

is a natural consequence of his present state. The nurse will be present—a most capable woman. I shall call again later. Miss Torrance, if I may have the honor of driving you safely home—

"Thank you, doctor. No, I shall stay here. My maid can make me comfortable, or if not, then I shall have to be uncomfortable. I do not budge until Mark is better."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the doctor. "Your spirit is wonderful, my dear Miss Torrance. I only hope your body may not suffer for it afterwards."

"My dear man, don't fuss! You know I cannot stand fuss. If you miss your daily call at Amberley Avenue, go and call on Jane. She has been eating too much sweet stuff and thinks she is getting the measles." She waved him away with quick gestures of her transparent hands and the big doctor accepted his dismissal with good grace.

"Miriam," said her brother, "It is like you to want to stay, but if it will injure your health—"



"It can not injure what I haven't got, and I am going to stay. Give me your arm, Adam. I want to go and see the boy. I must get a look at the nurse. I don't believe in nurses. Never saw one yet who didn't need more waiting on than the patient. I hope you have plenty of servants? With a nurse to do for, one might just as well prepare to entertain royalty—", and grumbling in a voice which she tried in vain to render subdued, she toiled up the wide and shallow stair case leaning upon her brother's arm. The nurse (who might easily have heard the remarks upon her possible character) met them at the door and motioned her into silence.

Mark was lying upon the bed. Such a strange Mark, with bandaged arm and white swathed head and restless eyes, bright with fever. Mr. Torrance thought with quick concern that even without the bandages he looked thinner and older than when he went away. There was a peculiar odor, also, in the room. An odor which recalled to him with strange vividness the room in which his wife had died. He shuddered.

"Pshaw!" said Aunt Miriam. "It's only anti-septics!"

"Hush!" The nurse raised a protesting finger, but the patient on the bed laughed weakly.

"Hullo, Auntie!" he said, but his eyes wandered past his adopted father unseeing.

"Mark," said Mr. Torrance.

"I can't attend to you just now, Mr. Macgregor," said Mark, in a matter of fact tone. "I want to talk to Auntie."

"Don't you know me, Mark?"

"Certainly, Macgregor. I'd know you anywhere. But don't bother me. I'm not going any farther with you this trip. I'm wanted at home."

"But, dear boy—"

"Don't argue with him!" warned the nurse.

Again the sick man's fancy veered. He looked up into his Uncle's face with a mischievous smile.

"Sly old Auntie!" he whispered, "Weren't you afraid to tell that fib?"

Adam Torrance drew back with a sigh. "He doesn't know me at all," he said. "You try, Miriam."

The little old lady bent tremulously over him.

"Do you know me, Mark?"

Her voice seemed to touch a train of memory. "Did you bring her?" he asked, anxiously. "You had her, you know. Where is she?"

"You are exciting the patient," said the nurse coldly. Miss Torrance waved her away.

"Who is it you want me to bring, Mark?"

But he had lost the thread again. "I want a bun," he said. "No, not a bun, a red waggon—no, that doesn't sound right. How funny!" He began to laugh weakly.

"I must ask you to leave the patient now," interposed the nurse. "Excitement is bad for him."

"If he wants anything, he ought to get it. The doctor said so," declared Aunt Miriam, stubbornly.

"Certainly—if you know what it is he wants. I presume," with a little prim smile, "that it is not a bun or a red waggon."

"I used to give him buns when he was a child," said the old lady with a suspicious choke.

Suddenly the unbandaged arm on the bed shot out and Mark's hand grasped hers convulsively. For a moment his eyes seemed clear. "Auntie! Did you bring her?"

"Say 'Yes,'" commanded the nurse.

"Yes, certainly," said Aunt Miriam. "Go to sleep!" A faint smile spread over the invalid's face.

"Good old Auntie!" he said, but as she bent over him to say good night, he did not know her. Calling her Miss O'Hara, he warned her not to forget the "O."

The nurse motioned them both away, peremptorily, and following them into the next room, closed the door.

"He is showing more excitement than the doctors expected," she said thoughtfully. "It will be well to quiet him if we can. Perhaps it would be possible to have the young lady in the house in case he frets for her again."

"What young lady?" asked Miss Torrance sharply. The nurse seemed mildly surprised.

"The one he asked for," she replied. "I presumed that you would know."

"I don't know. I have no idea. I know of no one whom he could possibly want! Do you, Adam?"

Mr. Torrance shook his head.

"Then it is someone whom you do not know," concluded the nurse placidly.

The brother and sister exchanged a quick and guilty look. A look which the nurse saw and interpreted in her own way. "It may not be absolutely necessary to send for her," she said practically. "Perhaps I can quiet him. I'll try." She disappeared into the patient's room.

"What impudence!" snapped Aunt Miriam.

"What did she mean?" asked Adam Torrance. "Did she think that we were deliberately—"

"Lying? Yes, she did. She evidently thinks that we know of someone whom Mark—do you suppose he might be wanting to see Alice Van Slyke, Adam?"

"No. In fact I may say that I am quite sure that it is not Miss Van Slyke. He told me as much before he went away."

"Perhaps he has met someone in Vancouver," suggested Miss Torrance nervously.

"Perhaps—I don't know."

They exchanged another guilty look and then Aunt Miriam gave in.

"I am afraid you do know," she said ruefully. "I am afraid we both know that he does not want anyone in Vancouver."

"You think it is—"

"I am quite sure it is."

"You are sure he was really taken with Miss—er—"

"Brown. Yes, Adam. I'm afraid I'm sure."

Adam Torrance smiled, but he was not the man to remain undecided in such an emergency. "Then we must send for Miss Brown," he said drily.

"Do you know where to send, Adam?"

"No," still more drily, "but I shouldn't be at all surprised if you do."

Miss Torrance had the face to blush. "Well," she declared, "perhaps it's lucky for us all that I do know. I thought I was a sentimental fool for taking the girl's address, but she interested me. I'm sure the address was enough to frighten anyone. She lives in Brook Street—actually! Number 1620, I think, room 26—fancy living in a room with a number!"

"Brook Street!" exclaimed Mr. Torrance. "You can't mean Brook Street? Why, it is in Brook Street that some of my employees live. (I was there this afternoon). Those other Miss Browns of whom I told you live there. It can't be the same? You said yourself they were not the same! You remember? When I asked you if she worked in a store? You said, No." Mr. Torrance's excitement was making him slightly incoherent.

"She didn't work in any store—when I saw her," said Miss Torrance. Her brother eyed her sternly. "But she may have afterwards. How was I to know?"

"The young lady of whom I spoke to you," said Mr. Torrance, "was called Christine."

Aunt Miriam tried to look surprised. "How very strange! I believe that the young lady of whom I spoke to you was called Christine, also."

The opening of the door interrupted his answer. "Excuse me, Mr. Torrance," said the nurse. "But the patient is very restless. The lady he seems to wish to see is called Christine. I don't know—"

"Thank you, nurse. I think that is all that is necessary. She shall be sent for."

"You need not look like that!" said Miss Torrance, recovering. "I really did not know whether the Miss Brown in whom you were interested was the same Miss Brown in whom Mark—was interested! I may have suspected. But it was quite true that, when I saw her, she did not work in any store. And you said yourself that you wished to consider her case without prejudice."

"I am not blaming you, Miriam. It is probably as well that I did not know—I can hardly realize it now that I do know. It seems too fantastic. I feel like a child who has frightened itself into a bogie which never existed."

Meaning?—

"Meaning the other Miss Brown! I may as well say at once," he went on simply, "that if Mark is in love with Miss Christine, I can wish him happiness. She is as sweet as she is beautiful and, Miriam, whatever her name may be, she is a lady!"

"Hoity, toity!" said Miss Miriam, "Whoever said she wasn't?"

Mr. Torrance's grave face brightened. One threatened calamity had not turned out so badly after all. One cloud had already cleared and the bogie of Miss Brown had vanished for ever. In her place stood Christine! He wondered why the mere thought of her made his heart feel warm.

"Do you think she will come?" he asked.

Miss Miriam thought that she would. Even if she did not care at all for Mark she would probably not refuse to see him.

But fate, tireless in concocting evil, had still another blow in store; for when the automobile returned she did not come. Instead, there was Ada, very pale, her poor eyes red with tears, and Tommy with bad news in every line of his anxious face.

Christine, they said, was gone. She had not come home as usual from the Stores. She had sent no word. She was not with any of their few friends. Christine had disappeared!

CHAPTER XXIV.

"BUT where is she?" Even as he spoke Adam Torrance realized the foolishness of his words. Tommy's stern face and Ada's tears were eloquent of that unanswered question.



"She can't possibly be really gone, you know," said Aunt Miriam. "She may very well have a friend of whom you have not thought. It is not late yet. She may have had dinner somewhere and gone on to the theatre."

Ada gave a half hysterical laugh. "Oh, no," she said. "You do not understand. One does not have dinner and go on to the theatre—in Brook Street!"

"We have been searching since half past six o'clock," said Tommy. "Were there any natural explanation of her absence we should have found her long ago."

"But my dear Mr. —"

"Burns," said Tommy.

"My dear Mr. Burns, what can possibly have happened?"

"We do not know. When this message from Mr. Torrance came we thought at first that it brought news; but as it was only a request for her to come here we thought it wise to come and tell you."

"We thought," said Ada softly, "that you might be able to help us."

"We shall certainly do that," said Mr. Torrance, and to give his assurance greater weight he drew his chair closer to hers and let his firm hand rest a moment upon her trembling one. "There must be a very simple explanation somewhere. But it may need a trained mind to find it. Fortunately, the very man we need is in the house—or should be."

He rang the bell and when the butler appeared, "Benson, is Mr. Johnson here yet?"

"Yes, sir. He said he had an appointment, sir. He is in the small reception room."

"Ask him to kindly step this way."

"You see," he explained to his puzzled guests, "I am engaged at present in a search myself and this is the hour at which Mr. Johnson makes his report. If we tell him your difficulty—"

"Oh!" Ada drew a deep breath of relief, but Tommy's face grew more troubled.



"Must it be made public?" he asked uneasily. The blind girl's sightless eyes turned to him in surprise. "Why not?" she asked.

There was something in the simple question which made the blood rush into Tommy's round face. "Only that publicity is not pleasant," he answered stiffly.

"But it need not be made public at all," Mr. Torrance answered them. "Mr. Johnson is a private detective and—"

"Mr. Johnson, sir," announced Benson, throwing open the door.

The big detective surveyed the agitated group with a benevolent air and the effect of his entrance was not unlike that of a doctor into a sick room. He brought confidence into the midst of fear. True, he was only a man with a brain like other men's and no abnormal faculty for the solving of mysteries; but his strength lay in the fact that mystery did not appal him or rob him of his confidence. He lived, as it were, on mystery and long familiarity had, as usual, bred contempt.

This serene being listened to Ada's faltered story with an air encouragingly blase. He did not falter into surprised and purposeless questioning, like Mr. Torrance, nor did he suggest dinner and theatres, like his bewildered sister; instead, he merely said, "Ah!" and one felt immediately that this was the acme of wisdom.

"We will, first of all, get the facts," said he, briskly, producing a serviceable note book. Ada, who had just finished telling her story, looked slightly bewildered and Mr. Torrance interposed with—

"I think that Miss Brown has already told you all she knows."

The detective smiled. "And also a great deal that she does not know," he agreed, blandly. "When one knows very little one naturally theorizes a great deal. But at this stage theorizing will not help us. We must get nothing but the facts. Therefore you will excuse me if I put a few questions."

"How long has your sister been employed in Angers & Son?"

Ada gave the required dates and they saw them duly recorded in the note-book.

"Her age?"

"Sixteen—or thereabouts."

"Or thereabouts?" in surprise. Poor Ada blushed. "I am not absolutely sure within a few months," she faltered.

"Surely a month or two does not matter, Johnson?" Mr. Torrance's tone was impatient.

"Perhaps not, in this case; but in some cases even a day or two might make every difference. Well, then—was the young lady pretty, homely, or—just ordinary?"

"I can answer that," said Miss Torrance. "Miss Brown was far more than merely pretty, she was, in fact, unusually lovely."

"Ah!" said the detective. Tommy moved uneasily.

"In what part of the Stores did her work lie?"

"At the ribbon counter."

"That is the counter just opposite the main entrance?"

"Yes."

"Had she ever, within the last few weeks or months, spoken of going away anywhere?"

"No."

"Where would she be likely to visit had she had such a holiday in view?"

"Nowhere—really, there is nowhere. We know so few people—none whom Christine would be likely to care to visit."

"No school friend?"

"Christine had school friends but she never went to their homes, because they might not have cared to come to ours."

"How about relations?"

"We are absolutely alone."

"And I understand you to say that you have already enquired at every place where you think she might possibly have gone?"

"Every place."

"And now, pardon me, but you know one must have no secrets from a detective—was there a young man in the case?"

"Oh!" Ada's exclamation was a gasp. "Certainly not," she added with dignity.

The detective made a note and then looked up. This time he looked at Tommy, who was very red. "You had better speak out if you know anything," he advised him.

"I! Why I can't—I—I don't know anything!" stuttered poor Tommy.

"Oh," said the detective, with a meaning glance. "Well, see you later! In the meantime—" But Ada's voice broke in sharply—

"Tommy—what is it? Oh, Tommy, do you know anything you haven't told?"