

I have my doubts. You have been in the city for a whole week."

"Yes, by Jove, I have! How the days fly. Well, isn't it time I came to see you?"

"If you had wanted to come."

"I should have come sooner. Naturally, and I would have come sooner, only I couldn't, you see. The governor has just kept me on the dead tear. It's been awful! Fact."

"Was part of the dead tear dancing attendance on Alice Van Slyke?" politely.

"Why, yes. You know—don't you?"

This enigmatic phrase seemed so full of hidden meaning that the old lady could not, for pride's sake, repudiate the knowledge. She nodded sagely. "Ah, that! Well, Alice Van Slyke is a fine girl."

"Yes. Bully!" absently. Mark's dark eyes had already searched every corner of the room in vain. "Yes, she is a very fine girl. She says she comes over to see you often. Old people get so lonely!"

"Do they?" with asperity. "I did not know it."

"Oh, you're not old, Auntie. I told Alice so. And of course you won't be lonely now that you have that nice young girl staying with you, Miss—er—what's-her-name?" (Mark considered this remarkably clever).

"Oh!" The old lady's tone was dry. "And was it Miss Van Slyke who told you that I had Miss—er—what's-her-name staying with me?"

"No—oh no! I just happened to see her come in at the gate."

The old lady put down her glasses. "I see," she said. "Martha give me my salts. Mark, your visit to me this morning, your solicitude, is quite touching! But you know I am an invalid. I cannot bear much excitement. You must excuse me. Incidentally, you have made a mistake. Miss—er—what's-her-name is not staying here. Martha, ring for Jane to show Mr. Wareham out."

For a moment Mark Wareham's handsome face flushed angrily, and then suddenly he laughed. His Aunt smiled grimly. "You see I know you, Mark," she said.

"Looks like it. But Auntie, aren't you going to let me see her?"

"I have no one staying with me, nephew."

"Aunt, it's not like you to tell fibs. I saw her."

"Then you have the advantage of me. I have not seen her."

"She is the most perfectly lovely child. Really, Aunt, I only want to look at her. You know how an artist delights in beauty."

"I know. But you have made a mistake this time, Mark. Must I call in the servants to protest that I have no visitor of any kind at present?"

"Oh, forgive me, Aunt! I must have mistaken the house. Really, if you had seen her you would not blame me for wanting another look!"

"It is alright," magnanimously. "And I may say that if I had a lovely child staying with me I would not be afraid to let you see her. Thank Heaven for that, Mark!"

He went over to her and kissed her wrinkled forehead. For an instant his face was serious. "Yes, thank heaven for that!" he said. At the door he paused. "Say Auntie, you've seen a lot of life in your day. Tell me—is there anything in—in that kind of thing?"

"I am not a mind reader, nephew!"

"Well, I mean in seeing someone, you know, and knowing all at once that you never saw anyone just like them—her, I mean, and feeling—"

"I understand. Why, yes. There is probably something in it. It has happened to you once or twice already, hasn't it?"

"By Jove, no! nothing like it. Girls," with a comprehensive gesture, "there are so many girls. They're all alike! Except, Auntie, I really thought I saw her come in here."

"You must have been mistaken, Mark."

When he had gone the old lady looked after him with a softened face. "Not a bit like his father!" she thought. "Not a bit, but a good lad—he will settle down some day. I wonder whom he thought he saw."

"Send in the reading-woman now, Martha," she said aloud.



CHAPTER IX.

THE "reading-woman" followed the maid down the corridor with courageous mien. It would never do to give way to nervousness now that the goal was in sight. Only let her be brave for another few moments and success would be hers.

"What did you say your name was?" asked the maid.

"Christine Brown."

The maid opened the door. "Miss Brown to see you, Mam," she announced, and to Christine, in a whisper, "Go right in. Never mind the dark. Her eyes aren't strong. Don't talk loud, it hurts her head."

"Don't stand there, come right in!" The voice from the invalid's room was so robust that Christine jumped. "Don't bang the door! Gracious! I thought I asked you not to bang the door. Martha, my salts! Please come nearer, Miss Brown. Sit where I can see you!"

It was the invalid herself who spoke, and so amazing was the effect of so large a voice from so small a person that Christine obeyed in bewildered silence. She had intended to be very acute and observing, but she found herself unable to observe anything save the odd figure in the invalid's chair. Indeed Miss Torrance was enough to engage anyone's whole attention. She was so little, so wizened, that her appearance was positively startling. And her voice! when she spoke Miss Torrance appeared to be all voice.

"Don't stare!" boomed the voice, irritably. Christine dropped her eyes.

"If there is anything I dislike it is a person who stares," continued Miss Torrance, staring very hard

herself. "Why, you are a perfect child! How old are you?"

"Going on seventeen."

"Far too young! I didn't advertise for a baby."

What is your mother thinking of?"

"I have no mother, Miss Torrance."

"I thought not. Dead, I suppose, or you would not be here. Well, I never judge from appearances. You may read a little from that book on the table, the green one. I am quite sure that you will not do. But I am always fair. I never form conclusions without good reasons. Begin where you find the book-marker." The invalid closed her eyes with a resigned expression.

Christine picked up the book. She knew that she was a good reader and the knowledge brought back some of her confidence. Her clear low voice was very pleasant to hear.

"Not bad, not bad at all," admitted the invalid.

"But I don't suppose you could keep it up. I am not pessimistic, but I always distrust good beginnings."

"Oh, I think I could keep it up!" said Christine quickly. "Really I do." As she leaned forward her face came fully into the light, looking so lovely in its young eagerness that the invalid started involuntarily and put up her glasses.



"My dear!" she said in a different tone, "did you meet a young man as you came in here?"

"No," said Christine, truthfully.

"Did you see a young man?"

"No—yes. One got out of an automobile a little farther down the street. I think he had lost something."

"Was he tall, dark, and quite too good-looking for any useful purpose?"

"I'm afraid I did not notice," faltered Christine. She could see no reason for the questions, but the little old lady was evidently excited.

"Did he speak to you, my dear?"

"I think he said 'By Jove,'" said the girl demurely.

"Um, very likely. Well, this is a nice state of affairs. Lost something, had he, the scamp! And no wonder he thought I was lying—" She checked herself. Her sharp old eyes rested more kindly on the girl's wondering face, but her determination was immediately taken.

"All this is beside the point," she said briskly. "My dear, you read very well, but I am afraid that you would not suit me. I am a very cranky old woman and you are too young to be patient. Don't protest. I believe in being fair and in giving people a chance, but I know that the young are never patient with the old. And I would always feel guilty if I kept you in this close room when you ought to be out in the sunshine. I inherit the Torrance conscience, and it is a great trouble to me!"

There was a kindness in her voice which largely took the sting from the rejection. Christine felt an impulse of liking, and raising her eyes said frankly, "I think I could be patient, Miss Torrance, but if it would worry you to have me, of course—" The old lady nodded. She had noticed at once Christine's neat dress and good shoes, and decided that this was not a case of urgent need, so that "the troublesome Torrance conscience" could not accuse her of harshness.

"Then we will consider it settled," she said. "And if you will not mind a word of advice from an old woman, I would tell you to go home and try to be useful there. You are much too young and too pretty to work for yourself, unless it is absolutely necessary."

Christine flushed. "It is absolutely necessary," she said, rising. Then, proudly fearful that she might seem to appeal for pity, she added a quick, rather stiff "Good morning," and left the room.

The old lady watched the closing door ruefully. "Most unfortunate," she murmured. "But it would never have done. Martha," to the maid, "you could see it would never have done to have her here. Pretty? The child is lovely! Mark would have been wild over her in a week. What did you say her name was? Brown? Might just as well have been Smith. Do you know whom she looked like? She looked for all the world like my youngest sister, Mona. She was a belle when I was already passe. How I used to envy her. Adam simply adored her—he used to call her honey-bee on account of her hair. This child's hair is just like it. Poor Mona, she died very young. Likenesses are strange things!"

The maid smiled grimly. "Likenesses or no, she'll have some trouble getting anything respectable with that face," she remarked. "In her walk of life I always say that beauty is a drawback as often as not." She glanced complacently at her own prim features in the mirror. Her mistress, observing the glance, smiled. "And what would you say Miss Brown's walk in life might be, Martha?"

The maid shook her head, slowly. "Oh, she's got airs and graces enough! But you never can tell. Shop girls are getting very dressy these days, what with their false hair and all! And ladies don't go about looking for work."

"The child said it was absolutely necessary."

The maid's prim lips came together sharply. It was evident that she had her own opinion about what "the child" might have said.

Miss Torrance sighed. "Well, I could not have taken her! Though if Mark hadn't come in I might have. I liked the child. She had a voice like music. It was most selfish of Mark, most inconsiderate! I wonder if he was going to call on Alice van Slyke, when he saw her? It looks as if Adam were making rather a point of Alice. Well, it can't be helped—Martha, I'll see no more applicants to-day."

"There are three waiting, Ma'am"

"Send them away. That girl has spoiled me for anything more ordinary. It would not be fair to hear them now, and I always try to be absolutely fair."

It was of this "fairness" of Miss Torrance that Christine was thinking as she walked cityward with a heavy heart. Why had she, who believed in being so fair, refused to give a trial to one so eminently fitted as Christine? On account of her youth?

Christine had read in books that invalid ladies liked youth. In the proper order of things Miss Torrance ought to have engaged her at once. Soon she would have made herself indispensable; the old lady would have loved her like a daughter, and finally have decorously faded away leaving Christine her blessing and, incidentally, her beautiful home and plenty of money! Here Christine's sense of humor saved the situation. She laughed heartily, and laughter is a good clearing house for gloom. After all, what was one check? One must not expect to succeed the very first time! Pausing for a moment, she drew out the second newspaper clipping.

WANTED—Cheerful companion for lady living alone. No housework. Good wages.

This sounded promising. "I should think she would want someone young," mused Christine. "Young people are more cheerful. Probably all her people are dead. Poor thing, it must be awful to be lonely like that."

The address, this time, was in another part of the city, distant, but easily reached by car. Christine was much too innocent to know that the street mentioned was in somewhat questionable quarters. She only knew that she had never been in that direction before, so that the sauce of novelty was added to the adventure. As the car whirled on she gave herself up or more to dreams. This lady to whom she was going was surely in great need. She pictured her in black with a sad face. It was too bad that she lived so far from Brook Street! Christine peered out of the window of the car to find out just where she was, but the street was a strange one. As she did so she noticed a young man in a motor whose face seemed vaguely familiar. The motor was going very slowly—for a motor. It seemed indeed to keep just abreast of the car! but here the girl's interest was distracted by the crowing of a pretty baby on the opposite seat and her eyes ceased to follow the slowly moving motor.

At the corner of Hadly Street, she alighted, and, after consulting her slip of paper for the proper number, she set off gaily in the direction indicated. It did not look like a pleasant street, yet the girl felt no dismay. She only felt sorry that a bereaved lady should be compelled to live in such an ugly part of the city.

But if her surroundings left Christine undisturbed, the same cannot be said of the young man in the motor car. When he saw her turn into Hadly Street, blank dismay seized upon Mark Wareham. The car slowed irresolutely, turned, stopped entirely, and then started again with new decision. It, too, turned into Hadly Street.

When Mark had left his Aunt's house he had fully believed that the old lady was not deceiving him. She had evidently no guest at present, and he must have been mistaken in thinking that the lady he sought for had gone in at her gate. On the other hand, there was the evidence of his eyes, and his eyes were not bad as eyes go. If she had not gone in there she had disappeared somewhere in that neighborhood, and her disappearance had added the spice of mystery to an interest already keen enough.

The only thing to do was to wait, and Mark waited. The chauffeur he sent home, and, driving the car himself, he patrolled Amberley Avenue with such efficiency that he soon saw Christine coming out—and out of his Aunt's gate!

Had Aunt Miriam fibbed, after all?

He did not care to settle the question now. The main thing was not to lose sight of the lady a second time. Effacing himself as far as possible in a big Panhard he watched her take a slip of paper from her pocket, read it and board a down-town car at the corner, evidently she was searching for an address; he would search too, and the blame for such seemingly dishonorable action might be laid at the door of Aunt Miriam, who had made such procedure necessary.



Christine sat by the car window, once in a while she glanced out, but as she never seemed to notice him his presence could not offend her; besides a cat may look at a king.

Where was she going? As the better portions of the city were left behind he wondered more and more, and watched the unconscious face at the window with no little concern. When he saw her alight at Hadly Street he gasped with dismay. That lovely child—here!

Quite happy, and with no idea of causing distress in anyone, Christine walked on, looking carefully at the house numbers. The houses, she thought, were not nice-looking houses, but the one she sought looked rather nicer than the others. It seemed comfortable and had a small garden. But it certainly did appear to be lonely. Christine wondered how it could look so lonely in the midst of a long city street, but long streets are very lonely sometimes—especially when the houses are so much alike. Christine thought that a lady living here would need a very cheerful companion indeed. She felt her own spirits sink a little. Nevertheless, she rang the bell with resolute hand. As she did so an automobile passed down the street. After a slight delay the door was opened by an untidy maid.

"I have come in answer to this advertisement," said Christine, determined this time to have no misunderstanding. But this house had no side door and the maid showed her in at once.

"I'll tell her," she said, eyeing Christine curiously. "Just sit down."

The room into which Christine was shown was evidently the parlor, and bore its state in life with dignity. It might have been its boast that no one could ever have mistaken it for anything but a parlor. It had a "suite," a piano, a palm, a polished table with the poets nicely laid out in padded leather, and each wall displayed exactly two pictures hung at the same height and at regular intervals. Christine shivered. "But she can't possibly live in here!" she comforted herself, and, with a glance at the precise