

first marriages were tragic mistakes, so the emotional field is really clear.

Now Molly's editor-in-chief was, so far as is known, quite happy with his wife, and his four daughters were not so much younger than Molly herself. It is true, the art editor of the Sunday edition was supposed to be pretty far gone, but he was married, too, and even his stenographer, who was furiously jealous, admitted that Molly never gave him the slightest encouragement. Such reporters as were free to do so are generally credited with proposals in strict order of income (there had to be some working system) but nothing but continued good feeling ever came of it.

THE French portrait painter who spent three days at the Metropolitan Art Museum with her out of the ten he vouchsafed America, declared openly that she was perfectly cold, a charming, clever boy in temperament—"absolutely insulated." And perhaps she was. She always said that she knew too many men to take them too seriously. And yet when Kathryn remarked once that it was encouraging to observe how women were gradually growing independent of men, Molly laughed consumedly. So there, as the great Anglo-American novelist says, you are!

Living, as she did, alone, utterly unrestricted in her goings, uncensored except by her own common sense, one readily imagines that there may have been scenes . . . how could they have been avoided, mankind being as it is? But if her house was of glass, it was by its very nature transparent, and I do not see how anyone who didn't deserve it could have kept the consistent respect of the entire force of *The Day*.

On her twenty-eighth birthday she came home from a very gay supper at a very gay restaurant with a hard pain at the back of her neck and a deep wrinkle from it between her eyebrows. They had been harder of late, these headaches, and lasted longer, and this one not only failed to yield to the practised massage of her kindly housemaid, but baffled the doctor and left her, finally, a pallid, shaken creature, who saw written on every wall in the little apartment, as she dragged herself about it, *I must not take any coal-tar preparation because my heart simply won't stand it!*

A vacation seemed a simple remedy, and she started out, bent on one, with the kindest orders to make it long, accompanied by large credit; but the promised renewal of vitality did not come, and the taste seemed gone from everything. The quaint and tiny little fishing hamlet she had fixed upon as a good place for gathering "material" by the way, proved all and more than she had been led to hope for, and when the greatest north-easter that had blown for fifty years bruised and tore the rugged little coast, she "wrote it up" as a matter of course—as a bird-dog points or a carrier pigeon wheels for home. And then Molly Dickett received what was literally her first set-back in ten years; the city editor sent her copy back to her!

"You're too tired, my dear girl," he wrote. "Why not wait a bit? Or pad this out and point it up a little in the middle and send it to one of the magazines. Peterson covered it for us, anyway, at Kennebunkport. The cubs send you an officeful of affection, and we are all yours truly."

BUT the "cubs" never hung over her desk again, for Molly never returned to it.

"You see," as she explained to them, gently, "I lost my nerve—that's all. If I hadn't sent the stuff it would have been all right, later, I suppose. But I did send it, and I thought it was O.K., and if it was as rotten as you said, why, how could I ever tell, again? Anyway, I'm tired."

They protested, but the city editor shook his head.

"Let her alone," he said, shortly, "it's straight enough. I've seen it happen before. She's gone too far without a check; I don't believe women can stand it. Let her alone."

And when the most talented of the "cubs" went next to interview Mrs. Julia Carter Sykes as to her recently dramatized novel, he was referred to her secretary—and it was Molly.

"For heaven's sake!" he said, angrily, "are you insane? Wasn't it true that Slater offered—"

"Oh, yes," said Molly, negligently, "but I'm tired of offices."

"I suppose you get time for writing your own stuff—on the side?" he suggested, awkwardly, but Molly shook her head.

"Writing seems bad for the back of the neck," she said, with a gray flash out of the tail of her eye for the cub.

"We're getting ready for the sanatorium this morning—sun baths and Swedish Movement Cure and grape diet. Of course you won't mention it," she said. "She can't possibly see you—I do all the interviews now—but if you come around to-morrow, after I get the house closed, I'll give you a good one."

A solemn butler entered.

"If you would be so kind as to cast your eye over the table for the ladies' luncheon, Miss Dickett?" he said, weightily. "There's two orchids short and no time for getting more. And the salt got into the mousse, I'm told by the cook—she wished to know if you could suggest anything. And one of the ladies has been detained and cannot come—by telephone message. Will you take her place, Miss Dickett?"

"Yes," said Molly. "Tell Mrs. Carter not to worry about the orchids, Halsey, I'll arrange something. I must go and dress, now—come to-morrow," she added, hastily.

THE CRYSTAL

By

Josephine Daskam Bacon

FROM PRECEDING PAGE

"By George!" the cub gasped, and left, to electrify the office later.

"It's a darned shame!" he ended, and the other cubs nodded sagely over their pipes.

"With her talent, too!" they said . . .

You will have understood, of course, why Eleanor dropped Molly after the unfortunate Greek dancer, but you may be surprised to learn of Kathryn's attitude when she learned of the secretaryship. It wasn't dignified, she said, and she was greatly disappointed in Molly.

Kathryn was Dean of Women, now, in a coeducational college in the Middle West, and was spoken of as Dean Dickett in the college journal. Of all her children, Mrs. Dickett was proudest of Kathryn, because Molly frightened her and Eleanor patronized her. Eleanor was getting up in the world a little too fast for her mother, nowadays, and knew people Mrs. Dickett would never have dreamed of meeting in the old days—people that she had grown used to the idea of never meeting even now that Mr. Dickett was in the firm. Eleanor's little girl went to school with all the little girls on the Hill and was asked to attend their parties. Her name was Penelope, after George's mother, who had never expected it (the name being so old-fashioned) and was correspondingly delighted and had given her much jewelry already.

Eleanor, in so far as she mentioned Molly at all, had expressed her opinion that to live with Mrs. Julia Carter Sykes was the most respectable thing. Molly had yet done, and added that there were exceptional opportunities in more ways than one for the woman who held that position; would perhaps even have called on her there, but Molly never asked her to. Kathryn, to her parents' surprise, developed a stodgy but unblinking antagonism to her sister for what she called Molly's lowering of her sense of what was due to herself, and said coldly that she had no doubt her sister's life was easier now, but that it was un-American.

Un-American it may have been, but easier it assuredly was not. Unlike the factory girls and

clerks for whose benefit Mrs. Julia Carter Sykes gave readings from her unpublished works, Molly's hours were not limited, and her responsibility grew as her executive ability became increasingly manifest. The thousands of women to whom the celebrity's manifold occupations, publicities, hospitalities and charities were an endless wonder and discussion might have marveled less had they been able to follow Molly's crowded days and nights and peep through the littered desk and scribbled calendar of her study.

To amusement and interest succeeded fatigue and interest, and to these, fatigue alone. Each hurried, various day became a space of time to be got through, merely, and Mrs. Julia Carter Sykes's heavy sigh as she curled into her wicker-inlaid Circassian-walnut bed was no more heartfelt than her secretary's. If Molly had ever envied Mrs. Julia, she had long ceased to; and indeed on that final afternoon when she laid her dark, braided head on her arms and cried on her desk, she felt as sorry for the authoress as for herself.

MR. JULIA CARTER SYKES (as many of his friends called him) sat opposite her, biting his nails. He was well dressed, fond of auction-bridge, and travelled abroad in the interests of some vaguely comprehended firm.

"This will just about kill the madam," he said, despondently.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Sykes, but I really must—I must," Molly gulped.

"It isn't money, is it?" he asked, "because though I'm not a popular authoress or anything like that, I could—"

"Oh, goodness, no!" said Molly. "It's not money at all. Only I must get away."

"We've never got on so well with any of the others," he went on, jerkily, "and she's certainly awfully fond of you—the madam is. She's taken you everywhere, I know, and all the dinners, and the car wherever you—"

"Mrs. Sykes has been very kind," Molly broke in, dully, "but—oh, it's no use, Mr. Sykes. It's got to be done, and putting it off only makes her worse. So I'm going to-morrow. She'll feel better about it later."

"I hope so, I'm sure," Mr. Sykes responded, doubtfully. "She was pretty bad when I left her. That brain of hers, you know—it's a great strain, they tell me. Hard on us all, in a way."

Molly always smiled and sighed when she remembered him and the hunched shoulders that leaned drearily over the tonneau.

"Where'll I tell him?" he asked, and she drew tighter the tight line between her brows, sighed, tried to speak, and found her mind quite utterly a blank.

"Where'll I tell him?" Mr. Sykes repeated, looking curiously at her.

To save her life Molly could not have remembered where she had arranged to go! A real horror caught her. Was this the beginning of all the dreadful symptoms that few of Julia Carter Sykes's admirers suspected in their idol? She must say something, and there flashed suddenly into her mind otherwise blank of any image or phrase, an odd occurrence of the afternoon before, an occurrence she had been too tired to try even to explain.

"Drive to the docks!" she cried, sharply, and the chauffeur touched his visor, and her life poised for twenty minutes on its watershed, although she did not know it.

In the motor it came back to her, that twilight not eighteen hours back, when in clearing out her desk ("the last desk I shall ever clear, I swear!") she had happened on the little transparent glass ball, a paper-weight, she supposed, and fingered it idly, void of thought or feeling, after the last emotional storm with her celebrity.

AS she looked into it, staring, her tired mind seemed to sink and sink and submerge in the little clear white sphere till it drowned utterly, and only a rigid body, its eyes turned into its lap, sat in the still, dim room.

Presently, after what might have been hours or seconds, she seemed to gather into herself again, but could not wrench her eyes from the crystal ball,

(Continued on page 23.)