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gown, or set it on fire, perhaps. I suppose you thought the same thing. Funny, wasn't it? And how fortunate we didn't happen to be two foolish women, and shot each other out of sheer nervousness!"

"Isn't it, though? What a funny situation, anyway! It was a very ticklish minute."

"I felt very thumpy," admitted Miss Warren.

"I do still," confessed Mrs. Grayson. "You'll find the brandy in a little silver flask on my dressing-table; just enough for you. I think you are justified."

The slim, black figure disappeared between the curtains into the bedroom and reappeared with the flask. "Soda?" she said with a business-like directness.

"Ice-box," said Miss Warren. "For you," she continued; "I never touch anything."

"Nor I," said Mrs. Grayson, "except as medicine. Let's make it ginger ale."

They adjourned to the pantry and turned on the light. The larder was well stocked—cheese, crackers, cold chicken, half a cantaloup, the remains of a lobster salad.

"Miniature isn't a starvation game, evidently," observed the girl with a grin. "Are you your own cook?"

"No-o, I'm not useful at all—only ornamental."

"You're that, all right," declared Mrs. Grayson with enthusiasm. "Pretty as you are, and a good sort, too, I don't see why you're not a broker's bride."

The hostess accepted the compliment

leading nowhere — one of those strange detached events of life that suggests so much, leave such a deep impression, and seem to have no connection with the woof and color of one's rational existence.

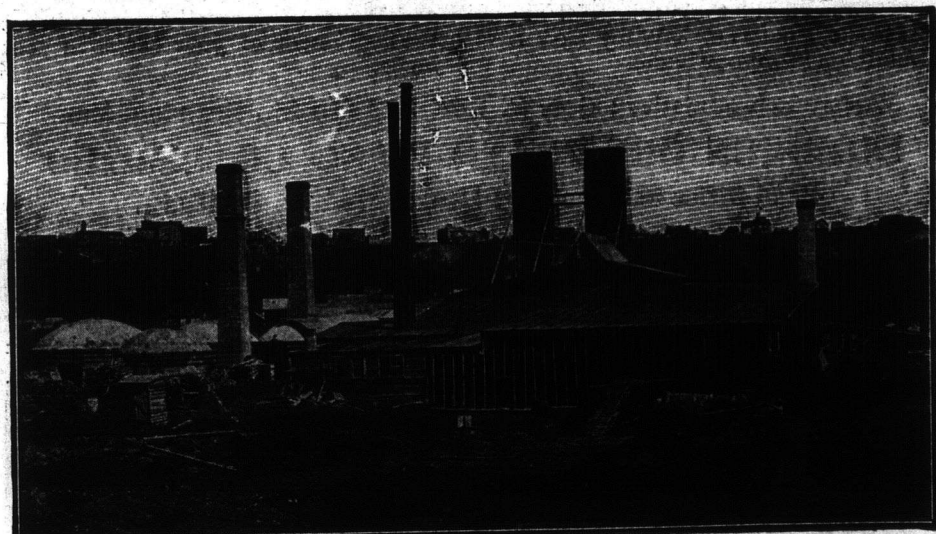
The cat stretched, sphinx-like, on the table, contemplated the dissimilar companions with unwinking eyes of liquid wisdom, seeming to comprehend the situation and find it matter for serious thought, even for vague unrest, for the tip of an anxious tail twitched time to the quick flow of talk.

Four o'clock tinkled from the clock in the front room. Already night had given place to blue dawn. The rattle of an occasional vehicle echoed in the street. The girl in black raised her eyebrows.

"Four!" she exclaimed. "How the time has bolted! I'll slip now, I think. Everything is quiet. I don't believe he's missed me yet. I'll go down to the Grand Central as if I was due for an early train—then come out as if I'd just arrived by one. I'll have to find some little hotel before there is much going on. I'm sure, Miss Ely, I'm more than grateful to you—I shan't forget any of it, you can bet your paint-box."

Miss Warren nodded. "You don't know how I've enjoyed my evening—or morning, rather. I don't say 'come again,' because it never would be the same, would it? You wouldn't be you if you arrived at the front door, rang for the elevator, and gave your card to the maid."

"Not like me at all," laughed Mrs.



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and a plate of cold salad simultaneously. "Only a moment ago you were advising me to stick to a single blessedness and leave married cussedness alone."

The girl glanced at her companion and laughed shrewdly. "Well, I meant both," she said enigmatically, "and I hope you'll be lucky whatever you do. I like you. Here's your buzz-water, and here's mine. I drink to my hostess—her very excellent health, with the sincere thanks and appreciation of hers truly—Mrs. Grayson of Nowhere."

Miss Warren bowed and smiled. "To my esteemed and self-invited guest—since finding this kind all others will be distasteful—here's her very excellent health, her successful flight from tyranny, and the sincere good wishes of hers cordially—Miss Ely, of Miniature Bohemia."

"You talk like a book," smiled the girl.

Miss Warren attacked the salad. "A good one, I hope."

"Good as Bradstreet and — money talks better than anything else. Can I say more?"

"You might ask me if I wanted some chicken."

It was a very agreeable supper they ate in the pantry. The intruder in the black walking-suit forgot her domestic trouble; the girl in blue chiffon forgot her ennui. They were heartily enjoying the unexpected entracte in the crowded play in their lives. Here was wit for wit, laugh for laugh, shrewd comment and rare philosophy. They might never meet again; it was unlikely that either would ever repeat the story of that night. The episode was unique, beginning out of nothing,

Grayson. "I'd have more sense than to do that," she added seriously. "We couldn't have had the lark of it; talked as we have, bluffed and held each other up, if things hadn't—well just happened. I wouldn't have you find out what a really ordinary sort of a fool I am. No, it's 'Good-by' and 'Heaven bless you' and 'good luck' and 'gesundheit,' but not 'au revoirs.'"

"Inartistic things," assented Miss Warren. "But I'm awfully glad I was home when you called."

"I'll get my traps, if you don't mind." Mrs. Grayson rose, drank the last drop in her glass, and turned toward the sitting-room, unsnapped the strap from the black handbag, folded it and slipped it in her pocket. "Don't need that now," she smiled. "It was convenient when negotiating fire-escapes. My revolver please."

Miss Warren hesitated. "It's been amusing. Suppose we swap. I'm not usually so silly, and yours is the best. I know, and if you don't want to—"

"Nonsense, here! Swap? Well, rather! You've been a brick to me, and the best sort of entertainer, too. I'll keep your pop-gun for luck—and mine will play you square."

"Good-by," said the hostess, extending her hand.

"Good-by," said the guest, gripping the extended palm.

"If any one meets you in the hall," added Miss Warren, "or says anything, tell them you've been stopping with me, and are off to catch an early train."

The girl smiled irresistibly. "Do you mind telling me the name of the lady I was visiting? That 'Miss Ely' business didn't go down, you know."

"Really—I'd forgotten that. Say

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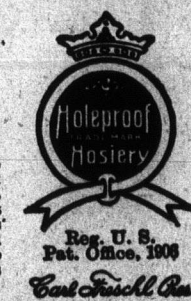
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