

of music, followed by a long salvo of applause. Laura's cheeks flamed with impatience, she hurried after Mrs. Cressler; Cortrell drew the curtains for her to pass, and she entered.

Inside it was dark, and a prolonged puff of hot air, thick with the mingled odours of flowers, perfume, upholstery, and gas, enveloped her upon the instant. It was the unmistakable, unforgettable, entrancing aroma of the theatre, that she had known only too seldom, but that in a second set her heart galloping.

Every available space seemed to be occupied. Men, even women, were standing up, compacted into a suffocating pressure, and for the moment everybody was applauding vigorously. On all sides Laura heard:

"Bravo!"

"Good, good!"

"Very well done!"

"Encore! Encore!"

Between the peoples' heads and below the low dip of the overhanging balcony—a brilliant glare in the surrounding darkness—she caught a glimpse of the stage. It was set for a garden; at the back and in the distance a château; on the left a bower, and on the right a pavilion. Before the foolights, a famous contralto, dressed as a boy, was bowing to the audience, her arms full of flowers.

"Too bad," whispered Cortrell to Laura, as they followed the others down the side-aisle to the box. "Too bad, this is the second act already; you've missed the whole first act—and this song. She'll sing it over again, though, just for you, if I have to lead the applause myself. I particularly wanted you to hear that."

Once in the box, the party found itself a little crowded, and Jadwin and Cressler were obliged to stand, in order to see the stage. Although they all