

which seemed to have grown more desperate, this profoundly affected Corvet. He moved once to stop one of the couples coming from the tearoom. They hesitated, as he stared at them; then, when they had passed him, they glanced back. Corvet shook himself together and went on.

He continued to go north. He had not seemed, in the beginning, to have made conscious choice of this direction; but now he was following it purposely. He stopped once at a shop which sold men's things to make a telephone call. He asked for Miss Sherrill when the number answered; but he did not wish to speak to her, he said; he wanted merely to be sure she would be there if he stopped in to see her in half an hour. Then—north again. He crossed the bridge. Now, fifteen minutes later, he came in sight of the lake once more.

Great houses, the Sherrill house among them, here face the Drive, the bridge, the strip of park, and the wide stone esplanade which edges the lake. Corvet crossed to this esplanade. It was an ice-bank now; hummocks of snow and ice higher than a man's head shut off view of the fies tossing and crashing as far out as the blizzard let one see; but, dislodged and shaken by the buffeting of the fies, they let the gray water swell up from underneath and wash around his feet as he went on. He did not stop at the Sherrill house or look toward it, but went on fully a quarter of a mile beyond it; then he came back, and with an oddly strained and queer expression and attitude, he stood staring out into the lake. He could not hear the distress signals now.

Suddenly he turned. Constance Sherrill, seeing him from a window of her home, had caught a cape about her and run out to him.

"Uncle Benny!" she hailed him with the affectionate name she had used with her father's partner since she was a baby. "Uncle Benny, aren't you coming in?"

"Yes," he said vaguely. "Yes, of course." He made no move but remained staring at her. "Connie!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Connie! Dear little Connie!"

"Why?" she asked him. "Uncle Benny, what's the matter?"

He seemed to catch himself together.

"There was a ship out there in trouble," he said in a quite different tone. "They aren't blowing any more; are they all right?"

"It was one of the M and D boats—the Louisiana, they told me. She went by here blowing for help, and I called up the office to find out. A tug and one other of their line got out to her; she had started a cylinder head bucking the ice and was taking in a little water. Uncle Benny, you must put on your coat."

She brushed the sleet from his shoulders and collar, and held the coat for him; he put it on obediently.

"Has Spearman been here to-day?" he asked, not looking at her.

"To see father?"

"No; to see you."

"No."

He seized her wrist. "Don't see him, when he comes!" he commanded.

"Uncle Benny!"

"Don't see him!" Corvet repeated. "He's asked you to marry him, hasn't he?"

Connie could not refuse the answer. "Yes."

"And you?"

"Why—why, Uncle Benny, I haven't answered him yet."

"Then don't—don't; do you understand, Connie?"

She hesitated, frightened for him. "I'll—I'll tell you before I see him, if you want me to, Uncle Benny," she granted.

"But if you shouldn't be able to tell me then, Connie; if you shouldn't—want to then?" The humility of his look perplexed her; if he had been any other man—any man except Uncle Benny—she

would have thought some shameful and terrifying threat hung over him; but he broke off sharply. "I must go home," he said uncertainly. "I must go home; then I'll come back. Connie, you won't give him an answer till I come back, will you?"

"No." He got her promise, half frightened, half bewildered; then he turned at once and went swiftly away from her.

She ran back to the door of her father's house. From there she saw him reach the corner and turn



"I'll tell you before I see him, if you want me to, Uncle Benny."

west to go to Astor Street. He was walking rapidly and did not hesitate.

The trite truism which relates the inability of human beings to know the future, has a counterpart not so often mentioned: We do not always know our own past until the future has made plain what has happened to us. Constance Sherrill, at the close of this, the most important day in her life, did not know at all that it had been important to her. All she felt was a perplexed, but indefinite uneasiness about Uncle Benny. How strangely he had acted! Her uneasiness increased when the afternoon and evening passed without his coming back to see her as he had promised, but she reflected he had not set any definite time when she was to expect him. During the night her anxiety grew still greater; and in the morning she called his house up on the telephone, but the call was unanswered. An hour later, she called again; still getting no result, she called her father at his office, and told him of her anxiety about Uncle Benny, but without repeating what Uncle Benny had said to her or the promise she had made to him. Her father made light of her fears; Uncle Benny, he reminded her, often acted queerly in bad weather. Only partly reassured, she called Uncle Benny's house several more times during the morning, but still got no reply; and after luncheon she called her father again, to tell him that she had resolved to get some one to go over to the house with her.

Her father, to her surprise, forbade this rather sharply; his voice, she realized, was agitated and excited, and she asked him the reason; but instead of answering her, he made her repeat to him her

conversation of the afternoon before with Uncle Benny, and now he questioned her closely about it. But when she, in her turn, tried to question him, he merely put her off and told her not to worry. Later, when she called him again, resolved to make him tell her what was the matter, he had left the office.

In the later afternoon, as dusk was drawing into dark, she stood at the window, watching the storm, which still continued, with some one of those delusive hopes which come during anxiety that, because it was the time of day at which she had seen Uncle Benny walking by the lake the day before, she might see him there again, when she saw her father's motor approaching. It was coming from the north, not from the south as it would have been if he was coming from his office or his club, and it had turned into the drive from the west. She knew, therefore, that he was coming from Uncle Benny's house, and, as the car swerved and wheeled in, she ran out into the hall to meet him.

HE came in without taking off hat or coat; she could see that he was perturbed, greatly agitated.

"What is it, father?" she demanded. "What has happened?"

"I do not know, my dear."

"It is something—something that has happened to Uncle Benny?"

"I am afraid so, dear—yes. But I do not know what it is that has happened, or I would tell you."

He put his arm about her and drew her into a room opening off the hall—his study. He made her repeat again to him the conversation she had had with Uncle Benny and tell him how he had acted: but she saw that what she told him did not help him. He seemed to consider it carefully, but in the end to discard or disregard it.

Then he drew her toward him.

"Tell me, little daughter. You have been a great deal with Uncle Benny and have talked with him; I want you to think carefully. Did you ever hear him speak of any one called Alan Conrad?"

She thought. "No, father."

"No reference ever made by him at all to either name—Alan or Conrad?"

"No, father."

"No reference either to any one living in Kansas, or to a town there called Blue Rapids?"

"No father. Who is Alan Conrad?"

"I do not know, dear. I never heard the name until to-day, and Henry Spearman had never heard it. But it appears to be intimately connected in some way with what was troubling Uncle Benny yesterday. He wrote a letter yesterday to Alan Conrad in Blue Rapids and mailed it himself; and afterward he tried to get it back, but it already had been taken up and was on its way. I have not been able to learn anything more about the letter than that. He seems to have been excited and troubled all day; he talked queerly to you, and he quarreled with Henry, but apparently not about anything of importance. And to-day that name, Alan Conrad, came to me in quite another way, in a way which makes it certain that it is closely connected with whatever has happened to Uncle Benny. You are quite sure you never heard him mention it, dear?"

"Quite sure, father."

HE released her and, still in his hat and coat, went swiftly up the stairs. She ran after him and found him standing before a highboy in his dressing room. He unlocked a drawer in the highboy, and from within the drawer he took a key. Then, still disregarding her, he hurried back down-stairs.

As she followed him, she caught up a wrap and pulled it around her. He had told the motor, she realized now, to wait; but as he reached the door, he turned and stopped her.

"I would rather you did not come with me, little daughter. I do not know at all what it is that has happened—I will let you know as soon as I find out." The finality in his tone stopped her from argument.