered, breaking into creamy furrows of foam under the ploughing traffic. The sunshine was warm and sank through Adriance with a lulling sense of physical pleasure and tranquil laziness. How bright and clean a world he seemed to view, seated here! He felt a pang of longing, keen as pain, when he thought that he might have had such content as this as an abiding state, instead of a brief respite. How had he come to shut himself away from peace, all unaware? How was it that he never had valued the colorless blessing, until it was lost?

After a while he fell to envying Maître Raoul, who had gone to the devil honorably.

A long sigh from Holly, slumbering amid his trophies, awoke Adriance to realization that his companion possessed the gift of being silent gracefully. He had not spoken to her for quite half an hour, yet she appeared neither bored nor offended, but as if she had been engaged in following out some pleasant theme of meditation. A sparrow tilted and preened itself on the rail, not a yard from her bent, dark head. Over at the curbstone, the boy who guarded Adriance's horse had slipped the bridle over one arm and was playing marbles with two cheerful comrades who made calculated allowances for his handicap, based on his coming reward from the rider.

"I am afraid I am very dull," Adriance presently offered vague apology.

"Are you?"

"I mean, I am not entertaining."

She lifted her eyes from her sewing to regard him with delicate raillery.

"No. If you had been the entertaining sort of person, I could never have let you talk to me," she said. "But I think you had better go, please, now. Two imported nursemaids in bat-wing cloaks have been glowering at us for some time as it is. Holly and I shall be grateful to you a thousand years for this morning's rescue."

He rose reluctantly, with a feeling of being ejected from the only serene spot on earth.

"Thank you for letting me stay," he answered. "You are very kind. I— —"

His lowered glance had encountered her little feet, demurely crossed under the edge of her sober skirt. They were very small, serious shoes indeed; not a touch of the day's capricious fancy in decoration relieved them. But what struck to the man's heart was their brave blackness, the blackness of polish that could not quite conceal that they had been mended. Of course, he at once looked away, but the impression remained.

"I hope Holly will not imitate Maît' Raoul any more," he finished lamely.

The girl frankly turned to watch him ride away. Her natural interest seemed to the man more modest than any pose of indifference.

But it seemed that she was appointed by Chance to make Tony Adriance dissatisfied and restive. It was altogether absurd, but the fanciful legend she had told him taunted and hunted his sullen thoughts. He took it with him to his home, when he changed into suitable attire to keep a luncheon engagement with Mrs. Masterson. It still accompanied him when he entered the great apartment house where the Mastersons lived.

He had not wanted to act as Lucille Masterson's escort on this occasion. His attendance had been skilfully compelled. But now he hated the duty so much that he was dangerously near rebellion. He hesitated on the threshold of the building, half inclined not to enter; to go, instead, to a telephone and excuse himself for desertion on some pretext.

It was too late. Already the door was held open for him by a footman whose discreetly familiar smile Adriance saw, and resented. He winced again when the elevator boy stopped at the Mastersons' floor without being told, implying the impossibility of Mr. Adriance's call being intended for any other household. He never had noticed these things before; now, he felt himself disgracefully exposed before these black men.

He was altogether in a mood of bitter exasperation, when he was ushered into Mrs. Masterson's little drawing-room. He recognized this condition with a vague sense of surprise at himself underlying the dominant emotion. All his life he had been singularly even-tempered. Now he combated a wish to say ugly, caustic things to the woman who had brought him here. He did not want to see her.

Yet she was very pleasant to see. Indeed, both the scene and his hostess were charming, as they met his view. Mrs. Masterson was standing before a long mirror, surveying herself, so that Adriance saw her twice; once in fact, and once as a reflection. Sunlight filled the room, which was furnished and draped in a curious shade of deep blue with a shimmering richness of color, so that the lady's gray-clad

figure stood out in clear and precise detail. But Mrs. Masterson could bear that strong light, and knew it. Without turning, she smiled into the mirror toward the man whose image she saw there.

"How do you like the last Viennese fancy, Tony?" she composedly greeted him.

Her voice was not one of her good points. It was naturally too high-pitched and harsh, and although by careful training she had accustomed herself to speak with a suppressed evenness of tone that smothered the defect to most ears, there resulted a lack of expression or modulation perilously near monotony. Adriance listened now, with a fresh sense of irritation, to the fault he only had observed recently. Before answering, he surveyed critically the decided lines of the costume offered for his approval; its audacious little waistcoat of cerise-and-black checked velvet, the diminutive hat that seemed to have alighted like a butterfly on the shining yellow hair brushed smoothly back from Mrs. Masterson's pink ears, and the high-buttoned gray boots with a silk tassel pendant at each ankle. Those exquisite and costly boots taunted him with their sharp contrast to those he had studied an hour before; they spurred him on to rudeness as if actual rowels were affixed to their little French heels.

"The skirt is too extreme," he stated perversely.

"They are going to be so; this is quite a bit in advance," she returned. "Do you like it?"

"Not so well! It makes a woman look like a child; except for her face."

Lucille Masterson's tact was often at fault from her lack of humor. Instead of retorting with laughter or silence, she opposed offence to his wilfulness.

"Thank you," she answered freezingly. "I seem to have aged rather suddenly."

"You know well enough how handsome you are," he said, a trifle ashamed. "Of course I did not mean what you imply. But, after all, we are not children, Lucille, either of us. We are a man and a woman who are going——"

"Well?"

"To gather a rather nasty apple!" He forced a smile to temper the statement.

She slowly turned around and regarded him.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, lifting her narrow, arched eyebrows. "My *costume trottoir*, and apples——? Aren't you considerably confused, Tony?"

"Can't we at least face what we are doing?" he countered. "If we are able to do a thing, we ought to be able to look at it, surely. We can put through this thing, and our friends will think none the less of us; they are that kind. But they are not all the people on earth, you know. What the maid who brushes your gown or the man who opens the door for me says of us downstairs may come nearer the general opinion. Perhaps we would better have considered that. For I am afraid the majority of the white man's world cannot be altogether wrong."

There was a quality in his voice that alarmed her. He had flung himself into a chair beside her desk, and sat nervously moving back and forth the trinkets nearest his hand. She stood quite still, studying him before committing herself by a reply. This was a Tony Adriance strange to her.

"It seems very cowardly, to me, to be afraid of what people will say," she slowly answered. "And I will not have you speak to me as if I were a wicked woman, Tony. You know that I am not. You know I have borne with Fred's neglect and extravagance much longer than other women would."

He flushed dark-red at the taunt of cowardice, but he spoke doggedly, tenacious of his purpose.

"You could not give Fred another chance? You remember, he and I were friends, once. He has played too much with the stock market. Well, I might get my father to help him there; we might fix it so that he won sometimes, instead of lost. You do not know how hard it is for me to come into Fred's house this way."

A flash of blended anger and fear crossed Mrs. Masterson's large, light-colored eyes.

"Is it?" she doubted, cuttingly. "You have been coming here for a whole year, Tony."

She had found the one retort he could not answer. Adriance opened his lips, then closed them with a grim recognition of defeat. Who would believe he had come here innocently? How could he tell this beautiful and sophisticated woman that he had been vaguely, romantically charmed by her without ever dreaming of any issue to the affair or of letting her suspect his mild sentimentality? How could he hope she would credit the tale, if he did tell her?

She had been watching his changing expression; herself paled by a very genuine dread. Now, suddenly she was beside him, her hands on his shoulders.

"Don't you love me any more, Tony? You come in here to-day and rage at me——! Have you taught me for months to need you and count on you for all the future, only to leave me, now? Oh, I believed *you* were strong and true!"

A caress from her was so rare an event, so unfamiliar a concession, that her mere nearness fired Adriance. Her fragrant face was close to his; he looked into her eyes, like jewels under water, suffused by her terror of losing him.

His kiss was her victory. Instantly she was away from him; half across the room and sending furtive glances toward the curtained doorways, even toward the windows five stories above the street. The guilt implied in the action made it to Adriance as if a hand had struck the kiss from his lips.

"We must be careful," she cautioned. "Suppose someone were coming in? You didn't mean all that, Tony? You love me as much as ever?"

Adriance moved toward her.

"I won't answer that in Masterson's house," he said, his voice shaken. "Lucille, you have got to do now what I asked you to do weeks ago: you must leave here at once and marry me as soon as it can be done. Since we have begun this thing, we must carry it through as decently as possible. And it is not decent for you to stay here or for me to come here. If you come with me now, to-day, I will put you with someone who can act as chaperon until the divorce is obtained; one of my aunts, perhaps. If you do this, and help me to keep what honestly is left, I give you my word that I never will fail you as long as I live, come what may."

She drew back from his vehemence. Assured of herself and him, now, she permitted a frown to tangle her fair brow in half-amused rebuke.

"My dear boy, what a dramatic tirade! Of course I will come to you the first moment possible—but, to-day? And just now you were deprecating gossip! You must let me arrange this affair. I am not ready to leave Fred, yet. Do you not understand? I must wait until he makes another one of his scenes; I must have a fresh reason for going, not a past one already tacitly overlooked."

"You will not come?"

She turned from his darkened face to the mirror.

"You really are very selfish, Tony. Pray think a little of me instead of yourself. But I will try to do as you wish; next month, perhaps. I could go to Florida for the winter."

Adriance sat down again beside the desk and took a cigarette from a small lacquered tray that stood there. He was beaten, but he was not submissive. He bent his head to the yoke with a bitter, sick reluctance. Yet he understood that it was too late to draw out. Lucille loved him; whether intentionally or not, he had won her. No, he must finish what he had begun.

The cigarette was perfumed, and nauseated him. He dropped it into an ash-receiver, but it had given him a moment to steady himself. After all, Masterson did neglect his wife. If he could not keep his own, why should Tony Adriance turn altruist and try to do it for him? At least, Lucille might be happy.

Mrs. Masterson had touched her hat into place, surveying her vivid reflection. She was wise enough to take her triumph casually.

"Shall we go?" she questioned. "Nan Madison hates late arrivals, you know. Do make your man throw away that cravat you are wearing, Tony. Gray is not your color. It makes you look too pale; too much——"

"Like Maître Raoul Galvez?" he dryly supplied, rising.

"Who was he?"

"A man who raised the Devil. I am quite ready if you wish to go."

CHAPTER III

The Girl Outside

Tony Adriance slipped into the habit of pausing for a few words with the girl in black whenever circumstances set them opposite each other. And that was quite often, since his home was so near the pavilion she had adopted as her place of repose. He rather avoided his friends, during the days following his futile rebellion against Lucille Masterson's will, yet he was lonely and eager to escape thought. He could talk to the girl, he admitted to himself, because she did not know him.

They met with a casual frankness, the girl and he, like two men who find each other congenial, yet whose lives lie far apart. Their brief conversations were intimate without being inquisitively personal. She had a trick of saying things that lingered in the memory; at least, in his memory. Not that she was especially brilliant; her charm was her earnestness, at once vivid and tranquil, and the odd glamor of enchantment she threw over plain commonsense, making it no longer plain, but alluring as folly.

But she continued to wear the shabby little boots, with their optimistic bravery of blacking. They really were respectable boots, aging, not aged. The fault lay with Adriance, not them; he was too much accustomed to women "whose sandals delighted his eyes." If her feet had been less childishly small, they might have preoccupied him less. As it was, they preoccupied him more and more.

There is no accepted way of offering a pair of shoes to a feminine acquaintance. Nevertheless, in the third week of his friendship with the girl, Adriance bought a pair of pumps for her. He had seen them in a glass case set out before a shop and stopped to gaze, astonished. They were so unmistakably hers; the size, the rounded lines, the very arch and tilt were right! They were of shining black, with Spanish heels and glinting buckles.

He took them home with him, but of course he dared not give them to her. He had an idea that he might essay the venture on the last occasion of their meeting; if she punished him with banishment, then, it would not matter. For he meant to leave New York when Lucille went to Florida. He would spend the necessary interval between the divorce and his marriage, in Canada, alone.

Meanwhile, there was the girl.

It was on the last day of October that he found her knitting instead of embroidering; a web of gay scarlet across her knees.

"A new suit for Holly's big Teddybear," she explained, as he sat down opposite to her. "Christmas is coming, you know. I like to have all ready in advance. Don't you think the color should become a brown-plush bear?"

"It is not depressing."

"It is the color of holly. And depression is not a sensation to cultivate, is it?" She paused to gaze across the river, already shadowed by approaching evening. "I believe in fighting it off with both hands; driving a spear right through the ugly thing and holding it up like Sir Sintram with that wriggly monster in the old picture."

"You would be a good one to be in trouble with," he said abruptly.

She disentangled his meaning from the extremely vague speech, and nodded serious assent.

"Yes, perhaps. I'm used to making the most of things."

"The best of them," he corrected.

"Of course! The most best—why should anyone make more worst?"

They laughed together. But directly the restless unhappiness flowed back into his eyes.

"They do, though!" he exclaimed.

"Then they are wrong, all wrong," she said decidedly. "They should set themselves right the moment they find it out."

"But if they can't?" he urged, with a personal heat and protest. "Things aren't so simple as all that. Suppose they can't set one thing straight without knocking over a lot of others? You *cannot* go cutting and slashing through like that!"

"Oh, yes; you can," she contradicted, sitting very upright, her gray eyes fired. "You must; anyone must. It is cowardly to let things, crooked things, grow and grow. And one could not knock down anything worth while that easily. Good things are strong."

He shook his head. But she had stirred him so that he sat silent for a while, then rather suddenly rose to take his leave.

"You never told me your name," he remarked, looking down at her. He noticed again how supple and deft her fingers were, and their capable swiftness at the work.

"No. Why?" she replied simply.

"I don't know," he accepted the rebuke. "I—beg your pardon."

"Oh, certainly. Holly is trying to shake hands before you go."

Of course he and the baby had become friends. He carefully yielded his forefinger to the clutching hands, but he did not smile as usual.

"Look here," he spoke out brusquely. "Just as an illustration that things are not as easily kept straight as you seem to think—I know a man who somehow got to following one woman around. I don't think he knows quite how. Of course, he

admired her immensely, and liked her. Well, I suppose he felt more than that! But he never even imagined making love to her, because she was married. You see, he was a fool. One day when he called, she told him that she was going to get a divorce from her husband. She has the right. And the man found she expected to marry him, afterward; she thought he had meant that all along. What could he do? What can he do?"

The baby gurgled merrily, dropping the forefinger and yawning. The girl laid down her work to tuck a coverlet about her charge.

"I do not know," she admitted, her voice low.

Adriance drew a quick breath.

"That isn't all of it. The husband is the man's friend. Why, they used to sleep together, eat together——! And he doesn't know. Don't you see, the man has to fail either the husband or wife? How can you straighten that?"

She looked up, to meet the unconscious self-betrayal of his defiant, unhappy eyes.

"I am very sorry for him," she answered gravely. And, after a moment. "She must be very clever."

He started away from the suggestion with sharp resentment. Clever—that was his father's term for Lucille Masterson; and it was hateful to him. He would not analyze why he felt that repugnance to hearing Lucille called clever. He refused to consider what that implied, what ugly depths of doubt were stirred in him to make him wince in anger and humiliation. Suddenly he bitterly regretted having told the story to this girl, even under the concealed identity.

"No doubt," he made a coldly vague rejoinder. "I dare say the matter will work itself out well enough. It is getting late; I think I must go."

It was altogether too abrupt, and he knew it. But he could do no better. He knew the girl's eyes followed him away, and he walked with careful ease and nonchalance.

Out of her sight, he walked more slowly. Already the autumn twilight was settling down like a delicate gray veil. At the foot of the Palisades, opposite, a familiar point of light sprang into view among the myriad lights there; a point that ran like fire through tow, up, across, around until the glittering words shone complete: "Adriance's Paper."

The name was reflected in the dark water. Down there, it swayed weakly and its legend was broken by the river's ripples. "You shine, up there, but I govern here," the Hudson flung its scorn back to the man-made arrogance. He was like that reflection, Tony Adriance thought, with a fancy caught from the girl's trick of imagery; he was the mere reflection of his father's successes, shifting, worthless, inseparable from the gold-colored reality above, dancing and broken on the current of a woman's will. He himself was—nothing. He winced under the self-applied lash. It was knotted with truth; he, personally, never had counted. Even Lucille never had said she loved him;

she simply had taken his devotion for granted, and used it. Would she have promised herself to him if he had been a poor man? Would she ever have contemplated divorce from Masterson, with all his faults, if Tony Adriance had not brought himself and his gilded possibilities across her path? The questions were ugly, and sent the blood into his face. He stopped walking and stood by the stone wall edging the sidewalk, facing the river.

He always had resented being merely his father's heir, in a vague, unanalyzed way. Now resentment threatened to flame into rebellion.

Rebellion against what? His father, who left him absolute freedom from any restraint? Lucille, whom he was at perfect liberty never to see again, if he chose to deny her assumption? He was very completely trapped by circumstance, since the trap was open and yet he could not leave it.

The delicate dot on the *i* of irony was that he had loved Lucille, yet he knew he must be miserable with her all their lives. He thought of her even now with a certain longing, yet he would always distrust her and detest himself. His fingers gripped the stone edge; he felt a passionate envy of men who were strong enough to do insane, desperate things, to tear their own way ruthlessly through the clinging web of other people's ways. He fancied the girl in black to be such a person; if she considered herself right in any course, she would take it.

But after a while he turned away and began to walk home. He had to dress, for he was dining with the Mastersons. It had been insisted upon, to make amends for the night he had stayed away to dine with his father. Lucille was not yet ready for any audible whisper to suggest divorce to the world or her husband. Tony must come and go as usual for a few weeks more. She had chosen to forget his appeal, after quelling his mutiny. Mrs. Masterson was not a generous victor.

CHAPTER IV

THE WOMAN WHO GRASPED

The Mastersons' apartment had, like many such apartments, a charming little foyer. It was lighted by a jade-green lamp, swung in bronze chains delicately green from the tinting of time; and the notes of bronze and dull jade were carried through all the furnishings, through leather and tapestry and even a great, dragon-clasped Chinese vase. But those greenish lights were not always becoming to visitors. When Tony Adriance entered the foyer that evening they were so unbecoming to him that the maid privately decided he was ill. Her master not infrequently came home with that worn look about the eyes and mouth. She wondered if Mr. Adriance gambled.

None of the other guests had arrived. Indeed, it was not yet time. The clink of glass and bustle of servants in the dining-room alone told of the coming event in hospitality. Hospitality? Tony Adriance stood still, arrested in his movement toward the drawing-room; the sick distaste of all the last weeks finally culminated in paralysis before the prospect of the farce he was expected to play out, with his unconscious host as spectator.

"I—am not ready," he found himself temporizing with the maid. His glance fell upon a desk and prompted him. "I have forgotten an important letter; I will write it before I go in. Don't wait; I know my way."

She obeyed him. Of course he had nothing to write, but he fumbled for a sheet of paper and picked up a pen. He was awake at last to the enormity of his presence here as a guest; before he had glimpsed it, now he saw it, stripped naked.

He could not go on. There was no reason why the conviction should have come to him at this moment, but it did so. As he sat there, that knowledge rose slowly to full stature before his vision like an actual figure reared in the path he had been following. It was no longer a question of Lucille's desires or his own; he could not do this thing.

He was not accustomed to intricate windings of thought, or to self-analysis. He hardly understood, as yet, what was aroused in him, or why. But he knew that he must act; that his time of passive drifting was ended. Once Lucille had reproached him with cowardice. To-day, the girl in the pavilion had innocently brought the charge again. And the girl was right; it was cowardly to let a wrong grow and grow. Masterson's friend in Masterson's house! Adriance dropped the pen his clenching fingers had bent, and stood up.

The maid had gone back to that centre of approaching activities, the kitchen. Alone, Adriance went down the corridor to the drawing-room.

Mrs. Masterson was alone there, moving some introduced chairs into less conspicuous situations. The alien chairs were covered in rose-color and marred the clouded-blue effect of the room. She pushed them about with a vicious force, as though she hated the inanimate offenders; her expression was sullen and fretful.

That expression altered too quickly, when she saw Adriance standing on the threshold. He caught the skilful change that transformed it into winning plaintiveness.

"You, Tony?" she greeted him, advancing to give him her hand. "I am so glad it was no one else. *You* know how I must contrive and make the best of what little I have. How I loathe this cramped place, and bringing chairs from bed-chambers to have enough, and all pinching——!" She glanced about her with a flare of contempt, her smooth scarlet lip lifting in a sneer.

Adriance slowly looked over the room, not very large, perhaps, yet scarcely cramped; made lovely by opalescent lamps and fragrant by the perfume of roses set in high, slender vases of rock-crystal. All one wall was smothered in the silken warmth of a Chinese rug, against whose blue was lifted the creamy whiteness of an ivory elephant quaintly carved and poised on its pedestal. Even to his eyes nothing here warranted discontent.

"I thought this very pretty," he dissented. "I thought Masterson had done things very well, here."

"Well enough, for a nook in a house; not for the house," she retorted. "I hate living in apartments. I always have wanted stairs; wide, shining stairs down which I would pass to cross broad rooms!"

She drew a thirsty breath. In the gleaming gown which left uncovered as much of her beauty as an indulgent fashion allowed, her large light eyes avid, her yellow head thrown slightly forward as she looked up at the man, she was a vivid and unconscious embodiment of greed. Not the pitiful greed of necessity, but the greed which, having much, covets more. As if he shared her mind, Adriance knew that she pictured herself descending the stairs in his father's house gowned and jewelled as Mrs. Tony Adriance could be and Lucille Masterson could not.

He was not aware of the change in his own face until he saw its reflection in the sudden alarm and question clouding hers. He answered her expression, then, compelling his voice to hold its low evenness of speech with the inborn distaste of well-bred modern man for betrayed emotion.

"That is it," he interpreted. "That is why you would marry me and leave Masterson. You want more than he can give you. If he had as much to give as I have, it would not matter what he did. You would bear with him. Perhaps you have been bearing with me."

"Tony!" she stammered.

"It is quite true. I have been a solemn fool. I have been nerving myself to lay down my self-respect without flinching, because I believed that I had led you to count upon

me; and all the while you were counting upon what I owned."

She gathered her forces together after the surprise.

"Rather severe, Tony, because I dislike expensive tenement life!" she commented, with careful irony. Turning aside, she laid her lace scarf across a table, gaining a respite from his gaze. "Have I ever pretended not to care for beautiful, luxurious things? And does that argue that I care for nothing else? I think you should apologize —and pay more heed to your digestion."

He paused an instant, steadying himself. As usual, she had contrived to make him feel in the wrong and ashamed.

"I do apologize," he said, less certainly. "I did not come in here to say all that, Lucille. But I did come to say what reaches the same end. We cannot finish this thing we have begun. We could not stand it. Think whatever you may of me as a coward, I am not going on."

"Indeed, I think you have gone far enough," she calmly returned. "Suppose we sit down and be civilized. Will you smoke before dinner?"

He shook his head, baffled in spite of himself by her elusiveness, but also angered to resolution. And he knew that he had seen her truly a moment since; the loveliness that had glamoured his sight for a year could not hide from memory that glimpse of her mind.

"I am not staying to dinner, thanks," he refused. "And I am not playing. Our matter looked bad enough as it was, but you showed me a worse thing, just now. It was bad enough to take my friend's wife for love; I can't and won't take her by means of my father's money."

She wheeled about, swiftly and hotly aflame, and they stared at each other as strangers.

"You have forgotten that we are engaged," she said stingingly. "Or doesn't your conscience heed a broken word?"

"Perhaps it is heeding the tactfulness of being engaged to one man while you are married to another," he struck back, goaded to a brutality foreign to his nature.

The faint chime of touching glasses checked them on the brink of a breach that would have made reconciliation impossible. Mrs. Masterson dropped into a chair, snatching up a fan to shade her flushed face. Adriance stood stiffly, where he was, wisely making no attempt at artificial nonchalance. The servant who entered saw only composure in his immobility.

Mrs. Masterson eagerly lifted the offered cocktail to her lips, as if anger had parched them. Adriance took a glass from the tray presented to him, but at once set it aside upon the table; now that he realized, he felt that the hospitality of this house was not for him. But the brief interlude helped both of them.

When the servant had gone, Adriance spoke with restored calmness.

"You see, even now the situation has warped us all awry. If it were not so, I should like to buy things for you, I suppose. I can imagine——"

He broke the sentence; quite suddenly he had remembered the little buckled shoes bought for the girl in the pavilion. He had looked interestedly at other things in the shop, while he waited for his parcel. It would have given him delight to purchase certain elaborate stockings and absurd lace-frilled handkerchiefs.

"I can imagine that I should," he finished lamely. "Lucille, you will come to agree with me, I hope. But even if you do not, I cannot go on."

She rose and came up to him with a swift movement that brought both her hands against his shoulders before he grasped her intention. Her warm face was directly beneath his own.

"Is there someone else, Tony?" she demanded. "Some girl? Of course it would be a young girl who inspired all this; 'pure as water'—and as tasteless! Is that it?"

She might have struck him with less effect. Tony Adriance went absolutely numb with disgusted wrath. What preposterous thing did she imply? The shining gray eyes of the girl in the pavilion looked at him across the alert, probing gaze of Lucille Masterson; looked at him with beautiful candor, with indignation. He felt outraged, as if the young girl herself had been made present in this nasty scene. And without cause! He had no thought of loving that sober little figure; he was sick of love.

"I am sorry you cannot credit me with one disinterested motive," he said coldly. "As it happens, you are wrong. There is no one except you. I am going away because you are neither unmarried nor a widow, since you force me to repeat all this. If you were either——"

"You would stay?" she whispered.

He looked down at her, and as always before her magic his strength grew weak. He lifted her hands from his shoulders, before replying.

"Yes," he conceded, his voice changed. "But it is over, Lucille. Tell Masterson I have gone abroad; to stay."

As he moved toward the door, Mrs. Masterson turned to the table and caught up his untouched glass. Fear and chagrin were swept from her face; it still glowed from her late rage, but her eyes were lighted with confidence and ironic relief.

"To your safe voyage and pleasant return!" she exclaimed lightly, facing him across the room. "For you will come back, Tony. The spasm will pass; and leave you lonely. I can wait, then. Good-night."

She laughed outright at the consternation in his glance, as he paused. But he turned and went out, leaving her leaning across the arm of one of the discordant rose-colored chairs, watching him.

Back in the foyer, Adriance stopped to recover a conventional composure of bearing before going out. He recalled that he must pass inspection by the elevator boy and footman; must meet their wonder, no less obvious because dumb, at his departure before the dinner.

The heavy blankness of his waiting was broken by the gayest sound in the world. The gurgling laughter of a happy child rippled through the silence like a brook, cascading down in a cadence of chuckles. As if to confirm the recognition to which Adriance started, a girl's clear laugh joined the baby merriment. Opposite him, light showed in a thin line through a curtained doorway. Without the slightest remembrance of proprieties or conventions, he sprang that way and swung the door open.

He was on the threshold of a nursery; a room pink as the inside of a rosebud, gay with all the adorable paraphernalia babyhood demands, fragrant with violet-powder and warm as a nest. At the foot of a shining little bed, clutching the brass rail for support while executing a stamping dance, was the lord of the domain; his silk-fine, frankly red hair rumpled into glinting ringlets about his moist, rosy face, his blue eyes crinkled shut by mirth. The girl knelt opposite, steadying the chubby figure and serenely indifferent to the small, mischievous fingers that had loosened her dark hair from its braids. Without her hat, she was younger, even more wholesome and good than he had thought. She looked as fresh and candid as the damp, open-lipped kisses the baby lavished upon her.

Perhaps the intruder moved, perhaps she felt his gaze, for as he watched the girl broke up the picture. She rose abruptly, turned, and saw him standing there.

At first her startled face told only of surprise; indeed his mere presence there gave her no reason to feel more. But in his dismay and bewilderment and complete obsession Tony Adriance betrayed himself.

"I didn't know," he stammered, grasping blindly at justification and apology. "I didn't know who Holly was—or that you lived here. I am sorry; I should not have spoken ——"

He stopped short. He had forgotten the fiction of a third person with which he had masked his confidence in the park; forgotten that the girl knew neither his name nor his purpose in this house. Quite without necessity he had enlightened her.

For the girl was swift of perception. Perhaps his expression alone would have told her the truth, if he had been silent. Mechanically she had put one arm around the baby, now she drew it closer, as if in protection. Her rain-gray eyes grieved, reproached, rebuked him. Possessed of Lucille Masterson's plans, holding her son, she faced him in judgment.

Of course he had known Lucille had a child, somewhat as he knew his father owned the factory behind the electric sign. He never had seen either of them, except distantly; they meant nothing actual to him. But now, there seemed nothing in the world so important. The girl had not spoken, yet she had abruptly brought him face to face with new things.

"You know, I would have taken him, too," he tried to answer all she left unsaid, hating himself for the unsteady humility he could not keep from his voice. "I always meant to. I meant to do everything for the boy. I could—I am Anthony Adriance."

She spoke, then, her smooth voice all roughened.

"You can buy him everything? You cannot buy him his father. And nothing will make up for that."

"But——"

She struck down the weak protest.

"I *know*. I have a good father. And Holly," the infinite compassion of her glance embraced the baby, "he has not even a real mother to do her half. It is not right; you cannot make it right."

"But I have! I am going——!"

He faltered. How was he to explain to her the scene that had just been enacted? Was it decent to Lucille?

"I've done my best," he stammered. "I told you; you know I've not liked this."

The exclamation blended defiance and appeal; it was almost a cry wrested from him. His position had been hard enough before the introduction of this new element. The girl understood, for the anger died from her eyes like a blown-out flame.

"There must be a way," she said quite gently. "There is always a right way, if one can only find it. I think you had better not stay here, now. Mr. Masterson always comes at this time; it is even late for him."

The warning had been delayed too long. Almost with the last word, a man's step sounded in the foyer, the curtains rustled apart and the door swung.

"What, Tony in a nursery!" exclaimed the master of the house, with an oddly tired gayety. He came forward and gave his hand to Adriance, his amused scrutiny wholly cordial. If he wondered how the other man came here, he was both too indifferent and too well-bred to betray the fact. "You have caught me; here is the only place I am behind the times," he added. "Hello, son!"

Adriance was spared the necessity of replying. The baby, who had stood staring round-eyed at the visitor, exploded into a very madness of chuckles and shouts, twisting out of the girl's hold and plunging toward the newcomer with fat arms insistently spread. With an apologetic, half-diffident glance at his guest, Masterson caught and swung Holly into the game of romps demanded.

It was a good game, evidently the result of practice. The pink room rang with treble shrieks of glee; and Masterson laughed, too, occasionally interjecting phrases of caution or comment.

"Jove, what a punch! How's that for muscle, Tony? Easy, son! How do *you* like your wig pulled? Steady, now."

The two in the background looked on. Adriance's throat was contracting; he was suffocating with a terrible sense of barely having escaped a shameful action. He understood the girl even better now. Only, if he loathed himself so much, yet knew that at least he had ended the wrong, how much more must her clear sight find him despicable in her ignorance of his tardy amendment! He dared not look at her. He tried to remember Lucille Masterson's regretfully murmured plaints of Fred's carelessness with money, his "wildness" and neglect of her. But he could only think heavily that if Mrs. Masterson had obtained a divorce, the custody of the child would surely have been awarded to her, the irreproachable wife. There would have been no more bedtime romps for Fred Masterson and his son. How much alike the two looked! He had forgotten how very auburn Fred's hair was, and how boyish his eyes were when he laughed.



THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN NO MORE BEDTIME ROMPS FOR MASTERSON AND HIS SON

With a final toss and shout the dishevelled, panting baby was replaced in the bed, one cheek poppy-red from a rough masculine caress. A little shame-faced over the sentimentality, Masterson turned to his guest.

"All over!" he affected lightness. "Come have a Martini before dinner, Tony."

"No, thanks. I couldn't." Adriance pulled himself together with a sharp effort. "I heard your kiddie laughing, and just looked in here. I ought to apologize; I have not yet met this lady——"

Masterson regarded him curiously.

"Miss Elsie Murray, Mr. Adriance," he obeyed the implied request. "Miss Murray is good enough to be Holly's guardian, since no one of his family has time for that—or inclination."

She was a nurse. The simple fact came home to Adriance for the first time. The severe black dress, the little white cuffs and collar that made it a uniform, her constant attendance upon the baby—all the obvious evidence had been overshadowed for him by her face and bearing, the personality out of all accord with the position in which she was.

There was no change in her face. He comprehended that she never had imagined him ignorant of her relation to Holly. Through all his whirling confusion of thought, Adriance contrived to hold outward composure and acknowledge the introduction as he would that to any gentlewoman. The quaint word seemed to suit her.

She met him with a poise at least equal to his own. But it was he who offered his hand, heedless of Masterson's observation. It seemed to him that he never had desired anything in his life so desperately, with such passionate eagerness as he desired to be justified before this girl. He wanted her to know the very thing he could not honorably tell anyone: that he had broken with Lucille Masterson of his own free will. His eyes sought hers, unconsciously beseeching her grace of comprehension; indeed, he had a confused idea that she would comprehend that his offered handclasp was ventured only because he was not going to do the wrong they both hated.

Perhaps she did understand. At least, she gave him her hand, for the first time in their acquaintance. He grasped it with a brightening of his drawn face, leaning toward her.

"Thank you!" he said. "I congratulate Holly; you will teach him in time about Maître Raoul Galvez."

That speech took her by surprise; for an instant she did not withdraw her hand, her direct gaze meeting his. He saw her gray eyes cloud and clear, and cloud again; abruptly her dark lashes cloaked them from him.

"Yes," she murmured. "Yes."

Masterson was staring at the two, his lips parted by cynical interest. But no one perceived the second observer. Mrs. Masterson had come to the doorway while Masterson was playing with the baby and still stood there, narrowed, incredulous eyes appraising the amazing tableau offered by her nursemaid and Tony Adriance. She herself had followed Adriance for a last word, unaware of her husband's return home. And she had found this group, in her nursery.

When the others moved, she drew back. The curtains noiselessly fell shut. The two men came into the foyer almost immediately, but the bronze lamp lighted an empty room.

Masterson asked no questions of his guest as they paused outside the nursery, but Adriance had recollected himself enough to shelter the girl from embarrassment.

"I stopped one day to speak to your boy in the park," he remarked casually. "Miss Murray was telling him an odd fairy tale that struck my fancy; Creole, I should think."

Masterson dropped his hand on the other's shoulder with an intimacy long unused between them, ignoring the explanation.

"We never seem to get together, any more, except at some society nonsense," he regretted. "We used to be pretty close, Tony. Remember that night in the Maine camp after the canoe had upset, when there was only one blanket left and we tossed up for it? I don't remember who won, but I know we both slept under it——as much as we could get under." He laughed reminiscently. "Well, it's a far cry from there to here! Shall we go in to Lucille?"

"Thank you, but I have made my excuses to Mrs. Masterson," Adriance answered steadily. "I had a telegram——! I am off for the rest of the year; perhaps longer. I am going to South America."

"Your father's business? I remember you once spoke of some such thing. I wish I were going with you."

He sighed with impatient fatigue, and the two stood for a silent moment. Masterson aroused himself to hold out his slender, nervous hand.

"Well, good luck go with you, Tony. It usually does, though! 'To him who hath——.'"

CHAPTER V.

THE LITTLE RED HOUSE

The next day it stormed. A biting north wind hunted across river and city; a wind that carried the first ice-particles of the approaching winter. There were no children on the Drive or in the park, except a few sturdy urchins neither of the age nor class attended by nurses. No one uncompelled cared to face the grim, gray, scowling day whose breath was freezing.

In the Adriances' breakfast-room, an effort had been made to offset the outside cheerlessness by aid of lamps glowing under gold-colored shades. But only an optimist could have deluded vision into accepting the artificial sunshine as satisfactory. Tony Adriance was even irritated by the feeble sham, and snapped out the lamp nearest to him as he took his seat.

The action was trifling, but Mr. Adriance, seated on the opposite side of the round table, glanced keenly at his son and read an interpretation of it. He believed that Tony wished to shadow the pale exhaustion of his face. In this he was wrong; Tony Adriance was quite past thoughts of his appearance. Not having looked in a mirror, he was not even aware of the traces left by the last night. He did not at all appreciate the significance with which his father presently inquired, courteously concerned:

"You are not well, this morning?"

"Quite well, thank you," Tony replied; he glanced up from his plate somewhat surprised at the question.

Mr. Adriance met the glance with sincere curiosity. His first hazard failing, he sought for a second. Indeed, he knew very well that Tony had none of the habits which lead to uncomfortable mornings, although to a casual regard his present bearing suggested a white night. Fortunately, he had not perceived the innuendo within the older man's question and was not offended. Mr. Adriance detested being in the wrong.

Tony was too listless to pursue the subject at all. After vainly waiting a moment for his father to explain the inquiry, he proceeded with the business of breakfasting more or less indifferently. He was conjecturing as to his own ability to set forth his trouble for the calm inspection of the gentleman across the table. He had come down-stairs with that intention, born of the night's bitter experience of solitude in unhappiness. Now he felt that the project was impossible. His father and he were not on terms of sufficient intimacy. He suffered an access of discouragement and weariness. His only idea had failed, yet something must be decided, some course followed.

"You dined at the Mastersons', last night, I believe?" Mr. Adriance had found his second hazard. Unconsciously his voice sharpened; it would be intolerable if Tony

and Masterson had made some clumsy scene between them. Occasionally Mr. Adriance wondered what so clever a woman as Lucille Masterson had seen in either of the two.

"No," Tony denied.

"No? I had understood——?"

"I dined down-town."

That was the first deliberate lie the younger man had told the older in all their life together. But Tony confronted an utter impossibility; he could not confess that he had sat until midnight in a park pavilion, with no more thought of life's common-sense routine than a sentimental boy. Nevertheless, his voice sounded unconvincing to his own ears, and humiliation swept over him like a wave of heat. The desire to get away from everyone and everything familiar made it difficult for him not to spring up and leave the room and the unfinished breakfast.

But Mr. Adriance was convinced and appeased. In his relief, he felt a really kind desire to relieve Tony from his evident depression.

"You appear to have something on your mind," he observed. "If it is anything I might remove, pray call upon me, Tony."

"Financially?" queried his son, drily.

"Certainly, if you wish. You are not in the least extravagant. In fact, you are a charming contradiction of a great many popular conceptions concerning those not forcibly employed."

"Thank you. But I wish you would employ me, sir, if not forcibly. I want to go away for a time; not just—for amusement. Can you not send me somewhere to take charge of your interests instead of a hired agent? I could learn to help you, perhaps."

The last expression was unfortunate. Mr. Adriance's brow contracted and the cordiality left his gaze.

"I am not yet superannuated," he signified. "When I am in need of help, I will ask it, Tony. Naturally I intend training you to take charge of your own affairs after my death. You will find that quite enough to occupy you, some day. I am sorry if you are unable to amuse yourself, already. Next year, if you like, we will take up the matter of your business education. This year, I shall be too busy. You are young and I am not old."

His glance turned toward a mirror set in a buffet opposite. The face reflected was clear in outline, firm to the verge of hardness; the eyes full and alert, the carefully brushed hair so abundant that its grayness gave dignity without the effect of age. Self-appreciation touched Mr. Adriance's lip with a smile, as he gazed, smoothing away his slight annoyance. His son, tracing that glance, felt a movement of kindred admiration and a renewed sense of his own personal inadequacy. Tony Adriance had

accomplished nothing, yet he was already tired. How would he look when he was thirty years older? Hardly like that, he feared. Nor would Fred Masterson! Whose was the fault, and what the remedy?

Mr. Adriance, returning to his coffee, surprised the other's observation of him, and shrugged an unembarrassed acceptance of the verdict.

"We have plenty of time, you see," he remarked. "Moreover, you are hardly ready for abstract affairs. You are not sufficiently settled. After you are married that will come. I myself married young. Marriage makes private life sufficiently monotonous not to interfere with the conduct of outside matters of importance."

"Does it?" speculated Tony, doubtingly.

"It should. Monotony is closer to content than is agitation, would you not say?"

"Doesn't that depend on the kind of monotony?"

"Surely. That is why each man should choose his own wife."

"I see. If I ever choose a wife, I shall remember the advice."

This time Mr. Adriance was astonished. He did not miss the significance of the remark, or the alteration in Tony since the previous day, when he had last seen him. It was not possible to be explicit in a matter so delicate, especially with servants present; but his curiosity was not to be denied.

"You have not—reached that point? I had fancied— —"

"I have no such engagement at present," was the steady reply.

Mr. Adriance pushed away his finger bowl and allowed his cigar to be lighted by the deferential automaton behind his chair.

"I am sorry," he said.

His son did not misunderstand him; in fact, he understood more clearly than perhaps did the older man himself. Mr. Adriance had chosen the hostess he wanted for his house, or rather, he had been enchanted by Tony's supposed choice. Lucille Masterson filled his ideal of his son's wife. Her loveliness would be a point of pride; her social experience would make her competent for the position; moreover, she was too clever not to have courted and won the genuine liking of Tony's father long ago. Fred Masterson was hardly considered, except as an obstacle readily removed, when the proper time came. And now, Tony himself was overturning all the pleasant family life that Mr. Adriance had planned. He knew that his father never willingly relinquished a perfected plan; rarely, indeed, was he turned aside from a purpose on which his mind was fixed.

"Perhaps you will reconsider that statement later," Mr. Adriance presently suggested.

"I think not, in the sense you mean," he made slow reply.

Mr. Adriance raised himself abruptly.

"I hope so," he said, with a touch of sharpness; "I hope you are not going to grow irresolute and changeable, Tony. I detest weakness of character. Perhaps you had better take a trip somewhere and get yourself in tone."

"Perhaps," Tony agreed; his voice was not yielding, but sullen and desperate.

Indeed, he was as near illness as a man may be without physical injury or disease. After his father had left the breakfast-room he sat for a long time in utter mental incapacity to undertake any line of effort. Finally he arose, oppressed with a sense of suffocation in the rich, sombre atmosphere; of imprisonment and helplessness. He wanted air and solitude, the solitude he had come to the breakfast-room to escape, and he could think of no place where he could be so well assured of both as in his motor-car.

In his abstraction he walked bareheaded and without an overcoat across the frozen stretch of lawn between the house and the garage. He was quite indifferent to the weather; his chauffeur put him into furs and passed him his gloves and cap as a matter of course, or he might have fared forth poorly equipped to meet the wind and storm.

He swung his machine from the cement incline into the street and turned across Broadway. He did not wish to pass Elsie Murray ensconced in the park pavilion with Holly Masterson at her knees; yet his thoughts were so swayed by her that when he reached One Hundred and Thirtieth Street he turned west again and took the ferry across the Hudson. He had no better reason for doing so than the tranquillity and content she seemed to draw from contemplating the opposite shore.

He sped up Fort Lee hill with a crowd of other cars, turned west and north to escape their companionship and all the landmarks he knew. He avoided the main highway and chose mere cross and hill roads and lanes. Always he had before him the vivid, pretty face of Lucille, the tired young face of Masterson and the gray eyes of Elsie Murray.

A nurse-maid! The girl who had told him the legend of Raoul Galvez, the girl by whose standard he had come to measure himself and his companions and who had fixed the sluggish attention of his conscience upon the mischief being wrought by his yielding good nature—that girl was Lucille's nurse-maid. That amazement of the night before remained with him, coloring all other emotions. He had come out to arrange his thoughts, but the hours passed and they remained in chaotic condition.

Near noon he was running through a narrow woodland track when a bend in the road suddenly revealed his way blockaded by an enormous wagon that stood before him. It was a moving van; its canvas sides distended by bulky furniture and household fittings, its rear doors tied open to allow a huge old-fashioned cupboard to stand between. Adriance brought his machine to an abrupt halt.

"Clear the way there," he impatiently shouted to the invisible driver; "what is the matter—broken down?"

The answer came, not from the concealed front of the van, but from the bank bordering on the side of the road.

"All right; but ain't it a shame that you blew in at dinner-time!"

The reply was unexpected; Adriance looked towards the complainant's voice. In the shelter of a big boulder that gave some protection from the wind, three men were seated, each with a leather lunch-box on his knee. Two of them wore the striped aprons of moving-men; the third evidently was the spokesman and the driver. All three held various portions of food and stared down at the intruder in the attitude in which his advance had arrested them.

"It ain't as if we could just turn out," the driver pursued, not resentfully but with an impersonal disgust. He put the apple in his hand back into his lunch-box and stood up. "We've got to go on a mile before there's room for you to pass. Come on, boys."

"No," Adriance aroused himself from self-absorption to forbid the upheaval. "I am in no hurry; finish your lunch, and I will wait."

The three on the bank stared harder.

"You're a sport," complimented the driver; "but it ain't more than five minutes after twelve."

"What has that to do with it? Oh, I see; you mean that you rest until one?"

"You're on."

"Well, I said that I was not in a hurry," he accepted the delay he had not contemplated. "Take your rest and I will smoke."

The three men regarded each other, then the driver slowly sat down. The munching horses were blanketed against the cold, but the men appeared careless of temperature. They obviously were constrained by the presence of the man in the automobile, however.

"This road ain't much used," the driver ventured presently. "We're taking this load to a farmhouse up here a ways. That's why we thought we could stop traffic without being noticed."

His round, bright eyes asked a question that Adriance answered with doubtful truthfulness.

"I lost my way."

"Oh!" The driver paused, then suddenly slid down the bank.

"Ain't we the hogs," he observed deprecatingly, coming up to the side of the car and offering his lunch-box. "Won't you eat?"

The tired, dark-blue eyes of Tony Adriance met the cheerful, light-blue eyes of the other man. The two men were about the same age, and one of them was desperately

lonely and sick of his own thoughts. They both smiled involuntarily.

"Thanks, I will," said Adriance; and took a thick, rye bread sandwich from the box presented. The driver sat down on the running-board of the automobile and there ensued a well-employed silence.

The sandwich was excellent. Adriance had eaten little breakfast; yet, left to himself, he would hardly have thought of food in his bitter preoccupation; but it did him good. The ham smeared with cheap mustard had a zest of its own, a little brutal, perhaps, but effective. It was a generously designed sandwich, too, not a frail wafer. He ate it all, even the acrid crust.

"'Nother?" invited the host.

"No, thanks; but that one tasted good." Adriance drew out his cigar-case. "Won't you all have a smoke with me, now?"

The cigars were passed and lighted. Before returning the case, the driver frankly inspected the fine leather toy with the tiny monogram in one corner.

"That's all right," he approved, returning it to its owner. "I was afraid you'd pull out a little gold box of cigarettes."

"Why?" amused.

"Oh, I don't know, my luck, I guess."

"You don't like them?"

"Me? I got a pipe three years old that holds *some* tobacco—that for me. But this cigar is all right. Ever try a pipe?"

"Yes."

The driver leaned back comfortably against the spare tire strapped beside the car, gazing up at the gray, cold sky.

"A pipe, my feet on the kitchen stove, the kids and the missus—me for that, nights."

Adriance looked at him with startled scrutiny. Almost he could have imagined that Elsie Murray had come to the man's side and prompted him. What, was it then real and usual, that homely content she once had painted so vividly? Did most men have such homes?

"You're married?" he vaguely asked.

"Sure, these five years; we got two kids." The boyish driver chuckled and shook his head reminiscently. "Darn little tykes! What they ain't up to I don't know. Dragged a big bull pup in off the street last week, they did, and scared the missus into fits. Pete—he's four—had it by the collar bold as brass, and it ugly enough to scare you. Say, I'm trying one of those schemes for training kids on him; exercising him, you know. You

ought to see the muscles he's got already, arms and legs hard as nails. Think it will work all right?"

Adriance looked down into the eager face.

"Yes, I do," he said slowly. "You cannot be more than twenty-five or six——?"

"Twenty-five is right."

"You must have worked pretty hard?"

"Ever since I was fourteen," was the cheerful assent. He pulled out a watch of the dollar variety and looked at it. "One o'clock it is! We'll get along again, boys. Yes, I've been busy. But the missus and I are saving up. Some day I'm going to have a trucking business of my own; there's good money in it. Well, we're sure obliged to you for waiting for us."

The other two men were coming down the bank. Adriance drew off his glove and held out his hand to his acquaintance.

"I am glad I met you. Good luck!"

"Same to you!" He pulled off his mitten to give the clasp. "Are you going to the ferry?"

"I—I—? Yes."

"Well, turn off when you get to the next road. It's a poor one, but it's a short cut to the Palisades road."

The horses were unblanketed and the bags which had held their luncheon removed. The men climbed into their places, and presently Adriance's lusty machine was rebelliously crawling on behind the moving-van.

At the end of a mile they came to the side road, and parted with cheerful shouts of farewell.

It was impossible to measure the good that interlude of healthy companionship had done to Tony Adriance. It had swept aside vapors, cleared his mind to normality, invigorated him like a pungent tonic. Yet it had laid a reproach upon him. He contrasted himself with that boyish husband and father; yes, contrasted Mr. Adriance, senior, with that driver who was anxiously training his son's body by his own efforts after the day's work. He could not recollect his father ever playing with him or seriously advising him. Even Fred Masterson was doing better.

The road debouched abruptly upon the main highway. A passing automobile momentarily delayed Adriance, and looking idly across the way, he perceived a house. After the other car had passed and the way was open, he sat quite still in his machine, gazing.

There was nothing about the house before him to catch the eye except a certain air of quaint sturdiness that had survived desertion. It was rather a cottage than a house, bearing a sign "For Sale," and unoccupied. It was a red-painted cottage, built in that absurd Gothic fashion once favored by some insane builders. Its ridiculous roof and windows were highly peaked; its high, narrow porch had a pointed top like a caricature of the entrance to *Notre Dame de Paris*. It stood quite back from the road with an air of abandonment; but it was unconquerably cheerful, even against the gray sky. It was a house that wanted to be cosy.

Suddenly Adriance realized that he was very tired. He was not ready to go home; he even thought with abhorrence of going there. Yet he was weary of guiding his machine along the highway. He left his seat and walked up the wood path—two planks in width—leading to the cottage. The windows gaped, uncurtained; he looked in, then deliberately seated himself upon the step and lapsed into heavy revery.

There were few passers-by on such a day. Those who were compelled to the road lingered in the cold to look curiously at the automobile standing by the gutter and at the young man who sat on the old wooden step.

It was four o'clock when Tony Adriance rose and went back to his automobile. He did not turn down to the ferry, but looked again at the signboard on the house; then turned his machine about and drove to an address which was seven miles inland.

CHAPTER VI

The Woman Who Gave

Tony Adriance had not really heeded the weather until he found his way to the stone pavilion on Riverside Drive at dusk that evening. Cold and wind had recorded slight impression on his preoccupied mind and his healthy body. Indeed, his feeling was that of a man passing through a fever, rather than one chilled. And he was hot with a savage sense of victory, for he brought decision back with him. He knew, at last, what he meant to do.

He was brought to heed the weather by his need of seeing the girl who was Holly's nurse. He stood for a while in the pavilion, after realizing the absurdity of expecting to find her, and considered. He was accustomed to having his own way; hardly likely to abandon it when his necessity loomed urgent. His distrust of himself was deep, if unconfessed; he dared not wait until the next day. Besides, the storm might continue. After a brief pause of bafflement, he walked up to Broadway, found a stationer's shop and a messenger, and dispatched a note to Miss Elsie Murray. He looked curiously at the name, after it was written; it seemed so soft, even childish, matched with that steadfastness of hers to which he held as to the one stable thing in his knowledge.

Would she come? The doubt bore him company on his way back to the pavilion. Could she free herself from duties to come, if she wished? He did not know, but he was obstinately resolved to see her that night. He was indeed like a man in a fever; one idea consumed him.

A quarter of an hour passed; a half hour. Dusk, their hour of adventure fixed by chance, had almost darkened to night when Adriance saw the small figure for which he watched step from the curb. She hurried, almost ran across the broad avenue, the wind wrapping her garments around her.

"Thank you," the man greeted her, his gratitude very earnest.

The girl brushed aside his speech with a gesture. She was breathing rapidly; amid all the shadows her face showed white and small.

"Of course I came," she said. "It was not easy—to come. I cannot stay long. But I knew you would not have sent unless it was important."

"No," he affirmed, and paused. "I wonder why you are there? I mean, why are you somebody's nurse, to be ordered about when you could do so much better things? Of course, I can see how different you are!"

He stopped, with a sense of alarmed clumsiness. Because she was weary, the girl sat down on the cold stone bench before answering.

"You are quite wrong," she said quietly. "I cannot do clever things at all. I do not mean that I am stupid, exactly, but that I cannot do anything so especially well as to make people pay me for it. Neither can my father. I think he is the best man in the world, and my mother the dearest woman, but they cannot make money. He is a professor of romance and history, at a small college in Louisiana. There are a good many of us—I have four younger sisters—so I came North to support myself."

"But——"

"Not as a nurse, of course. I came with an old lady whose son we knew at the college. She asked me to be her private secretary. But after a few months she died. I could not go back to be a burden. After I had tried to find other things to do, and failed, I came to take care of Holly. Why are we talking about me? There was something important, you said?"

"I—yes," Adriance said. He could read so much more than she told. Afterward he was ashamed to remember that he neither felt nor expressed any pity for her disappointed hopes. His whole attention was fixed on her steady courage; the fighting spirit that he had divined in her and toward which his indecision reached weak hands groping in the dark for support.

The girl shrank behind the stone column nearest her as a blast of freezing wind rushed past.

"Well?" she spurred his hesitation.

She was successful. He moved nearer her to be heard; the fever of the last twenty-four hours thickened and hurried his speech.

"I'm not going to tell you about Mrs. Masterson," he told her. "In the first place, you would not listen, and in the second place, I have nothing to say. But you must know that last evening she broke her engagement with me. I mean, before I saw you in the nursery. I was free, then."

"She dismissed you?"

He had deliberately thought out the falsehood that protected Lucille Masterson at his own expense. But it was harder than he had anticipated to play this weak rôle before Elsie Murray.

"Yes," he forced the difficult acknowledgment.

"You need not have told me that," her slow reply crossed the darkness to him. "I know it is not true. And I know what is true. It does not matter how I—learned. But we may as well speak honestly."

He could have cried out in his great relief. Instead, he seized the offered privilege of speech.

"I will, then! You know what I have done to Fred Masterson. I brought the glamour of money, of what I could buy, into his household and made his wife awake to discontent

and ambition. I didn't know what mischief I was working, until too late. I did not understand some of it until last night. Now, what? Suppose I go away? Where can I go? Abroad, or on a hunting trip? While I was gone she would get the divorce, when I came back she and the rest would push me into the marriage. My own father is pushing me. Everyone pities her and thinks the thing is suitable. You don't know me! I like her, and I'm easily pushed. I tell you I never did anything but drift, until last night. I am afraid of myself, yet."

"Then, why have you sent for me?" she asked, after a silence.

There was as much sullenness as resolution in the unconscious gesture with which he folded his arms.

"Because I mean to stop this thing. Because I am going to take my own way for the rest of the journey instead of being pushed and pulled. I quit, to-night."

"How? What do you mean?"

"I am leaving the position where I am not strong enough to stand firm. And because I know myself, I am fixing it so I cannot go back. You"—he stumbled over the word —"you are not much better off than I, so far as getting what you want out of life is concerned. Do you want—will you try the venture with me? I think, I'm sure I could keep my half of a home. You once said you would like to be a poor man's wife——"

The last word died away as if its boldness hushed him with a sense of what he asked so readily. The girl rose to her feet, swaying slightly in the strong wind; her fingers gripped the stone railing behind her while she strove to see his face through the dark. A street lamp sent a faint grayness into the pavilion, but he stood in shadows.

"You—are asking—me——?"

He laughed shortly to cover his own embarrassment.

"To marry a man who isn't much more than a chauffeur out of work! Driving a car is my only way of earning money, just now. Of course, if we go away together we will have to live on what I can bring in. It's not very dazzling, but neither is being a nurse."

Comprehension slowly came to her.

"You would do this so you never could go back," she whispered, half to herself. "To be cut off from everyone, because of me!"

"Not that!" he offered quick apology. "Why, you are above me by every count I can make! No, it is because I can't stand alone. And, of course—if I were married——"

"Mrs. Masterson would give her husband another chance," she finished.

He could not see her expression, but he felt her bitterness, and that he was losing.

"Don't be offended," he appealed. "I thought we could be good friends—why, if I did not respect and—and admire you, would I be asking to spend my life with you? I

know I am not offering you much, but it's my best."

"You do not love me."

He bent his head to the assertion; for it was an assertion, not a question. After the dazzling companionship of Lucille Masterson, love was scarcely an emotion he could associate with the grave, quiet little figure of Elsie Murray. He was surprised and embarrassed anew, and showed it.

"I am not very sentimental, I'm afraid. Couldn't we start with friendship? I'll try to make a good comrade for everyday."

The delay was long, so long that he anticipated the refusal and felt his heart sink with a sense of loss and apprehension. All his plans, he suddenly realized, were founded upon a strength drawn from her. He felt the tremor of his structure of resolution, with that support withdrawn. Unreasonable bitterness surged over him. Even she would not have him, penniless.

She was shivering. He noticed that, when she spoke.

"You wish us to understand each other?" she said, her voice quite steady. "Very well. Remember, then, I never knew who you were until last night. You were just a man who seemed lonely, as I was just a woman alone. Remember that I am human, too, and imagine things, and how monotonous it is to be a nurse and do the same things every day. I thought you talked to me and came so often because you were commencing to like me. Once you bought violets from a man on the corner, then threw them away before you crossed to me. I knew you meant them for me, but feared I would not like you to give them to me. I liked you better for throwing them away than for buying them. I was—foolish. And I cannot marry you, because you do not love me, while I—might you."

With the last low word, she passed him and went from the pavilion, not in running flight, but with the swift, certain step of finality. Adriance was left standing, struck out of articulate thought. The astounding blow had fallen among his accumulated ideas and scattered them like dust. She loved him. Slowly stupefaction gave place to hot shame for the insult of his proposal to her. He had been coarse, selfish beyond belief and wrapped in egotism. He had asked her to be his wife with the grace of one engaging a housemaid. And he might have had the unbelievable! A slow-rising excitement mounted through him; a tingling, vivifying interest in the future he had faced with such sullen indifference.

She was gone from sight. Adriance was not rapid of thought, or readjustment. But he knew where to look for her, now. He sprang from the pavilion and ran, throwing his weight against the wind's blustering opposition. The physical effort, in that stinging air, sent his blood racing with tonic exhilaration. He felt dulness and morbidity dropping away from him; zest of life taking their place.

The girl was crossing a dark little strip of park that lay before the house where the Mastersons lived, when he overtook her.

"Elsie Murray!" he panted. "Elsie Murray!"

His voice had changed, and his accent. He spoke to her possessively; he no longer depended, he directed. Instantly sensitive to the difference, the girl stopped.

"Are you running away from me, Elsie Murray?" His hand closed lightly on her arm, he stood over her with the advantage of his superior height, and she heard him draw the cold air deeply into his lungs. "I did not tell you the truth, back there. I meant to, but I did not know it myself. I want what you might give, and I want to give as much to you. Why, do you know what started me toward ending all this bad business, what has given me the will to keep on? It was what you said, the first night I saw you, about a woman waiting for her husband, with the lamps lit, and all. I can't say what I mean —I'm clumsy! But, will you come keep the lamp for me?"

She tried to speak, but to his dismay and her own, instead covered her face; not weeping, but fiercely struggling not to weep.

"No," she flung refusal at him. "No! No!"

As her firmness lessened, his gained. She looked pitiful and helpless, she, his tower of strength. Suddenly, protectingly, he caught her from the assault of a violent swirl of the gale; caught and held her against him, in the curve of his arm.

"If you may love me, and I want you, we have enough to start with," he gently insisted. "I promise you I'll do my part. Will you try it with me?"

She remained still. But the long pause, the contact between them, joined with the change in the man and helped him.

"Will you marry me to-night?" he pressed.

She drew away from him with a flare of her natural resolution.

"No! Not to-night, if you could!"

"To-morrow, then?"

"Go home," she bade him. "Go home; think of everything—of what you have and what you would leave, of all you want and must miss. *Think*. And if, to-morrow——"

"Yes?"

"If you are sure, come back. I——may try it."

He knew better than to force her further.

"To-morrow, then, I will meet you at noon, in the pavilion," he yielded, quietly, in spite of his leaping excitement. "And there is something else. Once I bought these, for you. Of course I dared not give them to you, afterward. But I did not throw them away, and I brought them in my pocket to-night. Perhaps you will wear them to-morrow, when we go away."

The storm swooped down again. This time he did not hold her from the gust, and she flitted with it into the darkness. But she took the little package he had pressed into her hands; she had at last the little pair of buckled shoes.

CHAPTER VII

THE DARING ADVENTURE

They were married at two o'clock the next day. The wedding was in church, at Elsie Murray's desire. With a certain defiance expressive of his attitude toward all the world, Adriance, after obtaining their license, took her to the rector of that costly and fashion-approved cathedral which the Adriances graced with their membership and occasional attendance. Of course the two were met with astonishment, but there was a decision in the young man's speech and bearing that forbade interference. The clergyman did not find the familiar, easy, good-natured Tony Adriance in the man who curtly silenced delicate allusion to the wedding's unexpectedness and the surprising absence of Mr. Adriance, senior.

"I am over age, and so is Miss Murray," was the brief statement, whose finality ended comment. "Will you be good enough not to delay us; we are leaving town?"

There were no more objections. Of course the bride was not recognized as Mrs. Masterson's nurse; she simply was an unknown girl. And she did not in any way suggest that Mr. Adriance was marrying out of his world. Adriance himself entirely approved of her in this new rôle. He liked her dark-blue suit with its relieving white at throat and wrists, and her small hat with a modest white quill at just the right angle. And she wore the shining, Spanish-heeled, small shoes of his choosing. He noticed how large her gray eyes were, when she lifted them to his, large, and clear as pure water is clear under a still, gray sky. But her heavy lashes threw shadows across them, as he had once seen lines of shadow lie across a little lake in Maine on an autumn day. He wondered if she was happy, or frightened. He could not tell what she was thinking or feeling.

So they were married before the imposing altar of cream-hued marble, and the conventional notice went to the newspapers:

Adriance-Murray. Elsie Galvez Murray to Anthony Adriance, Jr., by the Rev. Dr. Van Huyden, at St. Dunstan's Cathedral.

It was very simply done, for so daring an adventure.

When they stood outside, in the sparkling autumn sunshine, Elsie Adriance asked her first question.

"Where are we going?" she wondered, in her soft, blurred speech that now Adriance recognized as of the South. Her middle name had caught his attention also. There once had been a governor of Louisiana called Galvez; New Orleans has a street named for him.

But he was not thinking of ancestry now. He looked doubtfully at his companion. In spite of his repressed bearing, he was suffering a terrible excitement and a tearing conflict of will and desire. He was acutely conscious of the finality of what had been done; and one part of him wished it undone. He thought of his father and Lucille as a man in a fever thinks; glimpsing them in a confusion of remembered pictures, conceiving their future attitude with the exaggeration of his unreasoning sense of guilt and belated regret. He felt himself in bonds, and the instinct of escape gripped and shook him. But he kept himself in hand.

"Where do you wish to go?" he temporized, withholding his own wish. It became him to consider her first, now and hereafter.

She shook her head.

"I follow you," she reminded him, quite simply and gravely. "Where would—it be easiest for you? You spoke of going out of town; perhaps that would be best. I think, it seems to me, that we should start as we mean to go on."

"Yes!" he exclaimed eagerly. She had offered him his inmost desire; in his gratitude he caught her hand, stammering in the rush of words released. "Yes. If you will go, I have a house—our house. Let me tell you. Yesterday, after meeting you at Masterson's the night before, I was at the limit. I had to keep out of doors and keep moving, or go to pieces. I kept seeing Fred, and Holly. Well, I took a long drive; across the river, I went, perhaps because you were always looking over there as if it were some kind of a fairyland. And on the way back, on the road along the Palisades, I saw the house. It was—I stopped and went in. It looked like a place you had made a picture of. I can't explain what I mean, but I sat down there and thought things out. You won't be angry? I bought it. Not that I was so sure of you! You see, if you refused to take me, I knew I had money enough to buy fifty like it for a whim. And if you would come, it was the house."

There was no anger in her glance, only a heartening comprehension and cordial willingness.

"Let us go there," she agreed. "I should like that best of all."

Reanimated, he put her into the waiting taxicab, gave the chauffeur his directions, and closed the door upon their first wedded solitude.

"But this is one of the things we must not do," she told him, bringing the relief of humor to the situation. "We must not take taxis and let them wait for us with a price on the head of each moment. It is more than extravagant; it is reckless."

He laughed out, surprised.

"So it is. I am afraid you will have a lot to teach me."

"Yes," she assumed the burden. "Yes."

They rode down to the ferry, and the taxicab rolled on board the broad, unsavory-smelling boat. When the craft started, the vibration of the engine sent a throbbing sense of departure through Adriance such as he never had felt in starting a European voyage. This time he could not return. He was humbly grateful for Elsie's silence, which permitted his own.

On the Jersey side their cab slowly moved through the dark ferry house, then plunged out into a sun-drenched world and swung blithely up to the long Edgewater hill. They left the river shipping behind, presently. The sunlight glittered through the woods that still clothe the long, rampart-like stretches along the summit of the great cliffs; a forest of jewels like the subterranean woods of the Twelve Dancing Princesses, only instead of silver and diamonds these trees displayed the red of cornelian and brown of topaz all set in copper and bronze. The storm of the night before had littered the ground with the spoils of Lady Autumn's jewel-box; the air was spicily sweet and very clear.

The village on the first slope of the hills had been dingy and poor. Here above, on the heights winding up the river, there were few houses, with long spaces between. Elsie leaned at the window, her wide eyes embracing all. Adriance leaned back, seeing nothing.

The taxicab finally stopped, nevertheless, at his signal, before a little red cottage set far back from the road.

"Here?" the chauffeur queried, with incredulous scorn.

"Here," Adriance affirmed, swinging out their two suit-cases and his wife. He laughed a little at the man's face. "How much?"

The toll pointed Elsie's warning. She made a grimace at her pupil. His spirits mounting again, Adriance answered the rebuke by catching her hand to lead her up the absurd, staggering Gothic porch in miniature.

"I'll come back for the baggage," he promised. "Come look, first."

"Is there anything inside?"

"Oh, yes. I——" he looked askance at her. "I bought things, at a shop in Fort Lee, early this morning. I suppose they're all wrong."

She met his diffidence with a smile so warm, so enchanting in its sweet, maternal raillery and indulgence that his heart melted within him. And then, as he fumbled with the key, she took from her hand-bag a book and a small glass bottle, and gave them to him.

"What——?" he marvelled.

"Don't you know?" she wondered at him. "'Where was you done raised, man?' Don't you know there is no luck in the house unless the first things carried into it are the Bible and the salt?"

He did not know, but he found the superstition of a singular charm.

"Give me the salt, then, and you take the other," he divided the ceremony.

"No," she denied quietly. "You should carry the Book, because you will make the laws. I will take the salt, because I shall keep the hearth."

So they went in, he oddly sobered by the dignity she laid upon him.

There were only two rooms on the ground floor. The one into which they stepped was large and square, with a floor of brick faded to a mellow Tuscan red, and walls of soft brown plaster. A brick fireplace was built against the north side; the furnishings comprehended two arm-chairs, a round Sheraton table and china closet, a tall wooden clock, and four rag rugs in red and white. In one corner, modestly retired, a plain deal table supported an oil cook-stove, with an air of decent humility and shrinking from observation. The open door beyond revealed a bed-chamber, also rag-rugged, furnished with a noble meagreness, but displaying a four-posted bed of carved and time-darkened ash. Elsie took a long, full look, then regarded her husband with widening eyes.

"Anthony, *where* did you buy them? And what did you pay for them?"

No one within his memory had ever called Adriance by his unabbreviated name. It came to him as part of this new life where he was full-grown man and master. And he welcomed the frank comradeship with which she used it, without a sentimental affectation of shyness.

"At a little place with a sign 'Antiques'," he confessed. "I had passed it in the car. I thought they might do as well as new things, since we have got to economize. I never bought any furniture before; if they won't do——"

"They are perfect." The mirth in her eyes deepened. "But you had better let me help you, next time we shop economically. Hadn't we better build a fire, first, to drive away the chill? Oh, and is there anything to eat?"

"In the cupboard over there; everything the grocer could think of," he said meekly. "I'll go get anything else you say. First, though, I'll run down to the gate and bring in

our suit-cases."

"Do," she approved. "I want an apron. Do you know, you never asked me if I could cook."

"Can you?"

"Wait and see. What woman thought of the oil-stove?"

"The antiquarian's wife. She said the fireplace was more bother than it was use and suggested stuffing it with paper to keep the draughts out."

"Well, we will stuff it with fire," she declared.

They built the fire; or rather, Adriance built it, aided by the girl's tactful advice. When the flames were roaring and leaping, she sent him to the nearest shop where lamps could be purchased, the trifling question of light having been overlooked.

When he hurried back from the village, the need of light was becoming imminent. Dusky twilight came early here under the edge of the hills. Climbing the steep road, Anthony Adriance looked across the violet-tinted river toward the chain of lights marking the street where Tony Adriance had lived and idled. Already he knew himself removed, altered; he was interested in keeping on with this thing. Of course, he must keep on, he had set a barrier blocking retreat; he had taken a wife.

He opened the brown door of the shabby little cottage, and stopped.

The fire on the hearth had settled to a warm, rosy steadiness, filling the room with its glow and starting velvet shadows that tapestried the simple place with an airy brocade of shifting patterns. In the centre of the room stood the round table, robed in white and gay with the antique shop's ware of blue-and-white Wedgewood. The perfume of coffee and fragrance of good food floated on the warm air. The fire snapped at intervals as if from jovial excess of spirits, and a tea-kettle was bubbling with the furious enthusiasm of all true tea-kettles. It was the room of his fancy, the unattainable home that Elsie had pictured on the first evening he had spoken to her out of his sick heart.

Elsie herself stood beside the hearth. Elsie? He never had seen her like this. But then, he scarcely had seen her at all except in the severe black of a nurse's livery.

She had merely taken off her jacket, now, although he did not realize the fact. Her soft white blouse rolled away from a round, full throat pure in color and smoothness as cream. She was no sylph-slim beauty, but a deep-bosomed, young girl-woman, fashioned with that rich fulness of curve and outline that artists once loved, but which Fashion now disapproves. Her mouth, too, curved in generous, womanly softness; neither a thin line nor a round rosebud. Her dark hair rippled of itself around her forehead and was lustrous in the firelight.

His entrance caught her off guard. He surprised herself in her eyes, before she masked feeling in gayety. And he saw a wistful, frightened girl whose trembling excitement

matched his own.

The latching of the door behind him ended the brief instant of revelation. At once she turned to him the cordial comrade's face he knew.

"Dinner is served," she announced merrily. "At least, it is waiting in the oven. We have hot biscuits, scrambled eggs, a fifty-eighth variety of baked beans, and strawberry jam. There is no meat, because you only shopped at a grocery, sir. Do you really adore canned oysters, Anthony?"

"I never tasted one," he slowly replied, putting down the packages he had brought, without taking his gaze from her.

"Well, you bought six tins of them," she shrugged.

He made no pretense of replying, this time, moving across the room toward her. He was remembering that she was a bride, who by her confession loved him, and that he had given her nothing except the gold ring compelled by custom; not a caress, not a flower, even, to speak of tenderness and reassurance. He was astounded at himself, appalled by his degree of selfish absorption. All day she had given him of her understanding, her warm companionship, her gracious tact and heartening cheerfulness, exacting nothing—and he had taken. Oh, yes, he had taken!

Troubled by his silence, her color mounting in a vivid sweep, the girl tried to turn aside from his approach.

"We must have a little cat," she essayed diversion. "I hope you like kittens? Purrs should go with crackling logs. Not an Angora or a Persian; just a pussy."

Her voice died away. Very quietly and firmly Adriance had taken her into his arms.

"I've made a bad beginning," he made grave avowal. "I am learning how much I need to learn. And I don't deserve my luck in having you to teach me."

She rested quietly in his arms, as if conceding his right, but she did not look at him. She was very supple and soft to hold, he found. There breathed from her a fresh, faint fragrance like the clean scent of just-gathered daffodils, but no perfume that he recognized. She was individual even in little things. He wondered what she was thinking. The uneven rise and fall of her breast timed curiously with the pulse of his heart, as she leaned there, and the fact affected him unreasonably. He did not want her to move; warmth and content were flowing into him. Content, yet—— Suddenly, he knew; a man confronted with a blaze of light after long groping.

"Elsie!" he cried, his voice sounding through the room his great amazement. "Elsie! Elsie!"

She looked at him then, putting her two little hands on his breast and forcing herself back against his arm that she might read his face. But he would not have it so, compelling her submission to the marvel that had mastered him. What the church had essayed to do was done, now. Anthony Adriance had taken a wife.

"I love you," he repeated, inarticulate still with wonder, his lips against her cheek. "Why didn't you tell me? I love you."

He never forgot that she met him generously, with no mean reminder of his tardiness. She took his surrender, and set no price on her own. Her lips were fresh as a cup lifted to his thirst for good and simple things; he thought her kiss was to the touch what her eyes were to the gaze, and tried clumsily to tell her so.

When they finally remembered the delayed supper, that meal was in need of repairs. And because now Adriance would not suffer the width of the room between himself and his wife, he insisted in aiding her in the process, thereby delaying matters still further. Nine o'clock had been struck by the clock in the corner when they sat down to table, lighted by the new lamp. It had a garnet shade, that lamp, upon which its purchaser received the compliments of Mrs. Adriance.

She delivered an impromptu lecture on the subject, as the light glowed into full radiance and illumined her, seated behind it.

"Red, sir, is the color of life. It was the color of the alchemist's fabled rose, looked for in their mystic cauldrons, because if the ruddy image formed on the surface of the brew, the bubbling liquid was indeed the true elixir of youth and immortality. Red is the color of dawn, of sunset, of a fireside; of bright blood, poured splendidly for a good cause or daintily glimpsed in a girl's blush. Red are a cardinal's robes, a Chinese bride's gown, a Spanish bride's flowers. To be kept in a red-draped chamber, in Queen Elizabeth's time, was believed to cure beauty of the smallpox without a scar. Lastly, red is the color of the heart."

"'Lord, keep our heart's-blood red,'" paraphrased Adriance soberly. "I am not clever like you, but I know red is the color of your own jewels."

"Mine?"

He caught her hands across the table.

"Have you forgotten what stones were likened to the value of a good woman? Elsie, Elsie, when I can, I will give you—not diamonds or pearls, but rubies. Rubies, for to-night."

Neither of the two was given to continued sentimentality of speech. But the deep happiness, the shining wonder that still dazzled them found expression in plans for this new future; mere suggestions for the comfort of the house or the pleasure of their leisure together. She mentioned a much-discussed book, and he promised to read it aloud to her.

"I've always wanted to read aloud, but I never found anyone who would listen," he told her, over the strawberry jam and coffee. "You can't escape, so——! You can embroider, and listen."

"Embroider!" She heaped scorn on the word. "Let me inform you, sir, that there will be dish-towels to hem, and napkins. Do you know we have only one tablecloth, and

that has a frightful border, with fringe? Blue fringe? And there are no curtains at the windows. Embroider? I shall *sew*, and listen."

"Well, so long as you listen!" He lighted a cigar and leaned back luxuriously. "What little hands you have!"

She spread them out on the table and seriously contemplated them.

"Most Southerners have. Didn't you ever notice it, even with the men? Down in Louisiana most of us have some French or Spanish blood. But mine have not been do-nothing hands, and I think they show it a little bit."

He stopped her, with a sudden distasteful memory of certain wax-white, wax-smooth and useless hands that almost had laid hold on his life.

"I hope that mine may soon show something. To-morrow I will try to become a wage-earner, and start a pay envelope to bring you."

"So soon?"

"Right away. Am I one of the idle rich? The fact is, our grocer tells me chauffeurs are badly needed at a certain factory near the foot of the hill. I think I should rather drive a motor truck than pilot a private car, open doors and touch my cap."

She nodded agreement.

"Yes, of course. What factory is it, Anthony?"

He regarded her with a whimsical humor.

"Well, to be exact, it is not a factory unfamiliar to us. It is one whose sign you often have viewed from the aristocratic side of the Hudson, and it is the property of Mr. Anthony Adriance, senior."

"Oh!" startled. "Is, is that—safe?"

"Why not?" he wondered. "We haven't broken any laws, have we? The worst he could do, if he wanted to do something melodramatic, would be to fire me. But he will not. In the first place, why should he? In the second, he knows a trifle more about the natives of Patagonia than he knows about the men who drive his trucks. I don't believe he has been in this factory for ten years. New York is his end. And I'm giving him a square deal; he will have a very valuable chauffeur, Mrs. Adriance—one who can drive a racing-machine, if required!"

She disclosed two dimples he had not previously observed. But her eyes hid from the challenge of his and she rose hastily to clear away the dishes.

"Let them stand," he commanded, man-like.

There she was firm in rebellion, however. Finally they compromised on his assisting her.

"We must have a dog, too," he decided, when all was neat once more. He glanced about the fire-bright room with a proprietary air. "One that will not eat your kitten."

"With a nice watch-doggy bark?"

"With anything you want!" He turned abruptly and drew her to him. "Elsie, suppose I had missed you? What a poor fool I've been! Last night—— Why don't you take it out of me? Why don't you make me pay as I deserve?"

She smiled with the delicately-mocking indulgence he was learning to know and anticipate; it sat upon her youth with so quaint a wisdom.

"Perhaps I am, or will."

"I believe now that I loved you from the first day. I know that I kept thinking about you and considering everything from the point of view I fancied you would take. You"—with sudden anxiety—"you do not regret coming with me, Elsie? What were you thinking of, just now, when your eyes darkened? You looked——"

"Of Holly," she answered simply. "I hope his new nurse will play with him, and cuddle him."

"The baby?" Her fidelity touched him with a warm sense of promise for his own future. "Yes, I have taken you from him. But, we left him his father."

The allusion brought a constraint. The words spoken, Adriance flushed like a woman and turned his ashamed eyes away from the girl.

"You did not take me from Holly," Elsie hurriedly corrected. "Mrs. Masterson discharged me, night before last. I was to go to-day, anyhow."

"You? Why?"

She hesitated.

"She came to the nursery door while you were speaking to me of telling Holly the story of Maît' Raoul Galvez. You know, Holly is too much a baby to hear stories, so she understood that you meant—other things. And it seems that once you had spoken to her of that story. She—made connections. She accused me of—of flirting with her guests; of being—an improper person."

"Elsie!"

"It is all over. It does not matter, now. But that was how I knew she did not send you away. Of course she said nothing to tell me; she is too clever. But, you see I knew so much already; and when I saw she was jealous even of your speaking to me——!"

The silence continued long. Both were thinking of Lucille Masterson. As if she feared the man's thoughts, Elsie shrank away from her husband's clasp, the movement unnoticed by him. Her clear eyes clouded with doubt, a creeping chill extinguished their glow.

Adriance spoke first, breaking at once the pause and the barrier.

"Once they must have been like this—like us. She would have left Fred, left him down and out, for a new man; and she his wife!"

Disgust was in his voice, wondering contempt. He pressed his own wife hard against his side. But Elsie dragged her arms from the hold that bound them, and impulsively clasped them about his neck in her first offered caress.

"You were thinking *that*?" she cried, fiercely glad in her triumph. "Anthony, you were thinking that?"

He stooped his head to meet her glance; standing together, they looked into each other's eyes.

CHAPTER VIII

ANDY OF THE MOTOR-TRUCKS.

The man behind the wicket leaned forward to survey the man outside. The gate-keeper at the main entrance to Adriance's was the prey of a double vanity that kept his attention alert: he was vain of his own position, and of his ability to judge the positions of other men. This was his seventeenth year in the cage of ornamental iron-work, and he had brought his hobby into it with his first day there. He delighted in difficult subjects, now, who baffled a casual inspection.

It was, therefore, with an air of bored certainty that he classified this morning visitor at a glance, and settled back on his high stool.

"Office door to the right, sir," he directed, briefly, but respectfully. "Boy there will take in your card, sir."

"I understand chauffeurs are wanted here," said the visitor, his composed gaze dwelling on a poster to that effect affixed to the nearest wall.

The gate-keeper stared.

"I guess so——?"

"Is the office the place where I should apply for such work?"

"Trucking department; turn left, down basement, Mr. Ransome," vouchsafed the chagrined concierge, severely wounded in his self-esteem. So blatant a mistake had not offended his pride in years. He turned in his seat and craned his thin neck to watch the stranger swing blithely away in the direction indicated.

"Chauffeur!" he muttered. "Walks as if Adriance's was his private garage an' he was buildin' himself a better one around the corner! Hope Ransome throws him out!"

But Ransome of the motor-trucks was in urgent need of men and disposed to be more tolerant. Moreover, his sensitive vanity had taken no hurt that morning. But he looked rather closely at the applicant, nevertheless.

"Used to chauffing private cars, aren't you?" he shrewdly questioned.

"Yes," admitted Adriance.

"I thought so! Where was your last place?"

"I drove for Mr. Adriance, junior," was the grave response.

The man whistled.

"You did, eh? Why did he fire you?"

"He left New York for the winter, without taking his machines along."

"Did he give you a reference?"

"I can bring one to-morrow, or I can go get it now, if you want me to start work at once. I haven't it with me."

"Why not?"

"I forgot it would be needed."

This was unusual, and produced a pause. Ransome studied his man, and liked what he saw.

"Married?" he shot the next routine question.

"Yes."

"Anything against you on the police records? Accidents? Overspeeding?"

"Nothing."

"I can see you don't drink. You know Jersey?"

"Not so well as New York, but well enough to pick up the rest as I go along."

"Well, it's irregular, but we're short-handed. Give me your license number so I can verify that. Bring your reference to-morrow, and if it is all right—— I'll take you on to-day, on trial. Wait; I'll give you your card."

The inquisition was safely past. Adriance smiled to himself as he watched the superintendent fill out the card that grudgingly permitted him to earn his first wage. He was intoxicated, almost bewildered by his own lightheartedness. His body was still tired and beaten after the miserable conflict from which his mind had resiliently leaped erect to stand rejoicing in the sunlight. To-day he could have overcome a hundred ill chances, where one had yoked him yesterday.

"Name?" came the crisp demand from the man writing.

"Anthony Adriance."

"What!" The superintendent's head came up abruptly. "Why—what connection——?"

"Poor relation," classified Adriance coolly. He had anticipated this, but he could not have endured the furtive discomfort and risk of a false name. "All rich men have them, I suppose."

His indifference was excellently done. The superintendent nodded acquiescence.

"I suppose so; must have been queer, though! What did young Adriance call you? Did he know?"

"Oh, yes. 'Andy' is a noncommittal nickname."

"All right; here is your card."

Mr. Ransome watched the new employee cross the floor, with a meditative consideration of the uselessness of the shadow of the purple without its comfortable substance; but he was not especially surprised after the first moment. Few wealthy men trouble themselves about the distant branches of their families, and babies are frequently named after them by hopeful kinsmen.

At the other end of the subterranean chamber where trucks rolled in and out, piloted by weather-beaten chauffeurs and loaded with heavy packages and bales by perspiring porters, a little man in a derby hat and shirt sleeves was in command. With him the matter passed still more easily for the stranger.

"What's your name?" he shrilled in a peculiarly flat treble voice, across the uproar of thudding weight, rolling wheels and panting machinery. "Andy? Well, take out number thirty-five. Mike, Mike! Where is that—that Russian? Here, Mike, you are to go with number thirty-five. Bring your truck in for its load and get your directions from the boss there, Andy. Report when you get back."

A huge figure lounged across the electric-lighted space toward Adriance; a pair of mild brown eyes gazed down at him from under a shock of red hair.

"I guess you're new," pronounced the heavy accent of Russian Mike; "I guess I show you?"

"I wish you would," Adriance cordially accepted the patronizing kindness. He found time to marvel at the readiness of his own smile since last night, and at the response it evoked from these strangers. "I don't know where to find thirty-five yet, or who is the boss."

"I know," announced Mike, grandly comprehensive; "you ride with me, Andy; I'll learn you."

So Andy of the trucks began his education.

A motor-truck is not a high-priced pleasure car. Nor is the trucking department of a large factory professional in its courtesy. Tony Adriance learned a great many things in breathless sequence. And he never had been quite so much interested by anything in his life—except his newly-made wife. The men were not gentle, but they were merry. They shouted gaily back and forth at each other with a humor of their own. When Tony stalled his unfamiliar motor there was much unpolished witticism at his expense; but also a neighbor jumped down to crank the machine for him, and another sprang up to the seat beside the new man and gave him a score of valuable hints in a dozen terse sentences. When he finally drove up the incline into the street, he found that Russian Mike appeared to have a complete map of the Jersey City river front engraved on his otherwise blank intelligence and proved as willingly efficient a guide on the streets as in the factory. If the difficulties were more numerous than the novice

had anticipated and the work harder, these things were more than offset by the unexpected comradeship he encountered.

All day, amid the steady press of events, the thought of his wife lay warm at the core of his heart. His love was matched only by his deep wonder at the thing which had befallen him. The exultation of successful escape was strong upon him; escape from loathsome bonds, from complicated problems his innately simple mind detested, above all, from the guidance of other people. He and Elsie were alone as no distance around the world could have made them. He had come to a place in life where he was not a boy to be governed, but master in his own right. A heat of pride had burned his face when he had answered "Yes" to the superintendent's question: "Married?" Decidedly he meant to stay in the home and the factory of his first adventure, if possible.

On his first trip he made an excuse to stop at a stationer's, where he wrote for himself a recommendation signed by Anthony Adriance, Junior. The ruse amused him; he found himself childishly ready to be amused. When he brought the truck in from the last journey of the day he presented this letter to Mr. Ransome, who read and returned it with a nod of content.

"All right; to-morrow at seven," he said briefly.

He ached in every unaccustomed muscle bent to toil when he strode up the hill at dusk, his day's work over. But he was no more affected by that than a boy on his first day of camping—it was part of the sport. Because he was learning unselfishness he felt more anxiety as to how Elsie had got through the day. Housework in the rather primitive cottage was a different thing from caring for Holly Masterson in his luxurious pink-and-gold nursery. Would he find her discouraged, tired—perhaps cross? He smiled audacious confidence in his ability to caress her into good humor, but he wondered rather uneasily whether his wages would support a maid should Elsie demand one as necessary. He was utterly unused to the practical apportionment of money.

There were new curtains draped across the lighted windows of the little red house. As he turned up the ridiculous plank walk he saw a very diminutive kitten seated on the window-sill inside washing its face. And then he heard a fresh, smooth voice singing the drollest little air he ever had heard in his musical experience—a minor grotesquerie distinctive as the flavor of *bouillabaisse orléanais*. He opened the door and his wife laughed at him across the bright room, flushed with fire heat, dainty in her lavender frock and white ruffled apron, arrested with a steaming tureen uplifted in her little hands.

Perhaps she had doubted how he would come home from that first day of work. For just a moment they drank full reassurance from each other's eyes; then Adriance was across the room.

"Put it down or I'll spill it!"

"Sir, this is a soup extraordinary! Would you overturn your supper?"

"Yes, for this," said Adriance, and kissed her soft mouth.

"Anthony, can one be *too* happy and affront the fates?"

"No."

"We can go on and on, and nothing will happen!"

"Please God!" said Tony Adriance with perfect reverence.

"It is not a wonderful adventure now; it is just life?"

"Of course. I say—I wish that van-driver could see me now—the one I told you about last night."

"The butcher gave me the kitten, Anthony."

"Of course he did; any man would give you all he had. What were you singing when I came in?"

"How should I know? I know a thousand bits of song and a thousand stories, and they march in and out of my head. Our dinner is spoiling, Mr. Adriance."

"I love you!"

"I dislike you!" she mocked him.

There was no one in New York who would have quite recognized either Anthony or Elsie Adriance in these two children at play together.

"Next Saturday evening I want you to take me shopping, please," she told him when they were seated at supper.

"Enchanted; but why Saturday?"

"Because you will have your wages then, naturally. We need more dishes, and a casserole, and a ribbon for the kitten, and—thousands of things."

"Shall I have wealth enough?"

"Plenty; we are going to the 5-10-20 cent store."

"I thought those were the prices of melodrama on the East Side."

"Wait. You may find the event even tragic, if I want too many seductive articles," she cautioned him. "But let us not talk of mere things—aren't you going to tell me about your day?"

"I am. But it was a day like any other workingman's, I suppose; nothing happened."

"Did you want anything to happen? I imagined——"

"All I want," said Tony Adriance fervently, "is to be left alone, with you."

CHAPTER IX

THE LUCK IN THE HOUSE.

Nothing did happen. None of the traditionary usual experiences overtook the two in the little red house, as November ran out and December stormed in like a lusty viking from northern seas, attended by tremendous winds and early snow.

In the first place, the marriage of Anthony Adriance, Junior, somehow escaped the sensational journals, as a pleasing theme. There were no headlines announcing: "Son of a millionaire weds a nursemaid." No reporters discovered the house on the Palisades, to photograph its diminutive Gothic front for Sunday specials. Adriance had written a letter of explanation, so far as explanation might be, to his father. That was on the morning of his marriage, and as he had given no address, naturally he had received no answer. There were no reproaches and no pursuit.

Nor was Tony Adriance gnawed by vain regrets. According to every rule of romance and reason, he should have suffered from at least brief seasons of repining; at least have been twinged by memories of things foregone, yet desired. But he felt nothing of the kind. Masculine independence was aroused in him, and held reign in riotous good spirits. With a boy's triumphant bravado he faced down cold and hard work, delighting in the victory. He rose early and built Elsie's fires before permitting her to rise, while she sat up protesting in the four-posted bed as he bullied and loved and mastered her. He walked two miles to and from work morning and evening, and drove his big motor-truck eight hours a day. Moreover, he gained weight on the régime, and the springing step of a man in training. He never had suspected it, but his whole body had craved outdoors and employment of its forces; Nature had built him for work, not idleness. The atmosphere in which he had been reared was, by a trick of temperament, foreign to him.

"I'm plain vulgarian," he laughed to his wife one morning as he started to work. "I would rather drive one of my father's trucks and come home to your pork-chops, than I would to dawdle around his house and dine with a strong man standing behind my chair to save me the fatigue of putting sugar in my own coffee. Are you going to have some of those jolly little apple-fritters with butter and cinnamon on them for supper to-night?"

She made a tantalizing face at him. It was two days before Christmas, and so cold that her lips and cheeks were stung poppy-bright as she stood in the doorway.

"Of course not; now I know that you want them. We will have cold meat. What are you going to give me for my stocking, Anthony?"

"A cold-meat fork," he countered promptly. "How did you know I meant to give you anything?"

"I didn't," she calmly told him. "But I am going to give you something, so I thought it only kind to remind you."

He swung himself easily over the railing and smothered her in an embrace made bear-like by his shaggy coat.

"The chauffeur's peerless bride shall not weep," he soothed her. "For ten days her ruby stomacher has been ordered by her devoted husband. Now let your Romeo depart, or his pay will get docked next Saturday."

She lingered in his arms an instant, her shining dark hair pressed against the rough darkness of his cheap fur coat.

"Anthony, don't they ever notice your name, down there? Didn't they ever ask about it?"

"Surely! The first day I went in, the superintendent asked if I were related to Mr. Adriance. I told him yes, a poor relation. True, isn't it? He was satisfied, anyhow. They call me Andy, down there."

"Andy!" she essayed experimentally. "Andy! It goes pretty well."

They laughed together, then he gently pushed her toward the door.

"Go in," he bade, with his commanding manner; the manner Elsie had taught him. "You will take a royal cold out here, and then what should I do for my meals? I have to eat if I am to labor; besides, I like my food. What did you call those cakes we had this morning?"

"'*Belle cala, tout chaud!*'" she intoned the soft street-cry of old New Orleans' breakfast hours, her voice catching the quaint, enticing inflections of those dark-skinned vendors who once loitered their sunny rounds freighted with fragrant baskets. "Some day I will show you what I call a city, sir; if you'll take me?"

"I'll take you anywhere, but I'll not let you go as far as the next corner. Now, go in-doors, and good-bye."

She obeyed him so far as to draw back into the warm doorway. There, sheltered, she stayed to watch him swinging down the hill through the gray winter morning. It was nearly seven o'clock, but the sun had not yet warmed or gilded the atmosphere. Bleakness reigned, except in the hearts of the man and woman.

They had been married two months. Elsie Adriance slowly closed the door and turned to the uncleared breakfast table. But presently she left the dishes she had begun to assemble, and walked to one of the rear windows. There she leaned, gazing where Anthony never gazed: toward the gray-and-white stateliness of New York, across the ice-dotted river. She contemplated the city, not with defiance or challenge, but with the steady-eyed gravity, of one measuring an enemy.

Two months, and the victory was still with her! Yet, she warned herself, surely some day New York would call. She never quite could forget that. She herself was not unlike a city preparing for defence, feverishly grasping at every stone to build her ramparts. How she envied Lucille Masterson her beauty, the elder Adriance his wealth, since those possessions might have bound Anthony closer to her! She recalled Mrs. Masterson's exquisite costumes, colored like flowers and as delightful to the touch; the costly perfumes that made all her belongings fragrant; the studied coquetry that kept her like Cleopatra, never customary or stale. To oppose all this, Anthony's wife had only—her hearth. For she never would keep her husband against his will; Elsie Adriance never would claim as a right what she had held as a gift.

The kitten, a black-and-white midget suggestive of a Coles-Phillips drawing, rubbed insistently against the girl's foot. She picked up the living toy and nestled its furry warmth beneath her chin, as she turned in quest of milk. She thrust forebodings from her mind with resolute will. It was too soon to think of these things; Anthony loved her, Anthony was content.

She had no conception of how fervently glad Anthony was to be rid of harassing thoughts and complications, or how gratefully the luxury of peace enfolded him and dwarfed the mere physical luxuries of idleness and lavish expenditure. Nor, being a woman, did she sufficiently value his pride in the possessions he had bought with his own labor. Tony Adriance never had noticed the table service in his father's house; he had been known to overturn a whole tray of translucent coffee-cups set in lace-fine silver work, without a second glance at the destruction. But he knew every one of the cheap, heavy dishes he and Elsie had added to their equipment on Saturday evening shopping orgies at a five-and-ten-cent store. Knew, and admired them! When Elsie would call from her "kitchen corner;" "Bring me the Niagara platter, honey," he could locate that ceramic atrocity at a glance. And when he let fall the Whistler bread-plate —it had a nocturnal, black-lined landscape effect in its centre—he was truly grieved. Indeed, it was he who selected their china, Elsie's taste being inclined toward a simplicity he refused as monotonous. He never had realized the pleasure of purchasing until he went shopping with his wife, chose with her, overruled her or indulged her in some fancy, then drew out his newly-received wage and paid, magnificent.

He could not have explained his emotions to Elsie. But his candid delight in those expeditions came to her memory, as she poured the kitten's milk into a saucer enamelled with blue forget-me-nots. She lifted her head and again glanced toward the distant city; but this time she smiled with certain triumph. He was her husband; better still, he was as eagerly her playmate as any lonely boy who first finds a chum. She knew Lucille Masterson did not possess the art of comradeship among her talents; it was an art too unselfish.

"When he begins to tire of just playing this way," she half-unconsciously addressed the kitten, "we will find something else. There will always be something for us to think of, together. It will come when it is needed. Perhaps——"

Arrested, her breath failed speech. It was as if her own words had thrown open a door before which she faltered, her eyes sun-dazzled, yet glimpsing a wide horizon.

Soothed by her silent neighborhood, the kitten finished lapping its milk and went to sleep against her skirt. But the girl stood still for a long time, steadying her heart, which seemed to her to be filling like a cup held under a clear fountain.

Later in the day a boy brought wreaths and sprays of holly to the door. Elsie bought recklessly, so Adriance came home that night to a house Yule-gay with scarlet and green, spicy with the cinnamon fragrance of the apple-fritters, and holding a mistress who showed him a Christmas face of merry content.

"I could not wait two days," she explained to him. "We'll begin now and work up to it gradually."

But after all, Christmas morning came as a surprise, and achieved a final defeat of doubts and forebodings that drove them out of sight for many a day. For, kissing his wife awake at dawn, Anthony made his gift first, forestalling hers.

"You never had an engagement ring," he reminded her. "I'll have to make a tremendous record as a husband to live down my blunders as a fiancé! Here, let me put it on for you. What clever dimples you've got in your fingers! I noticed them our first night here, remember?"

She frankly cried in her great surprise and passionate joy in his thought of her. It really was a spectacular ring, and glittered bravely in the early light; an oval of dark-red stones like a shield set above her wedding ring.

"They're only garnets," he stilled her protest of extravagance. "But they are the color of rubies; and the promise of them. Don't—please don't! Come, what have you got for me? Give it up."

The diversion succeeded. Laughing before her eyes were dry, she answered:

"He is in the wood-box. I had to keep him in the house where it was warm, and I was so afraid you would hear him and spoil the surprise. But he was as good as possible; he never said one word. Open the lid, dear."

"He?" echoed her husband. "Him?"

The wood-box yielded him; a small, jovial, bandy-legged puppy.

"He is *almost* a Boston bull," Elsie explained conscientiously. "If he had been quite one, I couldn't have afforded to buy him. But he is a love. Anthony, he is the watch-dog, you know."

Finding both faces within reach, as he hung over Anthony's arm, the puppy licked them with fond impartiality.

CHAPTER X

MRS. MASTERSON TAKES TEA

It was the day after Christmas that Adriance was sent over to New York with his motor-truck, for the first time since he had become that massive vehicle's pilot. His destination was in Brooklyn, so that he had the entire city to cross, and lights were commencing to twinkle here and there through the gray of the short winter afternoon when he turned homeward.

The experience had not been without a novel interest. Holiday traffic crowded the streets; traffic officers, tired and chilled by a biting east wind, were not patient. Adriance chose Fifth Avenue for his route up-town with the naturalness of long custom, without reflecting upon the greater freedom of travel he would have found on one of the dingy streets usually followed by such vehicles as his. However, the difficulties exhilarated him. Andy of the truck could not but wonder how the policeman who roughly ordered him away from the entrance of the Park might have phrased that request if he had known that the intruder was Tony Adriance, "paper, you know!" Perhaps, because of this wonder, his cheerful grin drew a sour smile from the officer.

"Don't you know you've not got a limousine there? You from the woods?" came the not ill-natured sarcasm.

"Worse than that: from Jersey," Adriance shot back. "All right; I'm sorry."

"Plain streets for yours; round the circle," was the direction, which also implied a release.

"Thanks," Adriance called acknowledgment, as he obeyed.

The bulky figure beside the chauffeur stirred.

"You got a nerve," commented the man, his slow, heavy voice tinged with admiration. "I seen guys pulled fer less, Andy."

Adriance laughed. He and his big assistant were very good friends, after weeks of sharing the truck's seat. The chauffeur appeared a stripling by comparison with the man lounging beside him, huge arms folded across thick chest. "Mike," as he was known to his fellow-workers, was a Russian peasant. His upbringing in a Hoboken slum had fixed his patriotism and language, but had left his physique that of his inheritance. His reddish-yellow head was set on a massive neck whose base his open shirt showed to be covered with a red growth of hair extending down over his chest. His large features and mild, slow-moving eyes, his heavy, placid manner of speech were absurdly alien to the colloquial language that he spoke. Adriance knew his

helper had been an employee of the factory for ten years, but he did not know that Mike was always assigned to a new chauffeur until the stranger proved himself trustworthy. Mike was dull, but he was stolidly honest. Valuable boxes or packages were not reported "lost" from trucks under his care. Adriance had no idea of the truth that "Russian Mike" actually had determined the permanence of his position in his father's great mill.

"If I cannot go through the Park, I'll go back to the avenue," Adriance declared, when the turning had been negotiated. "I want gayety, Michael; boulevard gayety! Four o'clock on Fifth Avenue—shall a poor workingman be deprived of the sight? It is true that we are too far uptown, but the principle is the same. You agree with me?"

"It ain't nothin' to me," averred the magnificent guardian, shifting to a new position with an indolent movement that swelled the muscles under his flannel shirt until the fabric strained. His glance at his companion was mildly indulgent.

"Of course not. But it will be, next time; that is, if you do not die of pneumonia after taking this drive with your coat wide open. Appreciation will grow on you. What do you think of that girl in gray, in the limousine? Pretty? I used to go to school with her, Michael; dancing school."

The Slavic brown eyes became humorous.

"Fact," Adriance met the incredulity. "And now she doesn't recognize me; and neither of us cares."

The uplifted hand of another traffic officer halted the long lines of vehicles. Three deep from the curb on either side, so that the street was solidly filled, automobiles, carriages, green and yellow busses and ornate delivery-cars stopped in a close, orderly mass. Adriance's truck was next to the sidewalk, in obedience to the rule for slow-moving vehicles. As his laughing voice answered Mike, his tone raised to carry across the roar of sound about them, a woman who had emerged from one of the shops stopped abruptly. Her glance quested along the rows, to rest upon Adriance with eager attention. A moment later, the man started at the sound of his own name, spoken beside him.

"How do you do, Tony. And aren't you—rather out of place?"

Momentarily dumb, he looked down into the large, cool eyes of Lucille Masterson. She did not smile, but faced his regard with a composure that made his embarrassment a fault. Against the white fur of her stole was fastened a knot of pink-and-white sweet peas; beside them her face showed as softly tinted, and artificially posed, as the flowers. Beside the wheel of the huge truck, she appeared smaller and more fragile than Adriance remembered her. Without the slightest cause he felt himself a culprit surprised by her. He had all the sensations of a deserter confronted with the heartlessly abandoned.

"Aren't you going to speak to me?" she queried, when he remained voiceless. "I have missed you, Tony."

He hastily aroused himself.

"Of course! I mean—you are very kind. I—we have been out of town."

Feeling the utter idiocy into which he was stumbling, he checked himself. The current of traffic was flowing on once more, leaving his machine stranded against the curb; made fast, as it were, by the white-gloved hand Mrs. Masterson had laid upon the wheel.

Without heeding his incoherence, she looked at a tiny watch on her wrist, half-hidden by her wide, furred sleeve. With her movement a drift of fragrance was set afloat on the thick, city air.

"I want you to take me to tea," she announced, with her accustomed imperativeness. "I have things to say to you. Let your man take your car home."

In spite of his exasperation, Adriance laughed. He was aware of the staring admiration which held the big man beside him intent upon the beautiful woman; he had heard the greedy intake of breath with which the other absorbed the perfume shaken from her daintiness, and could guess the effect of *Essence Enivrante* upon untutored nostrils. But for all that, he could not imagine Russian Mike obeying the order proposed.

"You see, he isn't my man," he excused himself from compliance. "Thank you very much, but it is not possible."

"Then let him wait for you. Really, Tony, I think you owe me a little courtesy."

Adriance flushed before the rebuke. He never had seen Lucille Masterson since that rough farewell of their final quarrel. He had left her, to marry another woman inside of the next thirty-six hours. He always had been at his weakest with Mrs. Masterson; he slipped now into his old mistake of temporizing.

"I am not dressed for a tea-room," he deprecated. "Otherwise, I should be delighted."

Her eyes glinted. Grasping the slight concession, she leaned toward Adriance's assistant with her brilliant, arrogant smile.

"You will watch the car for Mr. Adriance, just a few moments, will you not?" she appealed. "I have something of importance to say to him. I should be much obliged."

The white-gloved hand slipped forward and left a bank note in the hairy fist. Dazed, Mike vaguely jerked his cap in salute, still staring at the woman. Neither money nor beauty might have lured him to an actual breach of duty, but this was the last trip of the day and the truck was empty. It could not matter if the return were delayed half an hour; a belated ferryboat might lose so much time. Moreover, he was not only willing, but anxious, to do Andy a favor, and the bill in his clutch assured a glorious Saturday night.

"Sure," he mumbled, with a grin of shyness like a colossal child's.

"Come, Tony," directed Mrs. Masterson.

Because he saw nothing else to do, Tony reluctantly swung himself down to the pavement beside her.

"I can only stay for a word," he essayed revolt. "It is hardly worth while to go anywhere. We should have to go find some place where these clothes would pass and where no one knew us."

"On the contrary! We must go where you are so well-known that your dress does not matter," she contradicted him. "The Elizabeth Tea-room is just here, and we used to go there often."

He could think of no objection to the proposal. Presently he found himself following his captor into the pretty, yellow-and-white tea-room.

As the Elizabeth affected an English atmosphere and had not adopted the *thé dansant*, the place was not overfull. The quaintly-gowned waitress greeted them with a murmur of recognition and led the way to a table without a glance at the chauffeur's attire. Mrs. Masterson ordered something; an order which Adriance seconded without having heard it. He was recovering his poise, and marvelling at himself for coming here no less than at Lucille for bringing him. What could they have to say to each other, now? The scented warmth of the room brought to his realization the cold in which he had left Mike to wait, and he was nipped by remorse.

It was a consequence of his education among people who never considered that narrowness of convention which they designated as middle-class, that Adriance had no sense of disloyalty either to Elsie or Fred Masterson in being here. On the contrary, the knowledge of his marriage would have enabled him to welcome frankly either of the two had they chanced to enter and find him. It was as if his assured position chaperoned the situation. But, truly masculine, since he no longer loved Lucille Masterson he detested being with her. He resented the acute discomfort he felt in her presence.

She was drawing off her gloves with a slowness that irritated him as an affectation; he thought the artificial perfection of her hands hideous as a waxwork. They were not really a good shape, nor small, but merely blanched very white and manicured to a glistening illusion. And he saw with disgust that she wore a ring he once had given her because she made it plain to him that the costly gift was expected. He knew she had lied to her husband as to the giver; "Tony" had been startled and half-awakened from his hazy content by that discovery at the time. Now he looked at the bulky pearl set around with diamonds and recalled the modest garnets he had given Elsie.

"I am sorry, but I haven't long to stay," he said. "You spoke of something important to discuss."

"Did I?"

"Certainly!"

She studied him with open curiosity.

"You want to go back to that wagon with the gorilla of a man?"

"Yes."

"Are you still very much married, Tony?" she questioned maliciously.

His eyes blazed, then chilled. Her lack of finesse had led her to a final mistake.

"You forget that my wife is an unfashionable woman. I am still happily married," he retorted.

"How—romantic!"

"Very."

"Still, two months, or is it three? Even Fred and I lasted that long. You will not mind my saying that you are a bit fickle, Tony. What will you do when you grow bored? Or do you believe that you never will? Elsie must have resources that I never suspected. Does she tell you the story of—Monsieur Raoul, was it?"

"She has others more pleasant. With Mrs. Adriance boredom is not possible," he controlled his anger to state. But he felt himself clumsy and inadequate.

The quaint little waitress was beside him, and proceeded to her duty of service with exasperating slowness and precision. She was a pretty girl, in a butter-cup-yellow frock and ruffled white cap and apron. Adriance became conscious of his work-darkened hands, of a collar that showed a day's accumulated dust, and other signs that differentiated him from the usual idle and dainty patrons of this place.

"You *are* a bit seedy," corroborated Mrs. Masterson, watching him with furtive acuteness. She permitted herself an ironic smile. "Do you not think it time you went home, and changed?"

He divined an innuendo, a *double entendre* in the speech that he did not comprehend, yet which enraged him. He wondered if she had brought him here for the purpose of forcing this contrast between his present life and his past, and so tainting him with discontent or even regret of his marriage. If so, she had failed. He merely visited his humiliation on her, and found her beauty spoiled by her spitefulness.

"I shall be home in an hour," he said. "And of course I am anxious to be there, so you will forgive my reminding you of whatever we have to discuss."

"Oh, of course." She paused until their attendant fluttered away through a swinging door. "You are quite cured of me, aren't you, Tony? Don't trouble about denying politely, please. But it is lucky no one really knew about us—I suppose you have not told?"

"Mrs. Masterson!"

She hushed the protest, laughing across the spray of sweet-peas she had lifted against her smooth red lips.

"Very well, very well! But promise you never will. Promise, Tony."

"It is not necessary," he replied stiffly. "But if you think it so, I give you my word."

"Never to tell that I thought of marrying you, whatever may happen?"

"Yes."

She dropped the sweet-peas and sat in silence for a space, her gaze dwelling on him. Neither of the two made any pretense of pouring the tea cooling in the diminutive pots between them, or of tasting the miniature sandwiches and cakes. Months later, Adriance was to learn something of Lucille Masterson's thoughts during that interval. He himself thought of Russian Mike waiting in the motor-truck, and that he would be so late home that Elsie might be worried. He had wanted to stop at a shop to buy a toy bull-dog collar for his Christmas puppy, but now that must be postponed. He was amazed and infinitely angry at himself for yielding so easily to Lucille's whim to bring him here.

Unconsciously he looked toward her with open impatience in his glance. She responded at once, with a shrug.

"Go, by all means. Pray go, Tony. Am I keeping you? I am not the kind of woman who mourns, you know. Just remember that our episode is not only closed, but locked, when we meet again. Good-bye."

"And the important communication that I was to hear?"

"I have forgotten what I wanted to say. Good-bye, Tony."

Puzzled and angry, he rose, leaving on the table twice the amount of the check, at which he had not looked. Mrs. Masterson nodded an acknowledgment of his grim salute. Her eyes had a look of triumph, and as the girl in yellow ushered him out, Adriance saw the other turn with appetite to the sandwiches and tea.

The east wind had grown stronger and its current was thick with whirling particles of snow. Darkness had come with the storm, turning dusk into night. Adriance shivered and buttoned his cheap fur coat as he hurried across the wet, shining pavement. Mike aroused himself with a grunt when the chauffeur swung up into the seat beside him.

"Swell dame, Andy!" he commented, staring with heavy curiosity at the man pushing throttle and spark. "I guess maybe you're a swell, too, like a movie show I seen once?"

Adriance stepped down again, to go forward and crank the motor. He began to glimpse the possible complications if Mike recounted this adventure among his mates. He wondered, also, if Lucille had noticed the name on the truck. Altogether, he was in a vicious enough mood to lie, and he did so.

"No," he asserted flatly, when he had regained his seat. "Don't be an idiot, Mike. I—used to be employed by that lady."

"Drive her automobile?"

"Yes."

The explanation was accepted as satisfactory. An intimate acquaintance with the etiquette of intercourse between mistress and chauffeur was not one of the examiner's accomplishments. But the incident appealed to Mike as romantic, and for him romance flowed from one source only.

"She looks like one of them actresses from the movies," he averred, folding his huge arms comfortably across his breast. "I guess she is, maybe? I seen queens like her, there."

"It is a good way to see them, if they are like her," observed Adriance ruefully. He laughed in spite of vexation. "Better stick to the movie girls, Michael; it's safer! Now stop talking to me; if this brute of a truck swerves an inch in this slush, some pretty car is going to feel as if an elephant had stepped on it."

But the ill luck of that day was over. They made a fast trip up-town and just caught a ferry-boat on the point of leaving.

After all, they were not to be noticeably late. And since there would be no need of explanation, it occurred to Adriance that he might not recount to Elsie the tale of his discomfiture. He was keenly ashamed of the poor rôle Lucille Masterson had made him play. She had whistled him to heel, and he had come with the meekness of the well-trained. She had amused herself with him as long as she chose, then dismissed him, humiliated and helpless. He did not want Elsie to picture her husband in that situation, nor to find him still unable to say no to Mrs. Masterson.

By the time he had walked up the long hill through a beating snow-storm, he was thoroughly chilled and self-disgusted, desirous only of shelter and peace. Both met him, when he pushed open the door of his house and stepped into the warm, bright room. When the door closed behind him, he definitely shut outside the image of Lucille Masterson.

With a little rush Elsie came to meet him, lifting her warm and rosy face for his kiss. The puppy scrambled across the floor, uttering staccato yelps of salute.

"I've named our house," the girl announced gleefully. "You know, we have named everything else. Don't you like Alaric Cottage?"

"I like the inside of it to-night, all right. But why Alaric?"

"Because it is so early-Gothic, of course. You must appreciate our front porch, Anthony. Oh, you *are* wet and cold! Hurry and change your things—I have them all laid out—and I will feed you, sir."

So the matter passed for that time, and was forgotten.

CHAPTER XI

The Glowing Hearth

Christened Noel, in honor of the day of his arrival, the puppy thrived and grew toward young doghood in a household atmosphere of serene content. From Christmas to Easter the days flowed by in an untroubled current of time. Day after day, Anthony and Elsie Adriance grew into closer and fuller companionship. The winter was a hard and long one, but never dull to them.



THE WINTER WAS HARD AND LONG, BUT NEVER DULL TO THEM

They found so much to do. In return for his reading to her, Elsie sometimes put out the lamp and in the flickering firelight told him quaint, grotesque legends of Creole and negro lore. Her soft accents fell naturally into pâtois; she was a born mimic, and interspersed fragments of plaintive songs, old as the tragedy of slavery or the romance of a pre-Napoleonic France. Her voice could be drowsy as sunshine on a still lagoon, or instinct with life as the ring of a marching regiment's tread.

She taught him to play chess, too, with a wonderful set of jade-and-ivory men produced from among her few belongings.

"Do you know these must be mighty valuable?" Adriance exclaimed, the first time he saw them.

"I know they are mighty old," she mocked his seriousness. "And I wouldn't sell them, so the rest doesn't matter."

"Tell me about them."

"There is nothing very definite to tell." She regarded him askance from the corner of a laughing eye. "Can you bear the shock of hearing that one of your wife's ancestors was suspected of having secret relations with the notorious LaFitte?"

"Who was he?"

"LaFitte was a pirate and freebooter, sir, who had a stronghold below New Orleans, where the mouth of the Mississippi widens into the Gulf. Many a ship paid toll to him, many curious prizes fell into his greedy hands; and it was whispered that some of these strange, foreign things mysteriously appeared in the house of Martin Galvez. Negroes were heard to tell, with breath hushed and eyes rolling, of a swift-sailing sloop, black of hull and rigged in black canvas, lines, and all. It slipped up the river at midnight and down again before dawn, past all defences, they said—and its point of landing was Colonel Galvez's wharf, ten miles above the city. No one ever knew more than a rumor that ran untraced like the black sloop. But it was said the ivory-and-jade chessmen had travelled by that craft, as had great-great-grandmother's string of pink pearls which are painted around her neck in her portrait. Loud and often her husband laughed at the tales, inviting all who chose to watch his wharf between sunset and sunrise, any night. The chessmen, he declared, were presented to him by a prince of Cairo, whose enemies had betrayed him into the hands of a slave-trader. The Egyptian noble's dark skin and ignorance of Western speech had made him a helpless victim; he faced the final degradation of the lash when Colonel Galvez saw and rescued him. His gratitude sent the pretty playthings. As for the pink pearls, they came from Vienna, by lawful purchase. At least, so the worthy Colonel was fond of relating, with a convincing detail, over his incomparable French wines and Havana cigars."

"But, what was truth? Which, I mean?" he questioned.

She shut her eyes in droll disclaimer.

"How should I know? The pink pearls disappeared before Josephine Galvez married Fairfax Murray, sixty years ago. The chessmen are dumb. But I know of many an old toy from overseas, around our house still. Nothing of great value! We are as poor as ecclesiastical mice; the family wealth long ago fled down the wind on the black sails of ill-luck. Yes, the Murrays usually held poor hands at cards. Will you move first, or shall I?"

"You," he invited. He looked at her with curiosity. "Why didn't you tell me before that you were a princess in disguise? I never knew you had an ancestor on record, and here you have a procession of them. You're a funny girl."

If you don't like me,
Why do you, why do you,
Why do you stay around?

She sang the very modern verse to him with a mockery altogether tantalizing; and he upset all the chessboard in answering her properly.

Little by little he learned a great deal about her home; which, he discovered, had once been the veritable home of the punctilious Maît' Raoul Galvez of surprising memory. He made acquaintance with her parents and her sisters, as Elsie brought before him a living simulacra of each one with her magician-like arts of description and mimicry. There were five sisters, it appeared: Lee, Roberta, Virginia, Clotilda and Nicolette.

"Mother named the first three of us and Daddy the last three," she explained. "Wasn't he right polite to wait so long? Mother is a rebel Confederate up to this minute, while Daddy altogether indorses the North and is a professional delver in romantic history."

"'Elsie' is not historical," he objected, much diverted.

"Oh, my truly name is Elcise; I come before Clotilda and Nicolette. But my grandfather insisted upon calling me Elsie as long as he lived, so in deference to him the first intention was abandoned. Poor Daddy lost one of his turns, after all. It happened very well, though! Elsie is more practical, and I am the most practical member of the whole family circle."

"Really?"

"Why, certainly! Lee married a dramatic poet, who is also the editor of a newspaper," she retorted upon his incredulity. "And one who lets his two vocations interfere with one another! Roberta has been engaged to an army officer these five years. He is stationed in the Philippines, where she is to join him and live in some jungle with him whenever he is sufficiently promoted to marry. Virginia is a beauty, who has the entire college full of young men vibrating around our house; and she declares that she is going into a convent when she is twenty-five. Clotilda and Nicolette are twin babies of eleven years. They still have plenty of time to do anything, you see. We were all perfectly happy as we were, but it became really necessary for someone to relieve Daddy, if only by supporting herself and leaving more for the others. So I began, and went as private secretary and companion with the old lady of whom I have told you. Wasn't that practical? Of course, Lee's husband supports her, usually.

"But the spring that I came away, Daddy had urged him to resign from the newspaper and come home for six months in order to write a poetic drama over which they both were enthusiastic. No one expects it to make much money, but, as Daddy said, we have always had enough for dignified simplicity, and it should be our duty as well as our glory to help Lee's husband to fame."

"Elsie's husband means to support her all the time."

"Oh, I told you Elsie was practical. She married sensibly."

"Should you call it that?" doubtingly.

"Her husband is quite kind to her, you know."

"Well, he is still in love. When that wears off as she grows tired of feeding him, and ill-tempered——?"

They laughed at one another across the hearth. But presently Adriance became serious.

"Elsie, I think that I should write to your father. One does not snatch a man's daughter in this barefaced fashion, without so much as a word to him, in civilized lands. Why haven't I thought of that before? And I should like to be welcomed into your family, or at least tolerated there. Do you suppose we might visit them, some day when our finances permit? Or perhaps some of my sisters-in-law might come to see us? George, what a time we could have given those girls with some of the money that I had, and haven't!"

His wife leaned toward him, her gray eyes quite wet with her earnestness.

"Anthony, there is nothing in the world that would make me so happy as for you to write home and tell them that I belong to you. I have so *hoped* you would think of it!"

"Why didn't you tell me to do so, long ago?" he asked reproachfully.

"Now, how could I tell you a thing like that?"

"Why not?" he wondered, densely.

She made an expressive gesture with her little hands, resigning the hopeless task of explanation.

"Never mind. But I shall be so glad! You see, they do not know that I am married at all. I have not dared tell them, because they have such stately, quaint ideas that they would be profoundly offended if you did not write yourself. They would consider it a great slight to me. So I have just waited."

He gazed at her in utter marvel at such patience.

"Never do it again," he requested. "Please remember that you have deigned to wed a poor, dull animal who needs your constant guidance. Even yet, I have failed to grasp the delicate point of your not setting me to work at this weeks ago. But bring the writing things and sit beside me as expert critic; we will attend to this before we sleep."

They did so; and were drawn still closer together by the fulfillment of that act of courtesy and consideration which they unwittingly had neglected so long.

The warm, gay intimacy of their life together sank deeper into the fibre of both, as the days went by. They found a comradeship of minds as well as hearts, never failing in novelty and delight to the man.

"I never before had an intimate friend," he said, one morning, with a wondering realization of the fact. "I knew so many people that I never guessed it, Elsie, but I've been lonely all my life. I can't see how I could be any happier than I am now."

They had just risen from the breakfast-table.

Across it Elsie met her husband's eyes; her own infinitely wise, splendidly happy as his, yet touched with that delicate raillery which caressed and laughed at him.

"Oh, yes!" she dissented. "Yes, Anthony."

Puzzled, he searched her meaning in her shining gaze.

"I could be happier?"

"Yes. *We* could be."

"But——?"

She came around the table and told him the answer, putting her hands into his. She did not speak shyly, but proudly, with frank courage and comradeship.

An hour later, when Adriance went down the long hill to his day's work, he carried himself with a dignity new as the blended exaltation and dread that paled his face. Once he stopped in the snapping March wind to bare his head and draw a full, deep breath, looking up at the bright-blue sky where tufts of white cloud sailed. Although the season was so far advanced, new-fallen snow overlay road and hills, so that Adriance seemed to himself as standing between two surfaces of pure, glinting brightness. His thoughts were only now becoming articulate, yet a sense of final change had settled through him. His manhood had come to full dignity. Now he knew what he had done when he snatched Elsie Murray out of her cross-current of life and took her for himself. He had found love like a jewel on the road; content had reared a shelter for his inexperience. Now, he stood as protector and shelter as long as he should live for the weaker ones who were his. And with responsibility, ambition sprang fully grown to life and challenged him. Was his wife to rank as a chauffeur's wife, and nothing more? Was their child to be reared in that place, and he to give the two nothing better? Anthony Adriance passed his glance, with his father's cold accuracy of appraisal, over the great factory lying far down at the foot of the cliffs, where he himself was awaited to drive a truck.

Presently he went on, down the road. But he went differently.

CHAPTER XII

The Upper Trail

Adriance had not spent half a year in the mill, even in the limited capacity of chauffeur, without observing many things. He had come to recognize flaws in that smooth-running mechanism of which he was a part. Might he not find in this fact an opportunity? He saw much that he himself, given authority, might do to promote efficiency. He did not delude himself with the idea that he could go into any factory as an efficiency expert; he did see that here he might fairly earn and ask for a salary that would give Elsie more luxuries than she had even known in her own home and more than he himself had learned to desire. After all, there had been no quarrel between his father and himself. When the young man had chosen a course that he knew to be disagreeable to the older, he simply had withdrawn from their life together as a matter of courtesy and self-respect. Since he no longer gave what was expected of Tony Adriance, he could not take Tony's privileges; now however, knowledge of Elsie had changed the situation. His father had only to meet his wife, Anthony felt assured, for his marriage to explain itself. Even if Mr. Adriance were disappointed by the simplicity of his son's choice and ambitions, even if he preferred the brilliant Mrs. Masterson to the serene young gentlewoman as a daughter-in-law, why should there be rancor between the two men? For the first time it occurred to Adriance that his father might be lonely and welcome a reconciliation. They never had been intimate, but they had been companions, or at least pleasant acquaintances. The house on the Drive had not contained only servants, as now it must—servants who were merely servants, too, not the faithful, devoted, tactful servitors of romance, but the average modern hireling. The house-keeper engaged and dismissed them and was herself a shadowy automaton, who appeared only to receive special orders and render monthly accounts. For any atmosphere of home created in the house, the Adriances might as well have been established in a hotel. Anthony wondered if even Elsie could leaven that dense mass of formality, or if her art was too delicate, too subtle a combination of heart and mind and personality to affect such conditions. He could not be certain. He could well imagine her, daintily gowned and demurely self-possessed, as mistress of that household; but he could not imagine the household itself as altered very much or made less stupidly ponderous by her presence. He had not thought of this before, but now he could not think his pleasure would be quite the same if they sat together in state in that drawing-room he knew so well, while she told him the tales he had learned to delight in. It could not be quite the same as a hearth of their own, and his pipe, burning with a coarse, outrageous energy, expressed in volumes of smoke, while Elsie leaned forward, little hands animated, gray eyes sparkling, and mimicked or drolled or sang as the mood swayed them or the tale demanded. He knew that he himself could never read aloud with enthusiasm and verve if Mr. Adriance listened

with amused criticism. No, Anthony realized with some astonishment that he did not want to take his wife home.

Nevertheless, the thing must be done. It was a duty. He could not selfishly continue in the way he liked so well. He must consider Elsie and the third who was to join their circle. He must pick up for them what he had thrown aside for himself.

But he refused to go back to his father like a defeated incompetent to plead for his inheritance. His pride recoiled from the certainty that his father would so regard his return; there must be a middle course. At the great gate to the factory yard he paused to survey again the enormous buildings with their teeming life. In more than one sense this was his workshop.

There was more than the usual hubbub and confusion in the shipping-room when he went down the stone incline to that vast subterranean apartment. The little wizened man in horn-rimmed spectacles, who vibrated around his long platform, checking rolls and bales and boxes as they were loaded into the trucks, had already the appearance of wearied distraction. His thin hair was flattened by perspiration across his knobby forehead, although it was not yet eight o'clock and freezing draughts of air swept the place as the doors swung unceasingly open and shut. Groups of grinning chauffeurs and porters loitered in corners or behind pillars, eying with enjoyment or indifference, as the case might be, the little man's bustling energy and anxiety.

This condition had already lasted two days, like a veritable festival of confusion. Adriance had watched it with the utter indifference of his mates, merely attending to the duties assigned him and leaving Mr. Cook to solve his own perplexities; but this morning he hesitated beside the fiery, streaming little man. The little man caught sight of his not unsympathetic face and hailed him, calling through the tumult of cars, rattling hand-trucks, pushed by blue-shirted porters, and the complex din of the place.

"Here, Andy—you know New York, how long should I allow this man to go to the Valparaiso dock, unload and get back? Three hours?"

"Two," responded Adriance, mounting the long platform beside his chief.

"Can't be done," the chauffeur of the waiting truck sullenly contradicted.

"Why not?"

"You ain't allowing for the ferry running across here only every half hour, nor for the traffic over on the other side."

The tone was insolent, and Adriance answered sharply, unconsciously speaking as Tony rather than as Andy:

"You don't know your business when you propose going that way. Go down the Jersey side here where the way is open, and take the down-town ferry, that runs every ten minutes. And come back by the same route."

"Who are you——" the chauffeur began, but was curtly checked by Mr. Cook:

"Do as you're told, Pedersen, and if I catch you at more tricks like that you're fired. You've got two hours. Next! Herman, get your truck loaded and take the same route and time; do you hear?"

"Yes, sir; but——"

"Get out, and the two of you come in together."

"Excuse me, Mr. Cook;" said Adriance, his glance taking appraisal of the second truck; "Herman has a cargo of heavy stuff, he can hardly get it unloaded in as short a time as Pedersen."

The little man turned on him wrathfully.

"Can't? Can't? They've got to get back for second trips."

"Then give him two extra helpers."

Mr. Cook stared at him through his spectacles, then turned and shouted the order. When he turned back he dried his forehead and relieved himself by a burst of confidence.

"There's a lot of stuff to go to South America by the boat sailing at three o'clock. A rush order, and just when we are rushed with other deliveries; and Ransome is home sick. *I* never send out the trucks; *I* don't know when they should come in or how they should go. I've got all my own work checking over every shipment that goes out, too. It's too much, it can't be done. The chauffeurs are playing me, I know they are. Look at the stuff left over that ought to have been got out yesterday, not moved yet! They tell me lies about the motors breaking down; I know they are lies; why should half the trucks in the place break down just when Ransome is away? But I can't prove it."

"Why not put a mechanic in a light machine to go out to any truck that breaks down, and then give orders that any man whose truck stops is to 'phone in here at once?" suggested Adriance.

This time Mr. Cook regarded him steadily for a full minute. Seizing the advantage of the other man's attention, Adriance struck again:

"Would you like me to take Mr. Ransome's place for the day? I know both cities pretty well and I know your men. One of the other men can take out my truck; Russian Mike, for instance."

"He can't drive."

"I beg your pardon, he drives very well; I taught him myself this winter."

The little man jerked a telephone receiver from the wall beside him.

"Mr. Goodwin! Cook, sir. I've got a man here to fill Ransome's place for the present; one of our chauffeurs, sir. Oh, yes! Andy—I forget his last name. He's all right, yes. I've got to have help; can't handle the men, Mr. Goodwin. All right; thank you, sir."

He whirled about to Andy. In the brief moments of their talk the congestion had thickened appallingly, and Mr. Cook looked at the disorder aghast.

"Go over to Ransome's box," he snapped; "you're appointed; and I wish you luck! Fire them if they kick, and, you may count on it, I'll back you up."

Ransome's box was on a small pier run out upon the main floor, in such a situation that every vehicle leaving or entering must pass it and report. It was railed around and contained a desk, a telephone and a chair. Adriance slipped off his overcoat and cap as he walked out on the little elevation and took his place. The men lounging about the rooms straightened themselves and stared up at this new arrival. A little improvement in calmness came over the horde at the mere sight of a figure in the post of authority.

The invalided Ransome was missed no more. Opportunity had visited Adriance on the day when he was inspired to seize it and attuned to accord with it. He and his fellow chauffeurs had been very good friends, but only as their work for the same employer brought them together. None of them had been so intimate with him as to feel his present position a slight upon themselves. Indeed, they were a good-natured, hard-working set, whose heckling of Mr. Cook had been as much mischief as any desire to take a mean advantage of the present situation.

There was an authority in Adriance himself of which he was quite conscious, a personal force that grew with exercise. He stood on his elevation, sending out man after man with clear, reasonable orders, noting the distance, the time of departure and the time allowed for the errand of each. He acquainted each man with the new rule concerning machines broken down or temporarily disabled, wisely giving this as an order of Mr. Cook's. When Russian Mike came by with Andy's truck, the big man smiled up at the man on the pier.

"I ain't going to bust her," he assured him; "I guess I'm a pretty good driver?"

"Of course you are," laughed Adriance, leaning down to give him his slip and a hand-clasp by way of encouragement. "You're all right, Michael; take care of yourself and remember what I told you about going slow."

"Sure!" A smile widened the broad lips. "Say, I guess it's a pretty good thing we wasn't being checked up this way when we met that actor lady, yes?"

"Never mind her." Adriance's color rose a trifle. "I am not holding any one down to too close time, either; but this is a rush morning. Go along now."

And Michael placidly went.

The room began to clear before the efforts of the excitable, nervous Mr. Cook at one end and the quiet management of the young man at the other extremity of the place. This was far more exacting work than driving one of those motor-trucks he dispatched in such imperious fashion, Adriance soon discovered. For he did not merely hand each driver a slip stating his destination, as was the custom of Ransome. Under that system Adriance knew from his own observation that hours a day were wasted by the men. Only if a chauffeur outrageously over-staid the reasonable time for his journey did he

receive a sarcastic rebuke, which was sufficiently answered by the allegation of engine trouble. The new method was received with astonishment and some scowls, but without revolt. Instead of each truck sent out failing to return until the noon hour, two, and even three trips were completed during the morning. There were some complaints, of course. Adriance cut them off in their incipience. He was enjoying himself in spite of the strain.

In the middle of the morning, when the trucks first sent out began to come in again, Cook left his post for a few moments. Adriance did not see him leave, nor did he note that two other men returned with his temporary colleague and remained standing for some time in the shadow of the pillared arcade around the wall, watching the proceedings on the floor. During a lull in the coming and going, when Adriance was sorting his piles of slips, one of these men walked out to his raised enclosure.

"Good morning," the stranger opened.

"Good morning," Adriance absently replied; turning his head and perceiving his visitor to be a frail little old gentleman, he offered him the solitary chair. Of course he knew that his visitor must be connected with the factory, if only from the air of tranquil assurance with which he settled his *pince-nez* and surveyed the younger man.

"How do you keep all those apart?" he questioned, motioning toward the slips.

"Put them in order on a file as the men go out, then turn the heap over. The first one out should be the first one in," explained Adriance, smiling. "Of course, I have to keep together those who have approximately the same distance to cover. It is a very rough and ready method, I know; but it was devised under the stress of the moment. A row of boxes with a compartment for each truck numbered to correspond would be one better way that occurs to me; but, of course, I am merely a temporary interloper."

"My name is Goodwin; Mr. Cook did not tell me yours——?"

The manager of the factory and his father's associate! It was the purest chance that Tony and he never had met at the Adriance house. But Mr. Goodwin belonged to an older generation than the senior Adriance, his home was in Englewood and he rarely came to New York unless upon business—the great city was distasteful to him. Something of this Adriance recollected after his first dismay, and drew such reassurance from it as he might, as he answered:

"My name is Adriance, Mr. Goodwin."

"Adriance?"

"Yes, sir. It is not so odd; I am a distant connection of the New York family, I believe." He had a cloudy recollection of a witty Frenchman who alluded to an estranged member of his family as his "distant brother."

"I see, I see; after all, even somewhat unusual names are constantly repeated." Mr. Goodwin scrutinized the other in the glare of artificial light that rather confused vision. "But, excuse me, you hardly speak like a chauffeur."

"Does not that depend on the chauffeur?" Adriance parried pleasantly. "I hope not to remain one all my life, anyhow."

"Ah—certainly. Mr. Cook asked me to come down and observe the improvement in the conditions here this morning. I am pleased, much pleased. I should have regulated the system in this department before; but these modern innovations press upon me rather fast. I looked forward to retiring, I do indeed," he coughed impatiently and glanced vaguely over the great room. "However, that is not the point. I should like you to keep this position, Adriance; at least until Mr. Ransome recovers. I hear he is threatened with pneumonia."

"I should be glad to do so, Mr. Goodwin."

"We might use him in the office to better advantage. Well, we will try your system first. Write an order for any filing cabinets or apparatus you deem necessary. Give it to Mr. Cook and I will see personally that all is supplied. This is a critical moment on which may depend a considerable trade with South America. Cook tells me that more goods have been moved this morning than in any entire day recently. We had thought of buying more trucks."

"I think that is not required, sir; I wish you would try my way for a week before doing so, at least. It is only a question of using to the full extent the materials on hand. I fancy new troubles grow up with new institutions, and an outsider may more easily see the remedy."

"Yes? Young blood in the business, you think? Perhaps, perhaps."

Two trucks roared into the place and up to Adriance's post. When he had finished with them and sent them on to Cook's end of the room, he turned back to Mr. Goodwin; but that gentleman, satisfied as to the improved conditions, was already stepping into the elevator to return to his own offices above.

"Seventy-three, the old top is," remarked Cook, running over to pass his fellow-worker a mass of memoranda. "Keen as ever, but not up-to-date, that is all. Here—these to the dock, these to the Erie yards; this straight to the decorator on Fifth Avenue, who is waiting for it—it's a special design landscape-paper for a club grill-room on Long Island. Rush the one to the steamer—Long Island and Buffalo can wait."

"You were mighty good to help me that way," said Adriance. He took the slip, regarding the little man with a glance in which many thoughts met. He smiled at one of these, and his face became warmly kind for an instant and rather startled Cook.

"You helped me out of a scrape by volunteering this morning," Cook answered, a trifle abruptly. "I only asked him to come see how things were going. You are to keep on here?"

"Yes, for the present."

"Glad of it! Ever do this kind of work before?"

"Handling trucks?"

"No; handling men."

Adriance considered.

"Only on a yacht, I think."

A group of four trucks came in. Outside a whistle began to blow; others joined the clamor and a gong clanged heavily through the intermittent shudder of the machinery-crowded building. Twelve o'clock! Cook hurried away to his own men, who had fallen idle with the surprising promptness of the true workmen; and the examination was ended. Adriance foresaw that it would recommence, but he was indifferent. He cared very little how soon his father discovered him, now that he had resolved to seek his father as soon as he saw his way a little more clearly.

He was profoundly gratified and excited by this morning's success. It gave him self-confidence, and it enabled him to ask a share in the factory's management with something more tangible to offer his father than the mere assertion that he saw improvements to be made. He actually had accomplished something. He would save many thousands of dollars by utilizing the machines on hand instead of purchasing more of the costly motor-trucks, with their expenses of upkeep, additional chauffeurs, and inevitable deterioration from use.

He walked out into the cold, fresh air to glimpse the sunshine and cool his hot flush of satisfaction. He thought of Elsie with a passion of tenderness and triumph. He resolved that he would not tell her of his plans until they were better assured. He must begin to shelter her from excitement or possible disappointment. No, he would not speak of the reconciliation he hoped to effect with his father; not yet. But of course he would tell her of his new position in the factory, and they would exult over it together. Adriance decided he would wait until their dinner was over and cleared away, then he would draw her down beside him in the firelight and astonish her.

There was a little lunch cart across the way, much frequented by chauffeurs, car-conductors and ferry-men. He went there for his lunch, as he usually did when noon found him near the factory. It seemed to him that there was already a little difference in the way the fellow-workers whom he found there treated him. Already they seemed to feel that he was moving away from them—had taken the upper trail, as it were. Indeed, he felt a change in himself not to be denied. It was not arrogance, merely the assurance of a man who sees a definite path before him and follows it to his own end; he had ceased to live from day to day.

But he was quite sure that he would never forget this day. If he had a son he would tell him about this when he reached manhood. And he would be his son's guide to this satisfaction of work accomplished, lest he miss it altogether, as Tony himself so nearly had done. There were to be no worthless Adriances.

CHAPTER XIII

What Tony Built

By a caprice of chance, it was that day Masterson came; almost at the hour when Adriance, tired and exultant, was rearing a structure of good dreams as he ate his cheap food at the counter of the lunch-cart under the shadow of the huge electric sign bearing his name.

Morning had arrived at noon, when Elsie was called to her front door by a clang of the bell; one of those small gongs favored years ago, that snap with a pulled handle. Down at the end of the straight path she heard laughter and the high-pitched voices of women above the soft roll of an automobile's motor. Surprised, she opened the door.

Before her, on the high, absurd little porch, a man in motoring furs stood and steadied himself by grasping the snow-powdered railing. Confronted by a woman, he lifted his cap, and a sunbeam piercing the old roof gleamed across his close-clipped auburn curls.

"I was told at the little shop that a chauffeur lived here," he explained, pleasantly enough. The glare of the sun on snow dazzled his first vision. "Our compressed air system is out of order, and my man forgot to put in a hand-pump. I——"

His voice trailed away into silence. He had seen her face.

"Elsie?" he doubted. "Elsie?"

She smiled at him with her serene composure, although deep color swept over her face with the startled movement of her blood.

"Mrs. Adriance," she corrected. "Will you not come in? I am sorry Mr. Adriance is not at home."

He crossed the threshold mechanically, his gaze not leaving her.

"I did not believe it," he exclaimed, under his breath. "I thought Lucille—lied."

"Mr. Masterson!"

He shook his head in deprecation of offense, continuing his scrutiny of her. He had the appearance of a man fevered by drink or illness; his eyes were bright behind a surface glaze, his face was haggard, yet flushed. His features, always of a fineness almost suggesting effeminacy, had sharpened to an extreme delicacy that promised little for health or endurance.

"They told me a chauffeur lived here," he said, presently.

"Anthony is a chauffeur," she answered, compassion for the change in him making her voice very gentle. "But I am afraid we have no automobile tools to lend. All such things are kept at the factory or in the machine he drives."

He swept aside the subject of automobiles with an impatient movement of his hand, and slowly turned to look over the room.

It had gathered much of comfort during those last months, that room; and something more. Scarlet-flowered curtains hung at the windows, echoing the vivid note of scarlet salvia in bloom on the sills. A shelf of books had been put up; beneath, a small table held the jade-and-ivory chessmen drawn up in battle array on their field. As always, the fire glowed, and on the hearth the cat stretched drowsily. Cheer dwelt in the place, the atmosphere of comradeship and assured love; and the pulse of it all was the girl who stood, tranquil of regard, rich in life and beautiful with health, princess in her own domain.

At her Masterson looked longest, his handsome, bitter mouth oddly twisted out of shape.

"You're different," he pronounced, finally.

"I am very happy."

"Happy? Here? You married a millionaire's son to live here?"

"I married to live with my husband," she proudly corrected him.

Again he looked around, and suddenly laughed out with an over-loud lack of control that in a woman would have been called hysterical.

"Tony Adriance's house!" he cried, striking his gloved hands together. "Tony—idle Tony, easy Tony, Tony of teas and tangos—Tony has built this! Why——," he bent toward her. "You have been matching work with God, Elsie Adriance; you have made a man!"

She drew back, aghast at the bold irreverence. He laughed again at her expression.

"You think I meant that wrongly? I did not. I know well enough the way Tony is going, and the way I am. That is if he sticks to this! Are you never afraid he will not! Never afraid he will drift back to the easier ways?"

"No," she affirmed. A shining radiance lighted her confident eyes. She carried beneath her heart that which made Anthony and her forever one. Fear was done with; it no longer, wolf-like, hunted down her happiness.

"No? Do you think he will be content to be a chauffeur on a honeymoon all his life? I'm going to do something decent, Elsie; I'm going to help you clinch Tony Adriance. No, don't protest. I'm going to force my help on you both, wanted or not. Why, you can't keep him out of New York forever! Send him there to-night, to me, and I'll finish what you have begun."

Amazed and dismayed, she retreated from his urgency.

"Excuse me," she began a stiff refusal.

He cut her short with impatience.

"Then I'll leave a message for him. Don't look like that; I only want him to meet me in a public restaurant. Can't you trust me?"

"You do not understand."

"I understand more than you do," he retorted bluntly. "But if I am wrong, no harm will be done. I want to see him, anyhow. Are you afraid of me?"

"No."

"Well, then——?"

He pulled off his gloves and took a card and fountain pen from his pocket. Elsie watched him helplessly as he wrote, chilled in spite of herself by a return of the old dread. What, was she not able to hold Anthony certainly, even now? She tried to look around her, fortifying her spirit with all the prosaic evidences of their united life. After all, Masterson knew "Tony"; he knew nothing of the man Anthony was.

She was able to meet her visitor's glance with her usual calm, when he put the message he had written into her hand.

"Tell him to come," he pressed. "Have you forgotten he and I were friends? And I'll always be grateful to you for loving Holly. Did you know I had lost Holly?"

She paled, the baby face rising before her.

"Lost him! Not——?"

"Dead? No. I'm the one who is dead, to borrow a bit of slang."

His laugh was bitter as quassia; he turned his head toward the sound of the automobile horn that summoned him.

"A dead one!" he repeated. "I have to go, Mrs. Adriance. But send Tony over, to-night."

The door closed on the last word. Elsie heard the high, rather strident voices of the women calling salute and impatience; then Masterson's reply set in a key of strained merriment. The motor roared under the chauffeur's hand. They were departing; evidently a means of inflating the tire had been found.

The peace of Elsie's day had departed with them. The alteration in Masterson frightened her; the strangeness of his manner and of his invitation filled her with anxiety. Something was wrong; something she could not guess or understand. Why should he have spoken so of Holly? Why, too, did he want Anthony this night?

Was Mrs. Masterson to be one of the party at the restaurant? That idea came later. The mere possibility of such an event fixed Elsie's decision; she would not send Anthony to the meeting desired. She would let Masterson's accidental visit pass unnoticed.

But when evening came, and with it Adriance, ruddy with the March wind, boyishly hungry and gay; when he took his wife in his arms and kissed her with the deep tenderness that the morning had added to their first love, Elsie knew better. Better any misfortune than the barrier of deceit between them. And she remembered in time that it was not for her to deprive him of his right of decision and free-will.

She waited until supper was eaten and the blue-and-white dishes shining in their rack again beside the ten-cent-shop china.

"Shall we go on with our book?" Adriance proposed, when his pipe was lit. Now that the moment had come, it pleased him to dally with the surprise he held for her, to prolong his secret content. He stretched luxuriously in his arm-chair. "Lord, it's good to get home! Funny I never cared much about books until we took to reading aloud, isn't it? Come over and settle down. I think we'll turn in early to-night, if you don't mind, girl. I want to do some extra work, to-morrow."

She came to him rather slowly.

"Mr. Masterson was here to-day," she said reluctantly. "He came by chance, to borrow something for his automobile. I think it was a tire-pump. Of course he was surprised to find me. And he left this for you."

Astonished, he took the card, pulling her down beside him; and they read the message together. It was very brief, yet somehow carried a force of compulsion. Masterson urged his friend to go that night to the ball-room of a certain restaurant known to every New Yorker, and there wait until he, Masterson, joined him.

There was a pause after the reading. Adriance stared at the card with the knitted brow of perplexity, while Elsie watched his face in tense suspense.

"It would be too late, now, anyway," she murmured, tentatively. "It is eight o'clock."

Adriance aroused himself and laughed.

"Oh, innocence! That ball-room does not open until eleven, fair outlander. But you had better get ready, for we have a quite respectable distance to go. Here vanishes our quiet evening!"

"We? You would take me?"

He regarded her curiously.

"Did you suppose I would go without you? We will have to go, because Fred means this; I know him well enough to tell. I'm afraid he is in some kind of trouble."

Elsie shut her eyes for a moment, mastering her passionate relief. She opened them to a new thought.

"Anthony, I haven't any clothes, for such a place."

"Neither have I," he calmly dismissed the matter. "We will go in street costume. It doesn't matter, since we do not want to dance. By the way, can you dance?"

"Certainly."

"The new dances?"

"Some of them," a dimple disturbed her smooth cheek. "Not the very new one."

"Well, I'll teach you. But you will only dance with me," he stated with finality.

Absurdly happy in the jealous prohibition, she went to make ready.

Elsie Murray had possessed one dress that Elsie Adriance never had worn. It was a year old, one brought from her distant home, but so simply made that its fashion would still pass. It was an afternoon, not evening gown; a clinging, black sheath of chiffon and net, covering her arms, but leaving bare the creamy pillar of her throat. The cloudy darkness echoed the dark softness of her hair and threw into relief her clear, health-tinted beauty of complexion. When she wore it into the room where her husband waited, he greeted her with a whistle of surprise and pleasure.

"Some lady!" he approved. "What did you mean—no clothes? Have I seen that before?"

"No. Do you like me this way?"

He put his hands on her shoulders, looking down into her eyes.

"Of course. But don't you know it doesn't matter what you wear or have?" he asked. "We have got away beyond that, you and I."

They walked to the ferry; two miles through the cold darkness. But they found the journey a pleasure, not a hardship. Elsie had taught Anthony her art of extracting amusement from each experience. On the ferryboat, they had sole possession of the deck. "Mollycoddles," Elsie called the passengers who huddled into the cabins. The wind painted her cheeks and lips scarlet, as she leaned over the rail to hear the crunch of drift ice under the boat's sides. The two evoked quite a sense of arctic voyage, between them. Anthony gravely insisted he had seen a polar bear on one tossing floe. They were happy enough to relish nonsense; and more excited by the coming meeting and place of meeting than either would have admitted.

CHAPTER XIV

The Cabaret Dancer

It was eleven o'clock when they entered the revolving door of the restaurant appointed, and faced a group of lounging attendants in the lobby; cynical-eyed servitors, all. Tony Adriance was recognized by these with a vivifying promptness; at once he was surrounded, addressed by name, had officious service pressed upon him. It was strange to the girl to see him so familiar in this place where she never had been; strange, and a little disquieting. But her grave poise was undisturbed. She left her simple hat and coat with a maid, aware of their unsuitability for the place and hour.

They did not enter the crowded room to their right, where an orchestra was overwhelming all other and lesser din with a crashing one-step. Instead, Anthony turned up a shining marble stair with a plush-cushioned balustrade and too much gilding. Elsie viewed herself beside him in mirrors set in the wall at regular intervals.

The stairs ended at an arcaded hall, beyond which lay a long, brilliant room, comfortably filled with people at supper. Filled, that is, according to its arrangement: the entire central space of gleaming, ice-smooth floor was empty, the tables were ranged around the four walls. The guests here wore evening dress, for the most part, so that the room glowed with color, delicate, vivid or glaring, as the taste of the owner dictated. Here there was comparative quiet; the voices and laughter were lower in pitch than down-stairs.

"Is Mr. Masterson here?" Anthony questioned the head waiter, who hastened to meet the arriving couple.

"Not yet, Mr. Adriance," the man answered deferentially. "At twelve, he comes. May I show you a table, sir?"

"Yes. Not too near the music—Mrs. Adriance and I want to hear each other speak."

"Certainly, sir. The drum *will* be loud, sir; but the dancers like it."

Elsie caught the man's side glance of respectful curiosity and interest directed toward herself, and understood why Anthony deliberately had fixed her identity as his wife. Pride warmed her, and love of his consideration for her; suddenly she was able to enjoy the scene around her. She felt no self-consciousness, even when the elaborately gowned and coifed women glanced over her appraisingly as she passed by their tables. She looked back at them, serenely sure of herself. She was not at all aware that many of the men stared at her with startled admiration of a visitor alien to this atmosphere. Adriance saw well enough, however. Elsie had an innocent dignity of carriage that, joined with her gravely candid gaze, was not a little imposing. Moreover her pure, bright color and clear eyes were disconcertingly natural beside the artificial

beauties. Pride of possession tingled agreeably through him; he had not thought of this or expected the emotion.

When the two were seated opposite one another, the regard they exchanged was of glowing content. Adriance ordered supper with the interest of appetite and with a fine knowledge of her tastes and his own. Then, at ease, they smiled at each other. The extravagance of the feast was of no moment. The utter simplicity of their daily life made Anthony's salary more than sufficient; they already possessed the resource of a bank account.

So far, there had been no music, except faint echoes from the room below. Now a tinkle of strings sounded delicately, swelling from a single note into a full, minor waltz melody. Turning, Elsie saw the musicians. They were negroes; not a band or an orchestra, merely a pianist, two men with mandolins and as many with banjoes, and one who handled with amazing dexterity a whole set of sound producers; a drum, cymbals, bells, a gong, even an automobile horn. From one to another instrument, as the character of the piece demanded, this performer's hands and feet flew with accuracy and ludicrous speed. But the music was more than good, it was unique, inspired; it snared the feet and the senses. All round sounded the scraping of chairs pushed back, as men and women rose to answer the call. In one short moment the place changed from a restaurant to a ball-room.

It was such a ball-room as Elsie Adriance never had glimpsed in either her Louisiana or restricted New York experiences. The women were costumed in the extreme fashions of a year when all fashion was extreme. As the dancers swayed past in the graceful, hesitating steps of the last new waltz, there were revelations;—of low-cut draperies, of skirts transparent to the knees, with ribbon-laced slippers jewelled at heel and buckle glancing through the thin veil of tinted chiffon or lace. The scene had an Oriental frankness without being blatant or coarse. At the tables there was much drinking of wine and liqueurs, but as yet no apparent intoxication. Some of the women who were not dancing smoked cigarettes as they chatted with their companions; not a few of these had white hair and were obviously matrons, respected and self-respecting.

"What do you think of it?" Adriance inquired, after watching his wife with mischief in his eyes.

"I don't know," she slowly confessed. "You know, I am an outlander. But I am not so stupid as to misunderstand too badly. These people are—all right?"

"Yes; most of them. This is the after-theatre crowd. Some are from the stage, some from the audience. That lady in green chiffon who looks as if she had forgotten to put on most of her clothes is the wife of one of my father's business associates. Did you see her husband bow to us as we came in? The little black-eyed girl in the black velvet walking-suit, at the next table, is La Tanagra, who does classic dances in a yard of pink veil. She is a very nice girl, too. Of course, some of them——" He shrugged.

The music stopped. Through a press of laughing, flushed people returning to their tables, a waiter wound a difficult passage with the first course of the supper Adriance had ordered.

Guests entered the room in a thin, constant stream, as the hour advanced. But there was no sign of Masterson. Elsie wondered what he would say on finding her with Anthony. Would he be angry, indifferent, disconcerted? Perhaps he would not come alone.

A sharp, imperious clang of cymbals rang out abruptly, hushing the murmur of voices and laughter. Elsie started from her abstraction, and saw all eyes turned toward the centre of the room.

"Demonstration dance," smiled Adriance. "Now you'll see something!"

A short, dark man and a woman in yellow gauze through which showed her bare, dimpled knees, stood alone on the floor. At a second clang of cymbals they floated with the music into a strange, half-Spanish, half-savage dance; a dance vigorously, even crudely alive and swift as a flight. The woman was not beautiful, but she was incredibly graceful. Her small, arched, flashing feet in their gilded slippers recalled a half-forgotten line to Elsie.

"'And her sandals delighted his eyes——'" she quoted aloud. "Do you remember that, Anthony?"

But Adriance was laughing at her.

"Infant!" he mocked. "Wait until you've seen it as often as I have, and then you will not let your supper grow cold. There, it's over!"

It was. The dance ended with the dancers in each other's arms, glances knit, lips almost touching. The applause was courteous. The audience, like Adriance, was too sophisticated to be readily excited. It really preferred to do its own dancing.

The preference was gratified during the next half hour. One-step, fox-trot and a Lulu Fado followed in smooth succession. The room was very full, now. One or two parties began to show too much exhilaration.

"I wish Fred would come," Adriance remarked, with a restive glance at the noisiest group. "I don't want you to be here much after midnight. I wonder——"

He was interrupted by a second crash of brazen cymbals that struck down the chatter and movement of the crowd. With the harsh, resonant clang, and continuing after it had ceased, came the soft chime of a clock striking twelve.

This time a more decided interest greeted the announcement. In fact, a distinct thrill ran through the room. Men and women abandoned forks and glasses, turning eagerly toward the entrance. A marked hush continued in the place.

"Some celebrity," Adriance interpreted, impatiently. "Confound Masterson's whims—why couldn't he have seen me at home? Now he can't get in until this is over."

The music had commenced—a tripping languorous ballet suite from a famous opera. Into the large, square arch of the doorway a girl drifted and stood.

She was a sullen, magnificent creature, as she faced the audience. Her full, red mouth was straight-lipped, returning no smile to the welcoming applause. It was not possible to imagine a dimple breaking the firm curve of her rouged cheek. Elsie thought she never had seen a woman so indisputably handsome, or so utterly lacking in feminine allure. Heaps of satin-black hair framed her face and were held by jewelled bandeaux; her corsage was dangerously low, retained in place by narrow strings of brilliants over her strong, smooth, white shoulders. Her skirts were those of the conventional ballet: billows of spangled rose-colored tulle. As she began to dance, her eyes, very large and dark behind their darkened lashes, swept the spectators with a sombre alertness. Elsie felt the glance pass across her and rest on Anthony. Yes, rest there, for an instant of fixed attention! But Adriance showed no change of expression to his wife's questioning regard; he watched the dancer with a placid interest, without evincing any sign of recognition.

It was a curious dance, as singularly stripped of womanly allure as the girl's beauty. Yet it was graceful and clever. She bent and swayed through the measures, circling the room with a studied coquetry cold as indifference; posing now and then with a rose she lifted to touch lips or cheek. The audience looked on with a sustained tension of interest that the performance did not seem to warrant. Elsie noticed that the men laughed or evinced faint embarrassment if the dancer leaned toward them, but the women clapped enthusiastically and sent smiling glances. What was it that these people knew, but which she and Anthony did not? There was something— —

Just opposite the Adriances the dancer had slipped in executing an intricate and difficult step. She staggered, catching herself, but not before she had reeled heavily against Elsie's chair.

"Pardon!" she panted, her voice low. "The floor is too polished!"

For a moment her eyes looked full into Elsie's, and they were not dark, but a very bright blue. The brush of her naked arm and shoulder left a streak of white powder on the other's sleeve; a heavy fragrance of heliotrope shook from her garments. Before Adriance could rise she was gone.

"Confounded clumsiness!" he exclaimed, with suppressed anger. "Did she hurt you, Elsie?"

"No. Oh, no! Anthony, I know her—I knew her eyes."

He stared at his wife.

"You know her!"

"I recognized her eyes. I do not know who she is, I cannot think; yet I know her. She knew me, too; I saw it in her face. And I believe she knows you."

"Elsie!"

"She looked—— Wait; she is finishing!"

The music was indeed rising to a finale. The dancer glided to the central arch through which she had entered, poised on the verge of taking flight, then raised both hands to her head.

The black wig came off with the sweeping gesture. The dancer was a man, whose short-clipped auburn hair tumbled in boyish disorder about his powdered forehead. But there was no look of boyhood in his face, as he turned it toward Adriance's table; the familiar, reckless face of Fred Masterson.

The room was in an uproar of laughter and applause. But the dancer disappeared without acknowledging or pausing to enjoy his success; indeed, as if escaping from it.

When Elsie ventured to look at her husband, he had one hand across his eyes. He dropped it at once, but avoided her gaze as if the humiliation were his own.

"Finish your coffee," he bade, his voice roughened by a dry hoarseness. "I want to get out of this—to get home."

"We have not spoken to Mr. Masterson," she hesitatingly reminded him. "He asked us to meet him."

"I suppose I have seen what he wanted me to see."

The waiter was beside them again, checking her answer. It seemed to Elsie that the man eyed Anthony with a furtive and malicious comprehension. Had he ever seen Tony Adriance with Mrs. Masterson, she wondered? Did he imagine—she thrust away the thought.

"After all, dear, aren't we prejudiced?" she essayed, unconvinced and unconvincing reason. "Isn't it really as if he were an actor?"

"No, it isn't! You know it's not. It isn't what he does that these people applaud; they applaud because he does it. He succeeds by making a show of himself, his name, his position. The grotesqueness of his being here succeeds, not his work. Well—are you ready?"

"Yes," she answered, submissive to his mood.

He paid the check, and they passed out. Elsie recovered her hat and coat from the maid, in the dressing-room below. She was too preoccupied to notice the attendant's inquisitive scrutiny, or the frank stare of a fair-haired girl who was making up her complexion with elaborate care before one of the mirrors. It would not have occurred to her, if she had, that word had passed down the staff of servants that the quiet girl in black was Mrs. Tony Adriance. But without knowing her own plain attire had the reflected lustre of cloth-of-gold, she was too feminine not to embrace with a glance of faintly wistful admiration the furs, velvets and shining satins of the wraps left in this place by the other women. No preoccupation could quite ignore that array. There was one coat of gray velvet that matched her own eyes, lined with poppy-hued silk that

matched her lips. A trifle dismayed by her own frivolity, she hastened out from the place of temptation. Anthony was waiting for her.

CHAPTER XV

The Other Man's Road

The damp cold of a March night closed chillingly around the two, as they passed through the revolving door into the street. The restaurant did not face on Broadway, the street of a million lights; for a moment they seemed to have stepped into darkness, after the dazzle of light just left. Adriance turned away from the vociferous proffers of taxicabs, with an economy prompted by Elsie's guiding hand rather than his own prudence. Indeed, his great amazement and vicarious shame for Masterson left him with slight attention for ordinary matters.

But they were not allowed to reach the subway, and return as they had come. As they neared the station entrance, a limousine rolled up to the curb and halted across their path. The car's occupant threw open the door before the chauffeur could do so, and leaned out.

"Come in," commanded, rather than invited Masterson's voice. "You didn't wait for me, so I had a chase to catch you. Put Mrs. Adriance in, Tony, and tell the man where you want to go. The ferry, is it? All right; tell him so."

He spoke with an abrupt impatience and strain that excused much by its account of his sick nerves. Adriance complied without objection. Before she quite realized the situation, Elsie found herself seated beside him, opposite Masterson in the warmed interior of the car.

The air of the limousine was not only warm, but perfumed. Without analyzing their reason, it struck both the Adriances as peculiarly shocking that this should be so. Elsie identified the white heliotrope scent worn by the dancer. The globe set in the ceiling was not lighted, but the street lamps shone in, showing the thinness of Masterson's flushed face and its haggardness, accentuated by smudges of make-up imperfectly removed. Elsie felt a quivering embarrassment for him, and a desperate hopelessness of finding anything possible to say. She divined that Anthony was experiencing the same feelings, but intensified.

The car rolled smoothly around Columbus Circle and settled into a steady pace up Broadway. The rush of after-theatre traffic was long since over, the streets comparatively clear. Masterson spoke first, with a defiance that attempted to be light.

"Well, haven't you any compliments for me? I've been told I do it pretty well. That's the only thing I learned at college of any use to me!"

"How did you come——?" Adriance began, brusquely. "I mean—what sent you there, to that? Why, Fred——?"

"I thought it was you, Tony, until to-day," was the dry retort. "I've thought so ever since I found out who was financing the case. Until this morning, I believed Lucille lied when she told me you were married. I suppose I should apologize to you; consider it done, if you like."

"Don't!" Adriance begged. His hand closed sharply over his wife's.

"We have been married since last November," she gravely came to his aid. "I am sure Mrs. Masterson told you only the truth in that. Indeed, the announcement was published in the newspapers! Since then, we have been living where you saw me this morning; on a honeymoon quite out of the world."

"I don't read more of any newspaper than the first pages," Masterson returned. "I see you two do not read even so much, or you would hardly have been taken by surprise, to-night. Shocked, were you, Tony? I suppose I would have been, myself, once. Now ——"

"Now——?" Adriance prompted, after waiting.

Masterson faced his friend with a sudden blaze in his hollow eyes.

"Now, I am through with being shocked at myself, through with thinking of myself or sparing myself and other people. Can't you see, can't you guess for whom alone I would do this—or anything else? Have you forgotten Holly? I may not have a wife, but I have a son. And I will not have my son reared as I was, married as I was, and ruined as I am. I am going to have money, if I fish it out of the gutter, to take him away to some clean, far-off place. There I shall rear him myself, understand! He shall never know this Fred Masterson. Roughing it outdoors will put me in fit condition long before he is old enough to criticise. He's got a fine little body, Tony! I'll have him as hard and straight as a pine tree. I'll teach him to work. What will I care for the squalls of this corner of the world, when I have done that? Since Lucille divorced me, I've stripped my mind of a good deal of hampering romance."

He was interrupted by the exclamation of both his listeners.

"Divorced you?" Adriance echoed, stifled by the pressure of warring emotions. "Divorced you, after all?"

"You don't mean to say you didn't know?" He studied the two faces with incredulous astonishment; then, convinced by their patent honesty, shrugged derision of himself. "Conceited lot, all of us! We think if our tea-cups drop, the crash is heard around the world. Yes, I have been a single man for three months. You have been away for six, remember. But it went through very quietly. Lucille is strong for propriety and conventions. She even," his face darkened with an angry flood of bitterness startling as a self-betrayal, "she even is willing to pay pretty highly for them. Holly——"

The sentence remained unfinished. Elsie's memory returned to that morning, when Masterson told her that he had lost Holly. She glimpsed his meaning now.

The automobile had long since left behind the flash and glitter of theatrical Broadway. When the gliding silence of the progress was suddenly broken by a blast of the car's electric horn sounding warning to some late pedestrian, the three within started as if at an unnatural happening.

"It went through quietly," Masterson sullenly picked up the broken thread, "because she bargained with me. She said that if I made no defence, she would let me take Holly. Well, I kept my word; I stayed away from the whole business and didn't even get a lawyer—like a fool. I don't even know what they said about me. I didn't care, since she wanted it. And then she asked the court for the custody of Holly; and got him. It was only for the boy's good, she says; I was not fit to have charge of him."

"Oh!" Elsie gasped.

Masterson lighted a cigarette with an attempt at unconcern. He had a singular difficulty in bringing the burning match in contact with the end of the little paper tube —a lack of coordination between the nerves and muscles that held a sinister meaning for one able to interpret the signs.

"Thanks," he acknowledged the unworded sympathy. "Maybe you know I was fit, then; or, at least, would have been fit if I had had him. Not having him, I went to—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Adriance."

"Fred——" Adriance essayed.

The other man hushed him with a gesture.

"I know what you are going to say, Tony. Don't! My wife, my *late* wife and I have managed this business. Keep out of what doesn't concern you. Here, I'll give her due to her, too! If I had not been weak, all this would never have happened. But if she had played the game, it would never have happened, either. Well, I lose. But Holly shall not pay for the game he had no share in. I am telling you two what I have told no one else. When I have enough money, I shall buy Holly from his mother and take him to Oregon. Lucille always needs money. Phillips is out there, Tony. Do you remember my Cousin Phil? Well, I started him out there ten years ago; sold my first automobile to help him out of a bad scrape. He says there is room for me; work that will support any man who doesn't want too much. They raise square miles of fruit. I only wish it was the other side of the world!"

The limousine swung to the left, jarring across a network of car tracks. They were turning down to the ferry. Elsie nestled her hand into her husband's, divining his pain.

"Nice machine, this," Masterson observed, casually. "One thing, I'm not making a gutter exit! You wouldn't believe what they pay me for my bit of college theatrical work. I did it at first on a bet, after a supper party I gave to celebrate my freedom. I think it must annoy Lucille considerably. It suits me; and there isn't any other way I could earn so quickly what I need. Here we are."

The automobile had stopped, and the chauffeur threw open the door.

"The ferry-boat is just coming across, sir," he stated.

"Very well," his employer dismissed him. "Mrs. Adriance, you had better stay in here until the boat docks; it is cold, to-night. Tony and I will go buy the tickets."

"You might say Elsie, still," she answered gently. "You know we were always good friends."

"You are good to say so now," he returned. "Thank you."

The two men did not buy the tickets; instead, they walked side by side across the rough, cobblestone square in front of the ferry-house. Adriance was pale, but steadily set of face and determination to have done, here and now with all deceit.

"Fred, I've got to clear things between us," he forced the distasteful speech. "Before I met my wife, I did see a great deal of Mrs. Masterson. You spoke a while ago of believing me responsible for her wanting a divorce. Once I might have done such a thing, I do not know. But, I did not. I went away, in order that I should not."

The other nodded, almost equally embarrassed by the difficult avowal.

"That's all right, Tony. I understand. But don't blame me too much for my mistake. Do you know who paid all the expenses of the case, whose influence kept it out of the newspapers as much as possible—in short, who managed the whole campaign? Except about Holly; that was a woman's trick! Do you know?"

"Why, no. How should I?"

The boat was in the slip; across the clank of unwinding chains, the fall of gangways and tread of men and horses, Masterson's reply came:

"Your father."

The amazing statement stunned Adriance beyond the possibility of reply. No outcry, no denial of complicity could have been so convincing as the utter stupefaction of the regard he fixed upon his friend. What had the senior Adriance to do with this affair? What had he to do with Lucille Masterson?

"It is true," Masterson answered his doubt. "Now you know why I did not believe you were married, until I met your wife, this morning. And," he hesitated, "that is why, when I did understand, I brought you to see me, to-night. I could not say so before Mrs. Adriance, but evidently your father is not pleased with your marriage, since you're living like a laborer, across the river. Make no mistake, Tony; your father never in his life did anything without reason. If he got Lucille her divorce, why, he knows you admired her, once. And he always liked her, himself. Suppose he figured that if she were free, you might wish to become so? Why not? We all know couples where both parties have been divorced and married several times, and no one says a word against them."

The recoil that shook Adriance was strong as physical sickness. Like a woman, he was glad of the darkness.

Divorce between Elsie and himself? He could have laughed at the coarse absurdity of the idea, if it had not been for his disgust and desire to get away from the subject.

"We shall miss the boat," he said curtly. "Thank you, Fred, but that is all nonsense. The truth of the matter is that you are sick—and no wonder! Come, man, pull yourself up and you'll get past all this. Why, you are only twenty-eight; start over again here! Drop everything and come home with Elsie and me for a while. You saw how we live; it isn't much, perhaps, but you would get back your health. And we can force Mrs. Masterson to let you have Holly part of the time, at least."

"I saw the way you live," Masterson repeated. "Yes. And you see the way I live. I'm no preacher, but measure them up and choose if ever you feel discontented, Tony. As for taking me home, neither of us could stand it. I drink all day to keep myself merry enough to stand that restaurant, and take morphine at night to keep myself asleep. No, we will not talk about it. I must put this through in my own way, and then leave this part of the earth. I can drop all this at once when I am ready. I am no weakling physically."

The two wanted back to the car. Just before they reached it, Masterson closed the discussion.

"Think over what I've told you. You can't love your wife any more than I did Lucille." He shivered in the damp air, drawing his fur-lined coat closer about him. "I couldn't keep her, though I tried hard, at first. Wish you better luck."

It was three o'clock in the morning when Adriance slipped his key into the clumsy old lock of his house-door, while Elsie perched herself on the railing of the porch. Within they heard his dog barking boisterous welcome.

"Up to work at seven," he commented, as the clock struck simultaneously with the opening of the door. But there was no complaint in his tone. He threw his arm around Elsie and drew her across the threshold with a deep breath of relief.

"Let me light the lamp," she offered.

"I'll light it." He held her closer. "Wait a moment; the hearth gives glow enough. I have been thinking—if it should be a boy, I would like to call our son after that jolly old ancestor of yours: the black-sloop man, Martin Galvez."

"Not Anthony?"

"No."

The brevity of the answer silenced her. She gave her consent more delicately than in words. But still Adriance did not move toward the lamp, or release his companion.

"Elsie, you are happy, aren't you?"

"More than happy, dear."

"If ever you are not, if you want anything you have not got, tell me. You know I am not going to keep you in this poor place always, or let you work for me; I am working towards better things for you, now. I have not told you, yet—I was promoted to a new position to-day. I have work inside the factory, and some individuality. I am no longer just one of a troup of chauffeurs. And, of course, this is only a beginning. It is all for you, everything, will you remember? If ever—I'm often stupid and, well, a man!—if ever you find me lacking, you will tell me, won't you?"

She clasped her hands over the hand that held her. This ending to the day of doubt and anxiety closed her round with a hush of deep content. She wanted to cry out her love and happiness and gratitude for his tenderness, to exalt him above herself. But with a new wisdom, she did not. Where he had placed her, she stood.

"Yes," she assented. "Yes."

CHAPTER XVI

The Guitar of Alenya of the Sea

That one day, in a mood of fierce impatience, had seized upon Anthony Adriance and hurried him through a range of feeling and experience such as Time usually brings in leisurely sequence, spaced apart. From Elsie's confidence in the morning, with its moving love and pride and awe he in nowise was afraid to name holy, he had gone to the spectacle of his friend's degradation in the tawdry restaurant. And as a completion, he had been confronted with the new and ugly vision of a father he could not honor.

He always had respected his father very sincerely, and felt more affection for him than either of them ever had realized. He had admired the success of the elder Adriance, and secretly regretted that he was not allowed to work with him or share it except by spending its proceeds. His hope of a reconciliation had not been all mercenary. Now all that was thrown down, an image overturned and shattered. He saw only a selfish, narrow-minded man, scheming to divorce a pretty woman from her husband in order that she might be free to come between his son and the unwelcome wife he had taken. For of course Elsie was judged by the servant's position she had held; there was no one to tell of her gentle birth and breeding. Anthony had understood this, and had looked forward with eager anticipation to enlightening his father, some day when his other plans were quite ready.

He had meant that day to be soon; now he knew that it would never come in the way he had fancied. And the loss of an ideal hurt. Masterson had told him the truth; there was no escaping the logical inference to be drawn from it. Anthony wasted no energy in trying, instead addressing himself still more closely to the work in hand.

He worked harder than ever, at the mill, but the buoyant enthusiasm was gone. Now he dreaded the possibility that Mr. Goodwin might speak to Mr. Adriance of the young man who bore his name and who was making such changes in the shipping department. For Anthony did not content himself with regulating the trucking system. He had inherited his father's ability, although the unused tool had lain undiscovered. His attention aroused, he found other slack lines, and indicated how to tighten them to taut efficiency. Mr. Goodwin visited the underground room more than once, observed and approved. Cook, won by the new man's tact that never slighted or criticised injuriously his former chief and present associate, aided him with warm co-operation. Anthony found his salary increased. When Ransome returned, after his illness, he was given a new position, upstairs.

The evenings in the little red house were no longer entirely devoted to play, after that night spent abroad. Adriance took to keeping a book of records, in the form of cryptic notes and columns of figures. "Chauffeur's accounts," he called them, when Elsie

questioned; and she laughed acceptance of the evasion, forbearing to tease him with curiosity.

Long before, there had arrived the replies to the letters of announcement he and Elsie had written to her parents, and Adriance had been touched home by the serious, graciously cordial welcome extended to the unknown son-in-law. He had promised himself, and Elsie, that some time a visit to Louisiana should be paid. Since that, she had described the neighborhood, the countryside and people, with her knack of vivid word-sketching, until all lay as clearly before him as a place seen. Now he recalled this with a new consideration.

"Do you remember the old house and plantation that you once told me about?" he asked her, one Sunday morning. "The deserted place, that had been for sale so long. Do you suppose it is still for sale?"

"It was, the last time Virginia wrote," she replied, regarding him questioningly. "She spoke of a picnic held under the old trees."

"If I—well, was crowded out of here, would you be content to try life down there? I remembered yesterday that I own some rather valuable stuff left me by my mother; nothing very much, just jewelry she had as a girl. I do not like the idea of selling it, but if I am forced into a corner, it would buy such a place for us. I have some ideas I would like to try out."

Elsie set down the salad-bowl with which she was busied; her rain-gray eyes grave, she considered her husband.

"Of what are you thinking, Anthony?"

Adriance looked away. Even to her, he could not bring himself to speak of his lost confidence in his father or to say whom he now feared as an enemy. Mr. Adriance could not divide Anthony and his wife without their consent, but he could make it bitterly hard for them to live together. Anthony had known of men who had incurred his father's enmity, and the memory was not reassuring. Before his interview with Masterson, he would have ridiculed the idea of such a situation between his father and himself; now, he was uncertain.

"Put on your hat and coat," he evaded the question. "Come for a walk; I want to show you something."

"And our dinner?" she demurred.

"Never mind it. We will eat scrambled eggs."

Laughing, she complied.

"What am I going to see, Anthony?"

"A house," briefly.

The walk took them quite away from the neighborhood of such small cottages as their own. In fact, the house before which Anthony finally halted was standing so much away from any others as scarcely to be called in a neighborhood, at all. It stood out on a little spur of the Palisades, delightfully nestled in a bit of woodland and lawns of its own.

"There!" he indicated it. "Pretty?"

Elsie looked, with a satisfying seriousness. The house was so new that the builder's self-advertisement still jostled the sign offering for sale: "this modern residence, all improvements."

"I love it," she pronounced. "Those white cement houses are adorable; it looks as if it were made of cream-candy. What deep porches, like caves of white coral; and how deliciously the light gleams in those cunning, stained-glass windows! I suppose they are set up the stairs? It is a nice size, too; large enough to be quite luxurious, but not so large as to be appalling. How did you happen to notice it, dear?"

"I took this road for a short cut, one day. Look what a view you have up here. One must see twenty miles up and down the river, and over half New York. But it is open to inspection; let us go in."

"As if we were considering buying it," she fell in with the sport. "Yes, and we will be very critical indeed; find flaws and finally reject it. Really, Anthony, it does not at all compare with our present residence."

"You'll do," he approved, drawing her up the broad, lazily-low steps.

It really was an enchanting house; a house that developed unexpected charms to the pair who wandered through its empty, echoing rooms and halls. It indulged in nooks, and inconsequential little balconies; it displayed a most inviting window-seat halfway up the stairs that could only have been designed for lovers.

"But none have been there, yet," Elsie observed, lingering on the stairs to contemplate this last allurement. "Just think, Anthony, that it is a mere débutante of a house with its ball-book all unfilled. No one has sat before its hearth, or nestled in its window-seat, or opened its door to let in love or give out charity. It is an Undine house whose soul has not yet entered its cool whiteness. Oh, I hope the people who buy it are both fair and good, and respect its innocence!"

"Coral caves and Undines—your sentiment is all deep-sea, to-day," he teased her. "Elsie, doesn't all this make you want something?"

"Yes," she promptly returned looking over her shoulder at him as she descended. "I want something that I saw in the Antique Shop, yesterday. Will you buy it for me?"

"That depends. What is it?"

"A guitar. A guitar that might have been made to go with our ivory and jade chessmen, for some heavy-lidded slave-girl to touch while her master and his favored guest

moved the pieces on the board. It is *El Aud* of Arabia; all opalescent inlay of mother-of-pearl, pegs and frets marked with dull color. I am quite sure it belonged to some Eastern princess; perhaps Zaraya the Fair or Alenya of the Sea. It will sing of court-yards in Fez where fountains splash all the hot, still days, of midnight, in the Alhambra gardens, and the nightingales of lost Zahara. And the antiquarian person will sell it for five dollars!"

Adriance threw back his head and laughed, beguiled from serious thoughts.

"What a peroration! We will buy the thing on our way home, Sunday or no Sunday. That is, if you can play it for me, and if it will come West enough for the sleepy, creepy song about Maître Raoul Galvez that should never be sung between midnight and dawn? I have never heard that one, yet."

"You shall," she promised. "And also the song with which Alenya of the Sea charmed the king from his sadness."

"Tell me first who Alenya was."

"To-night——"

"No, now." Lightly, but with determination he drew her across the threshold of the room that opened beside them. Opposite its rawly new, rose-tiled fireplace he pushed a tool-chest, forgotten by some careless workman, and spread over it his own coat, making a fairly comfortable seat. "Sit here," he bade. "You're tired, anyhow; and I have a fancy to see you here."

Surprised, but yielding to his whim with that cordial readiness he loved in her, Elsie obeyed. Adriance established himself opposite, on the comparatively clean tiles of the hearth.

"Shoot," he commanded, lazily and colloquially imperious. "Your sultan listens."

She made a mutinous face at him and slowly removed her hat, laying it beside her upon the chest. Her gaze dwelt meditatively upon the broad ray of sunlight that streamed across from the nearest window and glittered between them like a golden sword. Watching, Adriance saw her gray eyes grow reminiscent.

"Very well, I will try to tell the story as my father once told it to me. But whether he drew it from those strange histories in which he is so learned, or whether he drew it from his own fancy, I do not know. For he is more poet than professor, and more antiquarian than either—and more dear than you can know until you meet him, Anthony. Now imagine yourself in our neglected old garden, and listen.

"Long, long ago, before the beauty of Cava brought the Moors across Gibraltar into Spain, there lived in the East a king named Selim the Sorrowful. The name was his alone. His kingdom was as rich as vast; his people were content; it seemed that all the country laughed except its ruler. Upon him lay a vague, sinister spell, and had so lain from the hour of his birth.

"For always he grieved for a thing unknown, a want undefined and unsatisfied. Royalty was his, and youth, and absolute power, yet, because of this great longing of his he moved like a beggar through his splendor and knew hunger of the heart by night and day. Wise men and temples were questioned in vain, rich gifts vainly sent to distant oracles; none could tell the king's desire, or cure it. And his dark, wistful face came to be accepted by his people as a thing usual and royal.

"One day, when the king walked alone in his garden by the sea, a strange mist crept over the land and water, silvery, opalescent, wonderful. He stood, watching. Suddenly a gigantic wave loomed through the haze and swept curling and hissing shoreward to his very feet, where it broke with a great sound. When the glittering foam and spray fell away again, a girl was standing on the sands before him; a girl clad in the floating gray of the mist, girdled and crowned with soft, dim pearls. Her lustrous eyes were green as the heart of the ocean, and when the king gazed into them his sorrow shrank and fled.

"'Who are you, desire of mine?' asked Selim.

"'Alenya of the Sea,' she answered him, and her voice was the lap of waves on a summer night.

"Then the king took her in his arms and bore her to his palace."

"And she cured him?"

"Better! She satisfied him. Never was a change more marvellous; in all the kingdom there was no man so happy as Selim the king. Day and night, night and day, he lingered by the sea-maiden. Riotous prosperity came to the land, the fields yielded double crops; it seemed that the king's smile was a very sunshine of the South.

"But by-and-by superstitious dread fell upon the people, and the jealous priests fostered it. Strange, strange and weirdly sweet was the music that drifted from Alenya's apartments. There came a day when the country demanded that Selim put away the evil enchantress, or die. One month they gave him for the choice."

"The men of the East were poor lovers," commented Adriance. "He banished the sea-princess?"

"Not at all! He chose death, and a month with Alenya."

"Well, if he lived one month exactly as he willed, he had something."

"Very true, cynical person. But never was such month as his, when the lonely man still possessed his love and the wearied king had found an excitement. Intensity is the leap of a flame, and cannot endure. When the end of the four weeks came—" she paused, her dark little head tilted back, her regard inviting his hazard.

"They died?"

"Alenya sang to the king for the last time. There is no record of that lost music; it is so sad that if it were written the paper would dissolve in tears. When it ceased the king

slept, and Alenya flitted back to the sea and mist, alone. Later came the people and awakened Selim with their rejoicing, but he stared in cold amazement at the pageant of their returning loyalty. He had forgotten all."

"Forgotten?"

"Yes, for Alenya's last song had swept her image from his mind. From his mind, not his heart; he was again Selim the Sorrowful, yearning for the desire he did not know.

"Often, often he wandered along the shore, suffering, uncomprehending. It is written that his reign was long, and wise. But on the night he died his attendants found the print of a small, wet hand on the pillow where rested the king's white head."

After a moment Adriance rose.

"So he could not keep his own, when he had it!" he said. "Thank you, Madame Scheherazade. Now come outside and I'll tell you why I wanted you to sit at that hearth, for luck."

Laughing, she followed him, carrying her hat in her hand.

"Why, Anthony?"

"Because I want this place for our home," he answered.

She uttered a faint exclamation, genuinely dismayed.

"Want it? Why it must be worth ten thousand dollars, Anthony! See, it even has a little garage. And one would need servants; a maid-of-all-work, at least."

"Yes. I am working for all that. A while ago I thought I was certain of it. Now, I am afraid not. But you are not going to live the way we are now for much longer. Either I shall win my game, and bring you here, or we will go South and try a new venture."

Amazed and hushed, she met his steady, resolute gaze. She had not glimpsed this purpose of his in all their intimate life together.

"Do you—care to tell me about it?" she wondered. "And, you know I am quite, quite happy as we are; as I must be happy with you always, win or lose, my dearest dear."

The place was quite deserted; he kissed her, before the blank windows of the house that never had been lived in.

"I know," he said. "As I must be with you, and am! But I will wait to tell you the rest, until I can tell it all."

She accepted the frank reticence. They walked home more quietly than they had come, each busied with thought.

But Adriance did not forget to stop at the antique shop for the guitar. The proprietor lived in the rear of the shabby frame building and willingly admitted his two

customers, after examining them beneath a raised corner of the sun-bleached green curtain.

"The guitar?" he echoed Adriance's request. "For madame? But certainly!"

He produced the instrument from the window with deferential alacrity. He was a thin, bright-eyed French Jew; quite ugly and quite old enough in appearance to justify Elsie's assertion that he was the Wandering Jew and this the very shop of Hawthorne's tale. She smiled at him with a mischievous recollection of this, as she pulled off her gloves to finger the rusty strings.

"It is a good guitar," she approved. "And gay, with all this mother-of-pearl inlay and the little colored stones set in the pegs! But these wire strings must come off, Anthony. They are too loud and too harsh."

"It is so, madame," the old man nodded entire agreement, before Adriance could speak. "The guitar was used on the stage, where loudness——!" He shrugged. "Never would you guess, madame, who brought that instrument in to me last week."

"No?" Elsie wondered, politely interested.

"It was that enormous Russian who formerly rode beside your husband in the motor wagon, madame. He has not a head, that Michael, but he has a heart. About the cinés he is mad—the moving pictures, I would say. Well then, into the poor boarding-house where he lives came an actress. She was out of work, or she would not have been there, *bien sur*! The guitar was hers. Michael brought it here to sell for her. I believe she is sick. Because she is of the stage, he is a slave to her."

"He is in love?"

"He, madame? It has not even occurred to him. He would not presume."

"Poor idealist!" said Adriance. "We will take the theatrical guitar, but wrap it up so I can get home without someone tossing me a penny."

He laughed as he spoke, and had forgotten the guitar's story before they reached Alaric Cottage. But Elsie neither laughed nor forgot. That evening, as she sat across the hearth from Anthony, evoking music gay or weird for his enchantment, she thought much of the girl who had last played her decorative instrument.

"Is it my guitar, truly, Anthony?" she questioned, at last.

"It certainly isn't mine," he retorted teasingly.

She made a grimace at him. But she also made a resolve.

CHAPTER XVII

Russian Mike and Maître Raoul Galvez

Russian Mike lived in a settlement perhaps a mile back from the river road. He usually passed the Adriances' house each morning, a few moments earlier than the lighter-footed Anthony set forth, whose swinging stride carried him two steps to the big man's one. Elsie had long since made acquaintance with her husband's assistant. During the bitter weather she frequently had called him from the snow-piled road to warm his slow blood with a cup of her vivifying Creole coffee. The Monday morning following the purchase of the guitar, she knew just when to run down the path and find the bulky, lounging figure passing her gate.

At the sight of the girl in her lilac-hued frock, a drift of white-wool scarf wound about her shoulders, her dark little head shining almost bronze in the bright morning light, Mike came to a halt and awkwardly jerked at his coarse cap. It had flaps that fastened down under his chin, so that he was embarrassed equally by the difficulty of removing his headgear and the *inconvenance* of remaining covered. But Elsie's smile was a sunshine of the heart that melted such chills of doubt, as she came up to him.

"Good-morning, Michael. Thank you for bringing back my kitty-puss, Saturday night. She *will* run away, somehow."

"It ain't nothing, ma'am," he deprecated, confused, yet gratified.

"It was very kind. Michael," she considerately lowered her eyes to her breeze-blown scarf, "yesterday Mr. Adriance bought a guitar for me, from the antique shop. We heard where it came from—how you brought it. Will you tell the lady who owned it that I should be sorry to keep a thing she might miss? Tell her, please, that I hope she will soon grow well, and when she is ready I shall be happy to return the guitar to her. We will just play that she lent it to me for a while."

His rough face and massive neck slowly reddened to match his fiery hair.

"You, you——" he stammered, inarticulate. His mittened fist wrung the nearest fence paling. "I ain't——! Thank you, lady."

Mischief curled Elsie's lips like poppy petals, as she contemplated the discomfited giant.

"Is she very pretty, Michael?"

"No, ma'am," was the unexpected avowal. "Not 'less she's dolled up for actin'. She's nice, just. I guess many ain't like the swell one Andy used to work for: dolled up any time."

"Andy? Mr. Adriance? He never worked——"

"For an actress; yes, ma'am," finished Mike, calmly assertive. "He treated her to tea, the day after Christmas, when we was sent over to New York. Ain't you seen her? Swell blonde, with awful big sort of light eyes an' nice clothes on?" He leaned against the frail old fence, shutting his eyes reminiscently. "She had on some kind of perfumery——! Since I seen her, nobody else ain't very good-lookin'."

"He treated her to tea?" Elsie faintly repeated. She did not intend an espial upon Anthony; the question was born of pain and bewilderment.

"She ast him to. They went to a eatin' place an' I watched the truck. Tony, *she* called him." Mike ponderously straightened himself and prepared to depart. "I guess I'll get to work, ma'am."

Elsie nodded, and turning, crept back.

Adriance had appeared on the threshold of the cottage, his dog leaping about him in the daily disappointed, daily renewed hope of accompanying the worshipful master. He was whistling and fumbling in his pockets for a match, as he stood. But he was struck dumb and motionless by the change in the pale girl who turned from the gate. She seemed almost groping her way up the path.

"Elsie!" he called, springing down the steps. "Why, Elsie?"

To his utter dismay, she crumpled into his extended arms, her eyes shut.

He gathered her to him and swept her into the house, himself sick with absolute panic. Illness was so new to them; he did even know of a doctor nearer than the stately and important family physician in New York. He felt the world rock beneath his feet; his world, which held only his wife. Trembling, he laid her on their bed and knelt beside it, her head still on his arm.

"Elsie!" he choked, his eyes searching her face. "Girl!"

Perhaps it was the misery in his voice, perhaps the anguish of love with which he clasped her, but she moved in his arms.

"Yes," she whispered. "I—I shall be well, in a moment."

"You're not dying? Not in pain? What can I do?"

"No, no. Wait a little. Put me down; I must think."

He obeyed, settling her among the pillows with infinite tenderness. He dared not kiss her lest he disturb recovery, but he carefully drew the pins from her hair and smoothed out the thick, soft ripples. He had a vague recollection of reading somewhere that a woman's locks should be unbound when she swooned. It was in a novel, of course; still, it might be true. And there was one panacea that he knew!

Elsie did not open her eyes, but she heard him rise and hurry into the other room. The giddiness had left her now, and she could think.

Of course she had recognized Mike's portrait of Lucille Masterson. She had seen the other woman, lovely, imperious in assured beauty; almost had breathed the rich odor of her *Essence Enivrante*—which was not French at all, but distilled in an upper room on Forty-second street where individual perfumes were composed for those who could pay well. Anthony had gone to her, the day after Christmas. The day after that Christmas! Lying there, Elsie recalled how she and Anthony had gone together to church in Yuletide mood and knelt hand in hand in the bare little pew as simply as children: "because they had found each other." And then their first Christmas dinner in their holly-decked house, when the puppy had sat in rolypoly unsteadiness on Anthony's knee, regaled with food that should have slain him, while she laughed and remonstrated and abetted the crime. The day after all that, the day after he had given her the garnet love-ring, Anthony had gone to Mrs. Masterson? Her reason cried out against the absurdity. Yet, he had gone.

The clink of china hurriedly moved in the next room had ceased. Adriance came to the bedside, leaning over to slip his arm carefully under the pillow and raise the girl's head. In his other hand he held a cup of hot tea, the only medicine he knew.

All his wife's heart melted toward him in his helpless helpfulness. Suddenly she remembered that he had come back to her from that meeting. He had seen the invincible Lucille, yet had returned to glorious content with his wife. The ordeal she long had foreseen and dreaded was over. She opened her eyes and looked up at him quietly.

He looked like a man who had been ill, and his gaze devoured her, enfolded her.

"What was it?" he asked unsteadily. "What is it?"

"Anthony, why did you not tell me that you met Mrs. Masterson?" she put her quiet question. "Why did you leave me to hear it from Michael?"

Startled, he still continued to look down into her eyes with no confusion in his own.

"I suppose I should have told you," he frankly admitted. "But it wasn't of any importance, and I—well, I cut such a poor figure that I dodged exhibiting it to you. The woman caught me on the Avenue and fairly bullied me into a tea-room, with my collar wilted and oily hands. I think she did it out of pure malice, too, for she had nothing to say, after all. But—surely *that* did not make you ill, Elsie?"

"You never thought that I might mind your going?"

"Why?" he asked simply. "What is it to us? You don't, do you?"

She put up her hands and clasped them behind his head.

"Set down the tea," she laughed, tears in her mockery, "or we will spill it between us. Did you think me an inhuman angel, dear darling? No, I don't mind; but I did."

"Like that?" amazed. "So much?"

"You keep remembering who Maît' Raoul Galvez raised," she warned, her lips against his. "I'm mighty jealous, man!"

"But I love you," he stammered clumsily. "That woman—she looked like a vixen! Poor Fred!"

Their first misunderstanding was passed, and left no shadow. By and by they drank the cold tea together, and Elsie persuaded her nurse to go to the factory as usual.

"I was not sick, just full of badness," she conscientiously explained. "Although it might not have happened if I had been altogether just the same as usual, Anthony."

They talked over the affair at more leisure, that evening. But they could find no reason for Lucille Masterson's insistence upon that brief interview with Anthony. Why had she forced him to attend her? He could honestly assure Elsie that Mrs. Masterson had made no attempt to win him back to his former allegiance; rather, she had taunted and antagonized him. As a caprice, they finally classified and dismissed the episode.

What they did not dismiss from their thoughts was the conversation they had held in the new white house, the day they had bought the guitar. They did not speak of Anthony's ambitions, but Elsie came to speak often and with freer enthusiasm of her native Louisiana. Her husband saw through the innocent ruse with keener penetration than she recognized, and so far it failed. He understood that she was cunningly preparing to make easy for him their way of retreat, in case he lost his fight; preparing to convince him that was the way she most desired to go. He loved her the better; and was the more obstinately determined to force his own way.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CHALLENGE

Each day found Anthony less willing to leave the place he had chosen. He did not want to abandon the work commenced in the factory; he had attained an active personal interest in his progress there. He was well aware that he would soon know more about some possibilities of the mill than did Mr. Goodwin himself. His father never had concerned himself at all with such matters. Mr. Adriance was the converging-point of the many lines forming a widespread net of affairs in which this factory was but one strand. He did not even find time to notice Mr. Goodwin's advancing years and the desire for retirement the old man was too proud to voice. But the strand whose smallness was disdained by the greater Adriance might well prove able to support the lesser.

An accident still further determined his wish to remain. One day Mr. Goodwin came down to the lower room; occupied the chair in Adriance's enclosure for a quarter-hour and watched the proceedings. These occasional visits had done much to establish firmly "Andy's" authority, yielding as they did the manager's sanction to the new order of things. But this time Mr. Goodwin had something to say to the young man whom he and Cook had grown to regard as a fortunate discovery of their own.

"Andy," he began, using the nickname as Adriance himself had suggested on observing the positive reluctance with which the old gentleman handled familiarly the revered name of the factory's owner; "Andy, to-morrow there will be a meeting at the office of Mr. Adriance in New York City; I shall be present." He cleared his throat a trifle importantly. "I shall have pleasure in mentioning the excellent, the really excellent, work you have done here. I shall mention you personally."

Anthony carefully put down the papers he held and stood still, trouble darkening across his face. He saw what was coming, and he saw no way to stop it. He did not want his father to learn of his presence here from an outsider, or at a public meeting. He wanted to tell Mr. Adriance his own story, with their kinship to help him. He wanted to explain Elsie to the man who was championing Mrs. Masterson; he wanted to tell him of the new Adriance to come. He hardly thought it possible that his father would deny him the simple opportunity he asked, or try to force the monstrous wrong of a separation between man and wife, if he understood. But if the bare fact that Tony was secretly in his employ were flung before him, Mr. Adriance was quite capable of regarding this as an added defiance and even mockery of himself. Mr. Goodwin's speech flowed placidly on:

"Your abilities are really exceptional, exceptional; I am sure that they will be suitably appreciated. You are doing much better work than Ransome. I shall advise that I be

allowed to create a new position for you at a new salary. I should like you to supervise the entire shipping department on this floor, not merely the trucking."

"You are very good," Adriance murmured; "I am not quite ready perhaps for that. By the time the next meeting is held——"

"I have said that you were competent," Mr. Goodwin reminded him with some stiffness. "I am accustomed to judge such matters, pray recollect. I am quite sure Mr. Adriance will feel pleasure that a connection of his, even a distant connection, should thus distinguish himself from the ordinary employee."

"No! That is—I should wish——" Adriance caught himself stumbling, and colored before the astonished eyes of the other. "I mean to say, family influence cannot help me in that way. Can you place the matter before Mr. Adriance without using my name?"

The older man chilled in severe amazement. Very slowly he took off his *pince-nez* with fingers a trifle uncertain.

"Certainly not," he said, rigidly. "Why should I do so remarkable a thing?"

That challenge was not easily answered. The silence persisted unpleasantly. Through the breach it made trickled a thin stream of doubt, which rapidly grew to a full current of suspicion. Still Adriance could find nothing to reply, and the situation became more than embarrassing. Mr. Goodwin at last arose.

"I regret that I made this proposition," he said. "Of course it was not in my calculations that you had anything to conceal, especially from Mr. Adriance. We will of course drop the matter for the present."

"You mean that I may continue here as I am?"

"I hope so. You will comprehend that it becomes my duty to set this matter before Mr. Adriance. It is not right that I should employ in his name a man who fears to have his presence here known to his employer. I will bid you good-morning."

This condition was worse than the first. Recognizing himself as cornered, Adriance cast a hurried glance around him, found no one within ear-shot of his little enclosure, and took a step toward the man about to leave him.

"Wait! Mr. Goodwin, I am Tony Adriance."

The little old gentleman stared at him blankly.

"My father does not know that I am here, no one knows except my wife. Will you not sit down again and listen to me?"

Still Mr. Goodwin stared at him, dumb. Smiling in spite of his vexation and anxiety, the young man quietly fronted the scrutiny. He was quite aware that in his working clothes, his hands evidencing his winter of manual labor, his face dark with the tan of months of wind and sun, he hardly looked the part he claimed; that is, if Mr. Goodwin

knew anything of the former Tony Adriance. But he kept the candid honesty of his eyes open to the other's reading, and waited. Perhaps if those rather unusual blue-black eyes he and his father had in common had confronted Mr. Goodwin in the brightness of daylight, he might before this have been identified. At any rate, they convinced now, even in the deceptive light.

"There is a resemblance," murmured Mr. Goodwin.

"To my father? Yes, I think so; I have been told so."

"But—why——?"

One of the usual interruptions called Adriance away before he could reply. The old gentleman sat dazed, watching him. When the vehicle had passed on, Adriance turned back to the other man.

"I married without consulting my father, last autumn," he said quietly. "Will you dine with me to-night, Mr. Goodwin, at my own house up the hill, and let me explain to you what I am doing and why I am doing it? If you have any doubt of my identity, you may easily fix it by asking my father when you see him to-day whether his son is at home or not."

Mr. Goodwin found his voice with some difficulty.

"No, I would prefer to understand before I see Mr. Adriance. Come up to my private office now; Cook can manage here for an hour without you. I am astounded, even bewildered, Andy—Mr. Adriance——"

"Try 'Tony'," suggested the other with his sudden smile.

So while the indignant Cook struggled with double duties, Adriance and Mr. Goodwin sat opposite one another in the latter's private office, and held long converse.

With the exception of the Masterson side of the affair, Adriance told the story without reserve. He hoped to win Mr. Goodwin's temporary silence, but he actually won more than he had imagined possible. Mr. Goodwin was excited and interested as he had not been for years. When Adriance concluded, the other was quite the most agitated of the two.

"You will not tell my father to-day of my presence here, you will give me time to do so myself?"

"I will do better," said Mr. Goodwin, much moved, "I will help you—I adopt you, as it were. Mr. Adriance——"

"Tony."

"Tony, I will train you to succeed me here. I wish much to retire, as I have told you. My wife and I—we have no children—have long planned to travel; we have even selected the places we would visit and the routes we would prefer to take. It has been, I might say, our dream for years; but Mr. Adriance would not listen to my desire to

leave. He declares there is no one he could trust in my place." Pride colored the thin old face. "His esteem flatters me; but now I will give him a successor whom he can trust. It is very suitable that you should have this position. I will say nothing to him, as you wish; but do you enter my office here and study the management of this concern with me. I will myself take charge of that."

Astonished in his turn, and deeply touched, Adriance took the offered hand.

"Of course you know I can find no words of sufficient gratitude, Mr. Goodwin. If you will indeed be so good you shall not find me lacking so far as my abilities reach."

"They have reached quite far already," said his senior, drily.

What had appeared a calamity had become strange good fortune. Mr. Goodwin readily satisfied any doubt he might have felt of Tony's identity. Next morning when he would have gone to his usual place, a clerk stopped him and took him to Mr. Goodwin's private office, where a desk awaited him.

"Of course it is all my name, or rather my father's," Adriance said to Elsie that night. "There are a score of cleverer men than I already there who will continue, I suppose, plodding on as they are. Cook is one of them. But I am not altruistic enough to throw away the luck I have been born into, I am afraid. I shall take all Goodwin will give me, and if my father refuses to keep me there, at least the training will make me more fitted to earn our living in some other place."

"Man, you have not enough vanity to nourish you properly," Elsie gravely told him.

Mr. Goodwin proved a harder taskmaster than Cook or Ransome. He entered upon the education of Tony Adriance with an enthusiastic zest tempered with a conscientious severity that made him exacting and meticulous in detail. Adriance was fond enough of the outdoors to miss the motor-truck at times—there were even hours when he thought wistfully of Russian Mike; but he learned rapidly under the forced cultivation. Now he saw how superficial had been the knowledge of the factory on which he had prided himself in the shipping room, and how absurdly inadequate to the management of the great place he would have been had his father put it in his hands. But under Mr. Goodwin he was becoming in actuality what he once had fancied himself to be. Incidentally the teacher and the student grew cordially attached to one another; and as this attachment was obvious, as the new man was known in every department where he was sent to gather experience as "Mr. Adriance," and as Mr. Goodwin called him "Tony," his identity was soon no secret in the factory. But the senior Adriance never came in personal contact with any member of the force except Mr. Goodwin, so this was a matter of indifference. Adriance continued to be entered on the books as a chauffeur, and received the corresponding salary.

The genuine chauffeurs whose comrade Andy had been looked curiously after him and whispered among themselves when, he chanced to pass, although his greetings to them were the same as always. Cook dropped the use of "Andy," and said "sir" if the young man spoke to him suddenly. Mr. Goodwin advised his pupil to let such things pass without comment. Either Anthony's position would be assured and demand such

deference, or he would leave the factory altogether; in either case protest would only be hypocritical or useless.

The time when Anthony should go to his father with an account of the affair, was indefinitely postponed. The more accomplished first, the better. Secretly, both he and Goodwin had come to dread the possibility that Mr. Adriance would refuse to continue Anthony in his position, either through resentment or lack of faith in Tony's ability.

Sometimes Anthony felt a sharp misgiving that perhaps the very preparation that fitted him for the place he so much desired, would deprive him of it. It was more than possible that Mr. Adriance would keenly resent what was being done without his knowledge. In a sense Anthony was fortifying himself in his father's own territory in order to resist the older man's will in regard to Mrs. Masterson. Anthony never learned to think without vicarious shame and pain of the treachery his father had planned against Elsie. He could not reconcile that idea with anything their years together had shown him of his father. But he worked on and thrust from his mind what he could not remedy.

CHAPTER XIX

THE ADRIANCES

The weeks ran quietly on, bringing spring as the only visitor to the little red house. Masterson had been invited to come, but he never availed himself of the invitation. The Adriances did not speak of him, by tacit agreement feigning to forget the only painful evening they had spent since their marriage.

The event that fell like an exploding shell into the tranquil household, shattering its accustomed life as truly as if by material destruction, came quite without warning. It chose one of the first evenings of April, when a delicate, pastel-tinted sunset was concluding the day as gracefully as the *envoi* of a poem.

Elsie was making ready for her husband, much as she once had described to him a wife's employment at this hour, and so all unconsciously had cleansed the temple of his heart, thrusting down the false idols to make a place for herself. The table stood arrayed, she herself was daintily fresh in attire and mood; the little house waited, expectant, for the man's return. The soft flattery of love lapped Adriance around whenever he crossed this threshold; life had taught him a new luxury in this bare school-room.

Elsie was singing, as she went about her pleasant tasks with the deft surety and swiftness so pretty to watch; singing a lilting, inconsequent Creole *chanson*, velvet-smooth as the sprays of gray pussy-willow she presently began to arrange in a squat, earthen jar. She was happy with a deep, abiding, steadfast content, and a faith that admitted no fear.

She was listening, through all her occupations. The crackle of Anthony's quick, eager step on the old gravel walk would have brought her at once to the door. But the sound of an automobile halting before the gate passed unnoticed; many cars travelled this road, day and night. So, as before, Masterson came unheralded into his friend's house. Only, this time he found the door open and entered without knocking. When his shadow darkened across the room, Elsie turned and saw her visitor.

Rather, her visitors. Masterson carried in the curve of his arm a diminutive figure clad in white corduroy from tasselled cap to small leggings. The child's dimpled, ruddy-bright cheek was pressed against the man's worn and sallow young face, the shining baby-gaze looked out from beside the fever-dulled eyes of the other. A chubby arm tightly embraced Masterson's neck.

"Holly!" Elsie cried, the willow-buds slipping through her fingers. "Why—how——? Oh, how he has grown! Holly, baby, don't you remember Elsie? He does, truly does—please let me have him!"

Masterson willingly relinquished his charge, putting Holly into the eager arms held out, and stood watching the ensuing scene of pretty nonsense and affection. He did not speak or offer interruption. When Elsie finally looked toward him again, recovering recollection and curiosity, baby and woman were equally rose-hued and radiant.

"But—how did it happen?" she wondered. "Did—was the agreement kept, after all? Is Holly to stay with you, now?"

The man met her gaze with a strange blending of defiance and entreaty. Now she perceived his condition of terrible excitement and that his dumbness had not been the apathy she fancied. He was on the verge of a breakdown, perhaps irreparable to mental health. Her question was answered by her own quick perception before he spoke.

"I have stolen him. No! I did *not* steal him; I took my own. It was in the park—he was with a nurse, and she struck him. She didn't know me. I had stopped to get a sight of him. Well, that is all Lucille will ever give him: nurses! She never wanted him, or had time to trouble about him. She doesn't like children. He stumbled, fell down, and the woman slapped him—more than once."

She looked at him with a sense of helpless inability either to aid or condemn. Every conscious fibre in her championed his cause, except her reason. How could this sick man hope to keep Holly against the world?

"You——?" she temporized.

"I've told you what I did; I took him away from her. 'Tell Mrs. Masterson that Holly has gone with his father,' I said. That was all. I carried him to my car and drove straight here. You will keep him for me? You and Tony? I have got to go; to get back and make my last fight."

Elsie gently set down the baby. She saw what Masterson in his dazed and selfish absorption overlooked: that she and Anthony were to be drawn into a conflict surely evil for them. Mrs. Masterson must resent this, and call on the law to undo the kidnapping. She herself and Anthony would be dragged from their happy obscurity, their long honeymoon ended. More menacing still, Anthony's position in his father's factory would be discovered and exploited by the newspapers, with the probable result that Mr. Adriance would end that situation by dismissing the impromptu employee.

But she never even thought of sending Masterson away. The baby hands that grasped her dress grasped deeper at her heart. Also, this man in need was Anthony's friend and one to whom he owed atonement for a wrong contemplated, if not committed.

"Of course we will keep him," she promised, kindly and naturally. "But you must stay, too. You are not well and must rest for a while—it is absurd to speak of fighting when you can scarcely stand. Sit there, in that arm-chair. Presently Anthony will come home, then we will have supper and talk of all this."

The serene good-sense calmed and cooled his fever. Sighing, he relaxed his tenseness of attitude.

"I must go," he repeated, but without resolution.

For answer she drew forward the chair. He sank into it and lay rather than sat among its cushions, passive before her firmness.

Elsie moved about the matter at hand with her unfailing practicality. She took off Holly's wraps and improvised a high-chair by means of a dictionary and a pillow. To an accompaniment of gay chatter she made ready her small guest's evening meal, tied a napkin under the fat chin and superintended the business of supping. Hunger and sleep were contending before the bread and milk and soft-boiled egg were finished. Afterward, Elsie carried a very drowsy little boy into her room and made him a nest in her antique-shop four-posted bed. Masterson looked on, mutely attentive to every movement of the two as if some dramatic interest lay in the simple actions. When Elsie returned from the sleeping baby, he abruptly spoke:

"You know, I only mean you to keep him for to-night, not always. I will come back for him. You know all I planned for him and myself. This has hurried me, but I have money enough. Earned money. Did I tell you Mr. Adriance, Tony's father, has offered me a considerable sum to stop 'making a mountebank' of myself at the restaurant? No? He has. I fancy her former husband's occupation grates on Lucille." He laughed, moving his head on the cushions of the high-backed chair. "Well, I refused."

"Of course!"

"You knew I would? Then you grant me more grace than she did."

"She? You said Mr. Adriance offered——"

He glanced keenly at her face, then turned his own face aside that it might not guide her groping thought.

"I must go," he said, again. But he did not move, nor did Elsie.

The pause was broken by Anthony's whistle, the signal which always advised his wife of his return.

But to-night it was not the blithe hail of custom. The clear notes were shaken, curtly eloquent of some anger or distress. Acutely sensitive to every change or mood of his, Elsie caught both messages, the intentional and the one sent unaware. Dropping upon the table a box of matches she had taken up, she ran to the door.

It opened before she reached it. Anthony, his face dark with repressed anger, his movements stiff with the constraint he forced upon them, appeared outlined against the soft, clear dusk of April twilight. He looked behind him, and, holding open the door of his house formally ushered in a guest.

"My wife, sir," he briefly introduced to his father the girl who drew back, amazed, before their entrance.

Mr. Adriance showed no less evidence of inward storm than his son. But he stopped and saluted his daughter-in-law with precise courtesy.

"Mrs. Adriance," he acknowledged the presentation, his voice better controlled than the younger man's.

"Light the lamp, Elsie," her husband requested, dragging off the clumsy chauffeur's gloves he had worn home. "It seems that we are under suspicion of child-stealing. My father has done us the honor of looking us up, to accuse me of conniving at the kidnapping of Mrs. Masterson's boy. I have not yet gathered exactly what interest I am supposed to have in the lady or her affairs, or whether I am presumed to be engaged in a bandit enterprise for ransom. But I understand that there is a detective outside, who probably wishes to search the house."

Elsie made no move to obey the command. In the indeterminate light Masterson's presence had been unnoticed, shadowed as he was by the deep chair in which he sat. She was not afraid, or bewildered so far as to conceive keeping him concealed, but she was not yet ready to act.

"My son is inexact, as usual," Mr. Adriance gave her space, aiding her unaware by his irritation. "Mr. Masterson is known to have crossed the Edgewater ferry with the child, and we know of no friends he would seek in this place except Tony and you. His brain is hardly strong enough, now, to plan any extended moves. Surely it needs no explanation that we wish to rescue a two-year-old child from the hands of a drug-crazed incompetent?"

Elsie laid her hand over the match-box, wondering that the other two did not hear, as she did, the very audible breathing of the man in the arm-chair.

"He is hardly that," she deprecated. "But, if you find him, what will you do?"

"To him? Nothing. We want the child. If he persists in annoying the lady who was his wife, however, he must be put in a sanitarium."

"Elsie, why do you not say that we know nothing of all this?" Anthony demanded, harsh in his strong impatience. "Why do you feed suspicion by arguing? I don't say that I would not shelter Holly Masterson, if he were here—in fact, I should! But I do say that he is not here, sir, and I expect my word to be taken. Elsie——"

His wife put out her hand in a quieting gesture.

"Now I will light the lamp," she stated, in her full, calm voice.

Oddly checked, the two angry men stood watching her. The flame-touched wick burned slowly, at first, the light rising gradually to its full power; the circle of radiance crept out and up, warmed by the crimson shade through which it passed. It crept like a bright tide, shining on the figure of the woman who stood behind the table, rising over the noble swell of her bosom, submerging the curved hollow of her throat where a small ebony cross lay against a surface of ivory, flooding at last her face set in generous resolution and glinting in her gray, serenely fearless eyes. She looked, and

was mistress of the place and situation; perhaps because of all those present she alone was not thinking of herself.

"You see," she broke the pause, "there was much excuse. It is always wiser and kinder to listen to the excuse for actions; I think usually there is one. Mr. Masterson loves his little son very dearly, and that they have been separated is terrible to him. But he was patient, he did not interfere until to-day; he saw Holly struck and roughly treated by the nurse. He could not bear that, and just look on. No one could! So Mr. Masterson, obeying his first impulse, snatched up the baby, and he did bring him here. It was only a little while ago, Anthony; a very little while."

Before either Adriance could speak, the third man lifted himself out of the shadows into the light. He was laughing slightly, all his reckless, too-feminine beauty somehow restored as he faced them.

"Here is your drug-crazed incompetent, Mr. Adriance," he mocked. "Have you succeeded so well in training your own son that you want to undertake bringing up mine?"

The insult changed the atmosphere to that of crude war. Elsie drew back, recognizing this field was not for her. Mr. Adriance considered his antagonist with a deliberation cold and very dangerous.

"I think a comparison between my son and yourself is hardly one you can afford to challenge," he said bitingly.

"Now, no," Masterson admitted. He laughed again. "But a year ago—who was the best citizen, then? Fred Masterson, with all his shortcomings, or Tony Adriance, dangling after Masterson's wife? Hold on, Tony! I'm not saying this for you; you quit the nasty game as soon as you saw where it was leading. I'm only explaining to your father, here, that the difference between you and me is chiefly—our wives. Of course we ought not to lean on our women; we ought to be strong and independent. But I was not born that way, and neither were you. Lucille wanted me down, and I am down; Mrs. Adriance wanted you up, and you're standing up. Be honest, and out with the truth to yourself, if you never speak it, Tony. As for your father, if our guardians had started us differently, it might not have been this way with us. I don't know, but that is the chance I am giving Holly. He shall not have to pick up his education on the road. I have brought him here, and here he stays with Mrs. Adriance until I take him away with me. She has given me her promise."

"You forget that the court has given the child to its mother," Mr. Adriance reminded him, before Anthony could reply. "And let me tell you I have nothing except contempt for a man who foists off his responsibilities upon a woman's shoulders."

"Neither have I," retorted Masterson. "Did you imagine I had any vanity left, or that my self-respect still breathed? You are dull, Mr. Adriance! But all that is aside from the case. Holly stays here, unless Anthony turns him out, and then he goes with me, not with his mother. Do you think I fail to understand why she wants him, and you want her to have him? It is because he is a social vindication; her possession of him

brands me as the one found lacking in our partnership. Well, he is not to be so sacrificed."

"May I ask how you intend to enforce this?"

"You may, and I will tell you." He looked return in full measure of the older man's irony and determination. "I can enforce it because you care about the public at large, and I do not; because it would make a beautiful sob story: how Holly's reprobate father rescued him from neglect and ill-treatment, taking him away from a brutal nurse in the Park; and how Mr. Adriance, *the* Mr. Adriance, pursued and recaptured the child. The newspapers would be interested in learning that Mr. Adriance had managed the whole Masterson divorce case; with his usual tact and success. They might wonder why he had done it. I have wondered, myself, you know. That is, I might have wondered, if I had not known how much you once approved of Mrs. Masterson as a possible daughter-in-law, before Tony disappointed you by marrying to please himself. You have the reputation of never admitting a defeat; and, after all, two divorces are as right as one! I beg your pardon, Mrs. Adriance."

Elsie uttered a faint cry, abruptly confronted with the hideous thing Masterson had shown her husband on the night that had changed Anthony from her playfellow to her defender and fightingman.

"Fred!" Anthony exclaimed indignant rebuke, springing to the girl's side.

She caught his arm fiercely, as it clasped her. Suddenly she was one with the men in mood, burning with defiance and alert to make war for her own. And Anthony was her own, as she was his. Pressing close to her husband she held him. Arrayed together, the three who had youth stood against the man who had everything else.

But Mr. Adriance had reddened through his fine, gray, slightly withered skin like any schoolboy. His dark eyes lightened and hardened to an unforgiving grimness of wrath that dwarfed the younger men's passion and made it puerile.

"You will restrain yourself in speaking of the lady who had the misfortune to marry you," he signified, with a clipped precision of speech more menacing than any threat. "Since yesterday she has been my wife."

Of all the possibilities, this most obvious one never had occurred to any of the three who heard the announcement. The effect held the group dumb. All thought had to be readjusted, all recent experience focussed to this new range of vision. In the long pause, Anthony's dog yawned with the ridiculous sigh and snap of happy puppyhood; ticking clock and singing kettle seemed to fill the room with a swell of commonplace, domestic sound derisive of all complicated life. After all, men were simple, and involved evil usually a chimera. Plots and counterplots resolved into a most natural happening; thrown into companionship with Lucille Masterson by Anthony's flight, Mr. Adriance had fallen in love. Probably at first he had aided her through sympathy, as Anthony himself had done. There was no mystery in the rest.

The reckless challenge and false gayety died out of Masterson's face, leaving it dull and bleak as a stage when the play is over and the artificial light and color extinguished. Quite suddenly he looked haggard and appallingly ill. Circles darkened beneath his eyes as if dashed in by the blue crayon of an artist. He was conquered; with his fancied right to resentment and contempt he also lost all animation. The fire was quenched, apparently forever.

"I apologize, of course," he said, his lifeless ease a poor effort at his former manner. "Certainly I would have been—well, less frank, if I had understood. Pray convey my congratulations to Mrs. Adriance. No doubt you will be happy, since you can buy everything she wants. But neither you nor she can care to keep Holly Masterson in your house. I want him. After all, I am his father, you know, and entitled to some direction of his future. No? Come, I'll bargain with you! Leave him here, and I will do what I refused to do for money: I will quit public dancing and drop out of sight."

The unexpected offer allured. The wrath in the eyes of Mr. Adriance did not lessen, but speculation crept into his regard. His abhorrence of scandal urged him to grasp at this escape from having his wife's name constantly linked with the escapades of her first husband. There could be no question of Masterson's genius for spectacular trouble-making. Moreover, Holly would still be with the Adriances, so that dignity was assured. He did not believe that Masterson really intended to burden himself with the child. Lucille Masterson had formed his opinion of the other man; he credited him with no intention good or stable.

"Of course I must consult Mrs. Adriance," he answered stiffly. "But I have no doubt that she will meet your wishes in the matter, since Tony is now the child's step-brother. That is, if my son and his wife are willing to undertake the charge you thrust upon them?"

He turned toward the two, as he concluded. For the first time, the Adriance senior and junior, really looked at each other as man at man. For "Tony" no longer existed; in his place was someone the elder did not yet know. Indeed, he and Tony had been merely pleasant acquaintances; he and this new man were strangers.

"Why, yes," Anthony replied to the indirect question. He had regained his composure as the others had lost theirs. His cool steadiness and poise contrasted strongly with the strained tension of his guests; he spoke for both himself and Elsie with the assured masterfulness she had nursed to life in him during these many months. "We will take charge of Holly until his father claims him, unless it is going to be too difficult for me to take care of my own family. As you may see, sir, we are not rich."

"Is that my affair?"

"It has not been. But it is going to be."

"As a question of money——"

Anthony checked the sentence with a gesture. Gently freeing himself from Elsie's clasp upon his arm, he drew from a pocket of his rough coat that notebook which had

absorbed so many of his leisure hours.

"Let us say a question of business," he suggested. "Six months ago I entered your employ as a chauffeur. You will find my record has no marks against it. I did not think at that time of drawing any advantage from the fact that the mill belonged to you; I worked exactly as I must have done for any stranger. I was not late or absent, I accomplished rather more each day than the average chauffeur in the place. Cook and Ransome can tell you whether I gave them satisfaction. I only speak of this, sir, because I should like you to understand that I was in earnest. It was not until months had passed at this work that I began to think of changing my position. One day Ransome fell sick. I asked for his place to try out a better system of checking the shipping that had occurred to me. I was given this at first tentatively, then permanently. In fact, the system worked so successfully that—Mr. Goodwin came to see me." He hesitated. "I wish you would ask Mr. Goodwin to tell you himself something of what has happened."

"Very well."

The laconic assent was somehow disconcerting.

"I had to tell him who I was," Anthony resumed, with less certainty, "I had meant to find out what your attitude would be, before that happened, but I had no choice. He was good enough to take me into his office and offer to teach me the management of your factory. Now——"

"Now, since it is a matter of business," said Mr. Adriance, dryly, "what do you want?"

"I want a stranger's chance, and your pull," was the prompt return; Anthony's smile flashed across seriousness. "That is, I want your influence to give me Mr. Goodwin's position as manager, and after that I am willing to stand on the basis of my business value to you. Goodwin is old and anxious to retire. If I hold his place for a year and fail to earn his salary, then discharge me and I'll not complain. I know this end of your business as you do not, sir. You are brilliant, a genius of big affairs; I have discovered in myself a capacity for meticulous attention to detail. Will you take this little book home with you? It contains a collection of notes and figures for which you would gladly pay an outsider. Mr. Goodwin and I have found the plant is enormously wasteful; every department contributes its quota of mismanagement, except the office under his own eye. I want a chance to do this work, to buy a house I like up on the hill, here, and put my delicate Southern wife in a setting suitable for her. Will you let me earn all this?"

"I am not aware that it has been my custom to interfere with you," retorted Mr. Adriance. He eyed his son with icy disfavor. "Between you and Mr. Masterson it appears to be established that I am the typical oppressor of fiction and melodrama. Kindly look at the other side of the shield. Last autumn you chose to marry and leave my house. You did both, without paying me the trifling courtesy of announcing your intentions. I knew of no quarrel between us. The rudeness appeared to me quite without warrant. Nevertheless, I tied all the loose ends you had left behind. I kept

your marriage from furnishing a sensation to the journals. The lady who is now my wife helped me in convincing our friends that your wedding was in no way unusual or unexpected, if a little sudden, and that you had met the young lady from Louisiana at her house. In short, I smothered curiosity, a task with which you had not concerned yourself. You choose to enter this place as a truck driver. You did not ask if that were pleasant to me. It was not, but I made no objection. Oh, yes; of course I have known what you were doing! Why should I not know? Now, you meet me with the air of a man hampered and pursued. Why?"

"I was wrong," admitted Anthony, simply. He had flushed hotly before the rebuke, but his eyes met his father's frankly and with a relief that gladly found himself at fault rather than the other. "I did not understand. I am sorry."

They shook hands. A constraint between them was not to be avoided. The marriage of the older man had thrust them apart. Unforgiveable things had been said of Lucille Adriance; things that had the biting permanence of truth.

"I will arrange for Goodwin's retirement," Mr. Adriance remarked. "You will take his place, and this winter's work may pass as your whim to study the business from the bottom. I spent an hour discussing your affairs with him, on my way here, to-night. I had called on him to ascertain your exact address. He has agreed to remain as your adviser and assistant for a month or two, until you have quite found yourself. And of course I will be at your service. That is enough for this evening; I have already stayed here too long. Come to my office to-morrow."

When he turned toward the door, Elsie was awaiting him. A moment before she had slipped away from the two men.

"This is the first time you have been in Anthony's house," she said, her soft speech very winning. "You aren't going without taking our hospitality?"

She held a little round tray on which stood a cup and plate. The action was gracious and graceful, quaintly alien as her own legends. Mr. Adriance gazed at her, then bowed ceremoniously, lifted the coffee and drank.

"I think I had forgotten to congratulate Tony," he regretted. "Allow me to do so, most warmly."

Anthony closed the door behind his guest; presently the sound of a starting motor ruffled the calm hush of the spring evening.

"I want my supper," Anthony announced, practically. "I shall not have any more of your cooking, Elsie. What are you going to do with your idle time—learn to play bridge?"

She ran into his arms.

CHAPTER XX

THE CORNERSTONE

When they looked for Fred Masterson, he was not there. Elsie remembered, then, that he had gone into Holly's room while Anthony and his father were intent on each other. On the bed where the baby was asleep they found an envelope upon which was scrawled a message.

"I'm off for the present," Anthony read. "I'll drop in to-morrow or next day, when Holly is awake. Thank Mrs. Adriance for me. I'm going to be old-fashioned, Tony—God bless you both."

"He never will come, I know it!" Elsie exclaimed, her heavy lashes wet. "Can't we do something? Can't we go after him?"

"I will go after him," her husband agreed. "But not to-night." He crumpled the envelope and flung it aside. "Fred Masterson is not going under without a fight. If doctors, sanitariums, his love for Holly and our help can set him on his feet again, he shall be cured and do all he dreams of doing. To-morrow I will find him."

"Not to-night?"

"Not to-night. Elsie, don't you understand? He loved his wife. If I lost you so—if you married someone else——"

She put her small fingers across his lips, stilling the sacrilege.

"No! Do not let our little house even hear you say it!"

"Nor any house of ours! To-morrow I will buy the house we looked at together, and you shall have an orgy of shopping to furnish it. Oh, yes, you shall, and I'll help you. Have lots of dark red things and brown leather in that front room where you told me about Alenya of the Sea. And—do nurseries have to be pink?"

"Of course not, foolish one. We might make ours sunshine-color, like the satiny inside of a buttercup or a drop of honey in a daffodil. Anthony——"

"Yes?"

The rain-gray eyes laughed up at him, demure and daring.

"Please, I want a cloak all gorgeous without and furry within; a shimmery, glittery, useless brocaded cloak like those in the cloak-room of that restaurant. I—I just want it!"

"How do you know?" he wondered at her. "How do you always know the gracious way to delight me most? What a time we are going to have, girl! I'm going to drag Cook out of his rut and start him up the ladder, for one thing. If he hadn't given me a chance, and then brought Mr. Goodwin down to see how I handled it, who can tell how much I might have missed? I shall bring him here for you to see, before we move, too. You won't mind?"

"Try it and see."

"And we will spend my first vacation in Louisiana! Can't we take a trunkful of junk to each girl—including your mother? Let's bribe a publisher to bring out the poetic drama, if it's ever finished. Ah, be ready to come to Tiffany's next week. I'm going to buy you a ruby as big as the diamond advertisements on the backs of the magazines."

"Anthony!"

"Two of them!"

"Dear," she hesitated, "are we going to have so much money? I do not quite see——"

Her husband looked at her, and laughed.

"You haven't learned to understand your father-in-law. I have not mastered that study, myself, but I know some branches. He is not a half-way man. He will expect Tony and Mrs. Tony to proceed precisely as Tony used to do. And we will offend and disgust him with our small-mindedness if we do not take this for granted. When I remember the things I allowed Fred to make me believe of him! Elsie, I always could have earned our living somehow; I think the best news to-night was that my father is as fine as I grew up to believe him. By George, I never told him——"

"What, dear?"

"Don't you know?"

They had almost finished their delayed supper, an hour later, when Adriance set down his cup with an exclamation and stared across the table at his wife.

"I have just thought of something! Now I understand what Lucille Masterson wanted of me, that day, in the tea-room. She made me give my word never to tell anyone that she had been willing to marry me. I was angry enough that she should suppose such a promise necessary. But now I can see the reason: she feared I might tell my father enough of that affair to prevent his falling in love with her. You do not know him, Elsie. If he had suspected her attachment to him was greed, and that she had been willing to marry either Adriance for the Adriance possessions, he would have suffered nothing to bring them together, nothing whatever. I suppose she told him she never thought of me except as a pleasant young fool. Think of us!" He pushed back his chair

and took an angry turn across the room. "Fred, and I, and my father—all puppets for her to move about!"

"Holly has Mrs. Masterson, and I have you," Elsie demurred, her mouth curling into a smile as her glance followed him. "And I do not believe she has your father, Anthony; I think he has her. You know—excuse me, dear—both you and Fred Masterson were too young and inexperienced. And your father heard, in spite of himself, Mr. Masterson's story, this evening. I'm going to borrow a sentence from Mike: 'She's got her a boss.' Let the mills grind; we know what grain we put in! Anthony, did you notice that I gave your father coffee in the Vesuvius cup? If he noticed its five-cent atrocity, he will ostracize me; and you know who bought it."

"It is a good cup!" He dropped into his chair again and leaned across the table to catch her hands in his. "Elsie, we will never sell this house, or change anything in it, will we? We can come back to it, often, for just a day. It was the beginning place, however far we go."

"Yes. Oh, yes! Anthony, our hearthstone is our cornerstone; on it we're going to build, build splendidly, eternally— —"

Her voice faltered before the vision. Silent, the two looked into each other's eyes, seeing a happiness strongly secured, closing them around like folded wings.

FINIS

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