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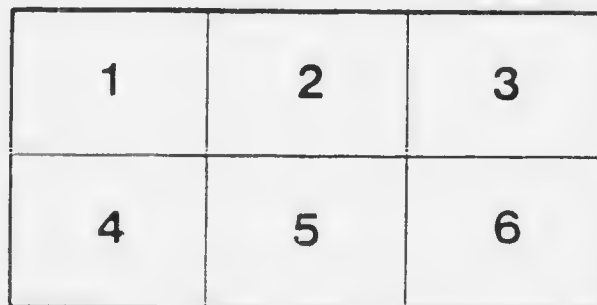
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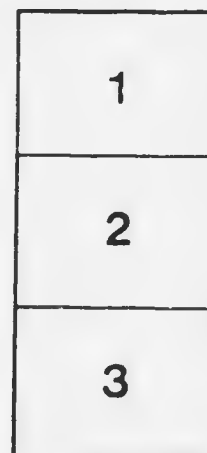
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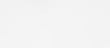
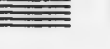
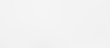
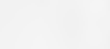
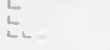
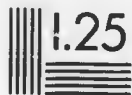
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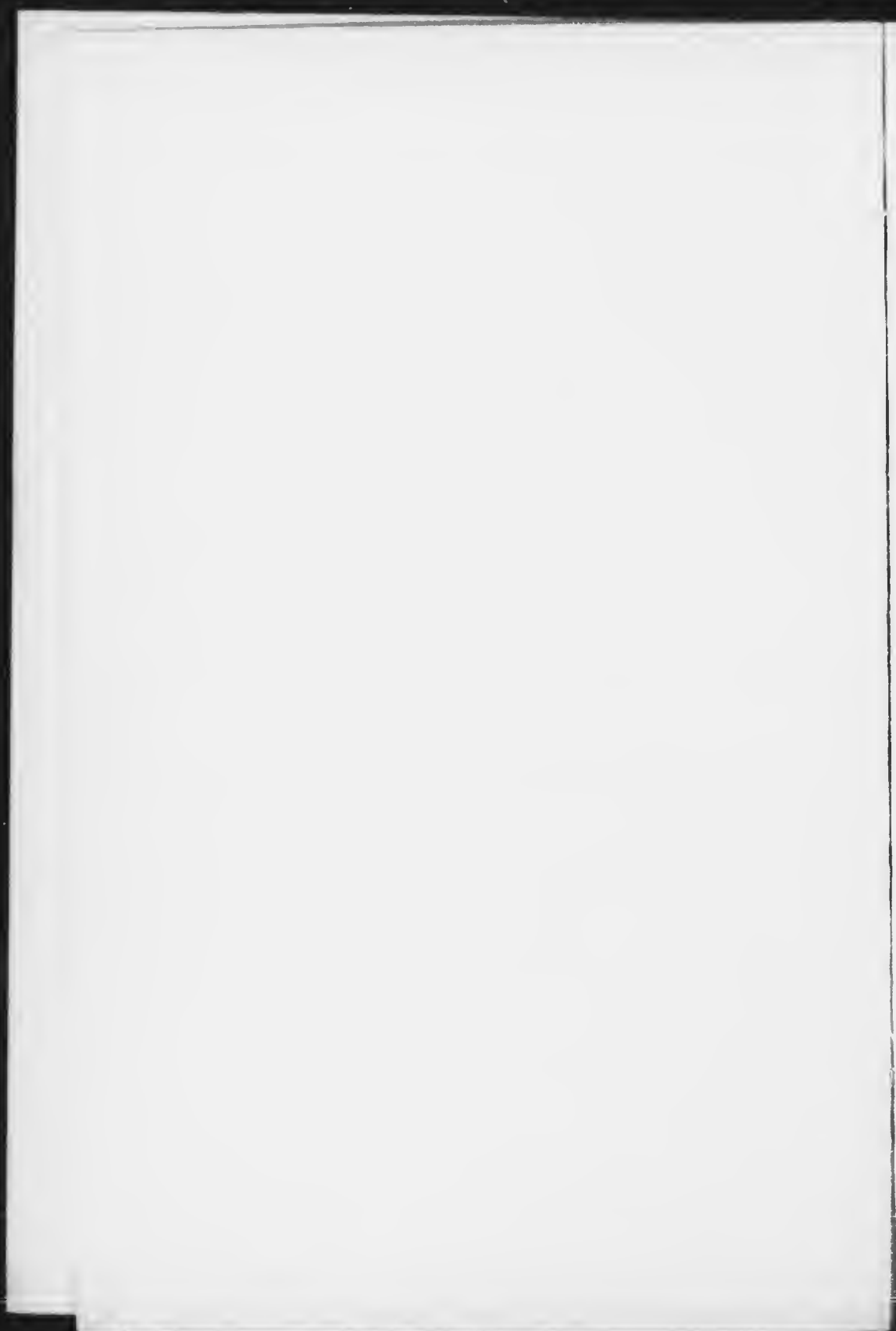
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It was very hard to resist her wistful, upturned face
[Page 306]

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“BURKESES AMY”

CHAPTER I

A SPOILED CHILD

THE trunks were all packed, locked, and strapped. The steamship company's labels had been affixed. They looked like great official stamps certifying a contract, so that if anything seemed signed, sealed, published and declared it was that Amy Burke was to sail for Europe next day.

But Amy herself was not so sure. Sitting in the confusion of her dismantled room, hearing the wind blow, watching the rain beat down dismally against her window-panes, feeling chilled inside and out, she was not at all certain she wanted to go—and what Amy did not want to do she very seldom did.

The doorknob turned. Amy looked up quickly, was across the room and in her father's arms in an instant.

“Oh, Daddy, Daddy!” she cried. “I can't go, and, what's more, I—I won't, so there!”

Mr. Burke held her close, as she clung about his neck, then fell to patting her on the back in a helpless, mannish sort of way, as if patting on the back were a cure for homesickness or any other affliction common to fifteen-year-old girls.

"It's cold in here," he ventured at last. "Let's have a fire."

Amy unclasped her clinging fingers to set him free. She knew he did not believe she meant what she said, that when he found she actually did mean it there would be trouble. But she did not mind. The sort of trouble Amy Burke had known in the course of her short, "spoiled" life was of a kind to give way immediately before a tear or so, a grieved lip or, at a pinch, two hot, flushed cheeks and a pair of extra-bright eyes. No one ever held out if Amy showed signs of "temperature." Before the word her hard, grim old grandfather quailed, her meek little aunt grew pale, and even Daddy, sensible Daddy, visibly weakened. For it was of fever that her beautiful young mother had died years ago, when Amy was a baby.

"Now then, how's that for a blaze?" asked Mr. Burke, referring to the fire he had set leaping up the chimney. "That's going to put a different face

on matters, d'you see? With everything at sixes and sevens here in the house, and Noah's flood coming down outside, I don't wonder you feel doleful. But after your trunks are out of the way—gone down to the ship—and the servants have had a chance to clear up a bit, it'll be another story. And then, to-morrow morning, the sun will be shining, the world will look like new, and you'll wake up all fresh and hungry for fun. Then—then you wouldn't give up your trip for a thousand daddies."

Amy shook her head silently, as she drew nearer the blaze with slow, dragging steps. Her father had seated himself in a big armchair before the hearth. Now she crept into his arms and laid her head against his shoulder.

"It's no use. I can't go, Daddy!" she repeated.

"Nonsense!"

Again Amy shook her head, but this time the obstinate little motion was accompanied by a still more obstinate little pronouncement: "I'm not going!"

It did not seem to occur to him to enforce his authority. To say: "You must. Your grandfather and aunt expect it. All the arrangements have been made. You can't back out at the last minute, disappointing them and upsetting their plans, when for

months past they have been counting on you." No, indeed, he never would have dreamed of saying such a thing, for, if he had, Amy's grandfather and aunt would instantly have flown to their idol's defense, with sympathy for her and blame for him, so he would have had only trouble for his pains. He had long, long ago given up all attempt to "bring up" his motherless girl. At every turn he had found himself hindered by the iron will of an arrogant old man, and the unyielding softness of a doting young woman. What he actually did during the short pause following Amy's declaration was to ponder her words and wonder what was the best way "to get around her." People always tried to get around Amy. The way did not suggest itself at once, and Daddy meditated in silence. But Amy, snuggling comfortably against his dear, rough coat, did not mind that. It was comfort enough to feel she had made her decision and was going to stick to it, that she was not going to be parted from her darling Daddy. That nothing "they" (which really meant her grandfather, for Auntie Jean didn't count)—nothing they might say could make her change her mind.

"I suppose you don't object to telling me what

you mean to do if you insist on your own way and actually stay behind," observed her father after a pause, the quizzical glint in his eye somehow seeming to slip into his voice.

"I don't know," Amy answered. "I haven't thought of that."

"Well, young lady, I think you'd better be thinking of it. This house is to be closed, you know. Boarded up, wired down, locked, and double-locked. Not even a caretaker left in charge. So you can't possibly stay here, that's certain. And you can't stay with me, because I'm going to be located in quite a different part of town. A district it gives your grandfather and aunt what Harleigh calls particular fits even to hear mentioned. I'm going to keep bachelor's hall in No. 9 Craigen Street."

"What's the matter with Craigen Street?"

"Innumerable things, my lady."

"Where under the sun is it?"

"One of the things the matter with it is that it isn't as much under the sun as it ought to be. The sun is shut out by skyscrapers all around. But nobody cares. You see, it's the slums."

Amy gasped. "And you're going to live there?"

"I'm going to keep bachelor's hall there, as I have just told you."

"Why are you going to?"

"First, because I'm not a bachelor, ma'am. Second, because the tenement floor I've hired is as far from being a hall as anything you could think of, and, third, because Craigen Street is not in the least the sort of place one would be likely to be able to keep anything in."

"You mean the people who live there are——"

"I mean the Craigen Streetites are 'just folks' like the rest of us, only unfortunately they haven't had what is called a square deal. I'm going down there to live among them because I want to find out, if I can, the reason they are in such—well, to put it politely—straitened circumstances."

"Why do you want to find out?"

"Because I'm what is called a sociologist."

Amy stared blankly up into his face for an instant.

"Why, that," she stammered painfully, "*that* is something dreadful, isn't it? Sociologists shoot presidents and things, don't they? And put dynamite where it can go off and kill lots of people just because they are rich, like—like—Grandfather."

James Burke threw back his head and laughed until Amy began to feel quite sheepish and abused. She pouted her lips at him reproachfully.

“You have hit your head on the nail with precision, my daughter. That’s exactly what a sociologist—*isn’t*. I gather you’re thinking of socialist—and then you’re wrong. If you did as you ought to do, and looked the word up in the dic’y, you’d find sociologist is ‘one who treats of, or devotes himself to the study of sociology.’ And sociology is ‘the science which investigates the laws regulating human society.’ Not a word about pistols or bombs, you observe. No, Amykin. I’m not a German anarchist, nor a Russian Nihilist, nor yet an Italian Black Hander. I’m just a plain individual who loves his fellow-man and wants to lend a hand. Only, first, he wishes to learn whom to lend it to, and which hand, d’you see? They say one-half of the world doesn’t know how the other half lives. In Craigen Street I hope to learn to know how the other half lives, if you call it living. And when I’ve seen, perhaps I can do a little to ease things up a bit. But we’re off the track. It’s not what I’m going to do, but what you are that is the question just now. Last year, when you decided that gov-

ernesses weren't in your line, and sent poor little Miss Price and the rest of the noble army of martyrs packing, you didn't seem to relish the idea of school as a substitute. Do you think you'd like it any better now?—Boarding-school?"

"Like it? I'd just despise it!"

"So I think I have heard you remark before. In fact, the trip abroad was arranged by your grandfather precisely because you do despise it, and he thought you might get a sort of smattering of education—'enough to do for a girl'—from a long dose of foreign travel. I don't agree with him, but that again has nothing to do with the point. What I want you to tell me, provided you have no objection, is—what are you planning to do when your grandfather and aunt shall have swallowed their disappointment and sailed to-morrow without you?"

Amy paused a moment. Then she brought it out very slowly, deliberately, positively:

"I'm going with you to Craigen Street."

CHAPTER II

FATHERS AND GRANDFATHERS

DADDY'S response was a long, low whistle. "I don't care, I am!" Amy challenged obstinately. "I've thought it all out since we've been sitting here and it will be as easy as pie. We'll hire another suite——" A shout of laughter from Daddy interrupted her, but she went on determinedly in spite of it: "We'll hire another floor then, if that suits you any better, in that place you spoke about, and I'll live in it with old Ellen to take care of me. I won't be a bit of bother to you and I'll go to day-school, if—if you *make* me, only—I just can't bear to be away from you, and that's all there is to it!"

Mr. Burke's gaze, fixed on the dancing flames, took no account of them at all. Instead, his mind's eye was busy seeing all the difficulties that lay in the way of Amy's plan, all the obstacles it would put in his path if she actually carried it out. Why, it was impossible. Her plan was plainly impossible.

"It can't be done, daughter," he brought out at last. "If you were to go down to Craigen Street with your motor car, and your fine clothes, and your furs, and rings and bracelets, and all the rest you are accustomed to, my poor people would be up in arms in an instant. They'd have nothing to do with us. They'd freeze me out, and they'd make it so hot for you you'd probably be glad to shake the dust of the ward off your feet in no time. Those people have their own pride, as we have ours, and they resent the thought of what they call 'rich up-towners coming to investigate them.'"

"Then I won't have the motor, or the fine clothes, or the furs, or anything," broke in Amy quickly. "I'll just wear the plainest things I've got, and I'll leave all the rest here. And if I need any plainer, Ellen can buy me the kind the girls down there wear, and I'll wear 'em. I give you my word I will. I'll never let on to a living soul you're investigating 'em and, oh, please, *please*, Daddy darling, don't say it's impossible, for it isn't, and I won't interfere with you a minute, honest I won't."

"But even if I should admit it isn't impossible from my point of view—what about your grandfather and aunt? They *might* be brought to resign

themselves to your staying behind, if they knew you were going to be here at home, with a sort of ironclad companion like the Dorrits' Mrs. General to keep an eye on you, and a flock of servants as a bodyguard. But Craigen Street, and only old Ellen in charge! Never, my child, never! You'll see they'd never consent. Moreover, I'm no coward, young woman, but I may as well say, right here and now, that I refuse, pointblank, to stand up to your grandfather and listen to his candid opinion of the plan, and of me for countenancing it."

Amy gave a little gasp of triumph. Then suddenly hugged her father close. "Oh, you! Oh, you!" she said, half laughing, half crying. "I can manage them all right, now I've got you on my side!" and, before he was able to recover himself, she was off and away to beard the lion in his den.

But for the first time in her life Amy found herself unable to manage the lion—otherwise Mr. Alexander Guthrie. He heard her out, to be sure, but in stony silence, and there was no sign of softening in his stern eyes as she finished. When she had quite done, he laid his finger deliberately upon a push-button electric bell connected with the library-table before which he sat, and sounded a summons,

sharp and clear. Almost instantly a servant stood in the doorway.

"Tell Mr. Burke I want to see him."

"Yes, sir."

Amy waited until the butler was out of earshot.

"Oh, Grandfather," she cried in alarm, suddenly seeming to realize that real trouble was brewing, "what are you going to say to Daddy? He can't help my not going. He hasn't anything to do with it. You mustn't scold Daddy, Grandfather, for it's not his fault. Truly it's not."

She might as well have tried to appease the Rock of Gibraltar.

When her father appeared on the threshold, as he did very shortly, she started to run to him, but her grandfather checked her with a gesture.

"Stay where you are!" he commanded curtly, in a tone he had never used to her before. And she obeyed as she had seen the servants obey when he spoke to them in the same fashion.

Daddy closed the door behind him and came forward.

"Sit down!" the old man dictated sharply, motioning toward a chair. Daddy sat.

"Now let's get to the bottom of this. What is

it Amy is telling me? That she's not going to sail with her aunt and me? She's going to stay back here with you instead, and live——"

"Daddy has nothing to do with it!" Amy broke in, rushing gallantly to the rescue before her father had time to reply. "It's my plan, and Daddy can't help it any more than you can."

A wry smile twisted Mr. Guthrie's thin lips for an instant, then the hard lines about his mouth stiffened into their usual set expression. "Can't help it any more than I can," he repeated with dry mockery. "As a rule, I manage to 'help' having my plans upset and my arrangements interfered with."

"If Amy does as she threatens," interposed Daddy quietly, speaking now for the first time, "she will upset my plans, and interfere with my arrangements very seriously indeed."

The old man shot a quick glance at him. "You mean that balderdash bee you've always had in your bonnet? That nonsense you call studying the condition of the poor?"

Daddy nodded.

"Yes, naturally, if Amy stays back with you she'll interfere with that. You'd have to give it up, as you had to give it up years ago when her mother

interfered with it. But Amy is not going to stay back with you. She is going with us. She is going with her aunt and me."

The old man did not raise his voice from its customary measured low pitch, but somehow Amy felt as if a great thunderbolt had crashed out of a blue sky, as if the crack of doom had sounded.

"I'm . . . going . . . with . . . you?" she repeated dully after him.

"Yes, you are going with me."

Certainly the world had turned a somersault, and everything in it, herself included, had gone topsy-turvy. Amy could not understand it at all. Never in all her life had her grandfather shown her such a terrifying face, never had he used such a voice to her. She made a feeble little effort to set things back in their old position.

"I'm *not* going with you, any such thing! I'm going to stay here with Daddy and . . . and . . ." Her anger caught in her throat in a choking sob.

"You are going to keep still and listen to what I have to say." The cold, even voice broke in upon her commandingly. "Up to this I have taken no account of your little whims and tempers, whether you would, or whether you wouldn't. Your baby

notions couldn't affect *me*. I have let you have your own way. But since you are old enough to try to oppose me in a matter of importance, in a way that would interfere with my plans, you are old enough to understand I won't have it! Once and for all, understand, I won't have it! *I am master here!*"

For a moment after he stopped talking Amy was too paralyzed to speak or stir. She gazed at him silently with troubled, puzzled eyes, but she could not make out if he had suddenly gone crazy or if she had fallen asleep and dreamed that her grandfather (who, indeed, was stern and harsh enough to everyone else, but who had never before been anything but kind to her)—that her grandfather had actually spoken to her in the sort of way she had once overheard a housemaid describe as "enough to freeze the marra in your bones." Now she understood why the servants quailed before him. Why even Auntie Jean—yes, and Daddy too—why even they did not answer back when Grandfather spoke. But suddenly she waked with a start, for, wonder of wonders! Daddy was answering back.

"I hope Amy will, indeed, go with you, sir," he was saying quietly. "I think it would certainly be best for her. But, for all that, I will not deliber-

ately send her away from me, if she is absolutely certain that she would be made unhappy by going."

And still the heavens did not fall.

"And why in the world *should* she be made unhappy by going?" demanded Mr. Guthrie sharply.

"Because I can't leave Daddy, that's why!" Amy cried in desperation. "Ever since the start I've had the feeling I wouldn't be able to leave him when it came to the last minute, but I kept putting the feeling away from me, because, first-off, I wanted to go traveling, and by and by I felt it was 'no fair' to back out when you and Auntie Jean were counting on me. But the awful ache inside me has got worse and worse every minute, until I just can't stand it, and I know this much, if you take me on board that ship to-morrow and try to make me go, you'll be sorry ever after, for I'll tell you this . . . when I see Daddy standing on shore, and they've taken away the gangplank, and I know the water is getting wider and deeper between us every minute and I'm going farther and farther away from him, I'll . . . I'll just jump overboard and swim back . . . that's what I'll do . . . and maybe I'll drown . . . and you can't stop me, even if you are master . . . so there!"

"And your aunt and I? We count for nothing with you? After all the years we've looked after you and indulged you and . . ." The old man spoke with bitter jealousy.

"Yes, indeed, Grandfather, you do! But I can't explain. Only, just . . . I guess nobody can be quite the same as own parents, can they?"

Her answer, soft as it was, certainly did not seem to turn away wrath in this instance. A bleak light shot into Mr. Guthrie's keen eyes, his voice had a wintry chill in it when he spoke:

"You must be your own judge as to that. Only I'd advise you not to cut off your nose before you know precisely what effect it is going to have on your face. Since matters have come to this pass, I think it's time you were told a thing or two about your father's circumstances, and your own. You agree with me?"

This last to Daddy, who answered by a courteous nod of his handsome head.

"Well, then, to come down to hardpan, your father is a poor man. He hadn't a penny when he married your mother, and the little he can call his own now is what she left him. I don't blame him, mind you. He was earning some sort of a

salary somewhere when your mother married him, but we, she and I, didn't like his business (this puttering about among low people!), and we soon made him quit. As for you, you'll have your mother's fortune, of course, when you are of age, twenty-one. No one can take that from you. But your majority is a long way off, and meanwhile I've arranged your affairs so you depend on what I allow for your support. If you behave yourself properly, if you obey me and act like a dutiful girl, you'll have all you've been accustomed to, and more. But if you don't, if you persist in opposing me, doing what I dislike, I'll cut you off with a copper and you can try and see how you like it. Now you know the truth of the matter. I advise you to think it over carefully. Sleep on it, as they say. And to-morrow morning you can come to me and tell me what you've decided. That'll do for the present."

She and Daddy were dismissed.

Daddy rose and took a step toward the door, but Amy walked straight up to her grandfather and faced him squarely.

"Grandfather dear," she said, her voice trembling ever so little, in spite of her efforts to control

it, "I'm sorry if I make you mad, but there's nothing to think over. Daddy has told me lots of times not to care too much about money. He says money isn't everything in the world, though, of course, it's a great deal. Sometimes people are better off without it. He told me upstairs he wished I'd go with you and Auntie Jean, to be a comfort to you. But I know enough myself to be sure that, if I can't go for love, I mustn't go for money. I mayn't like doing without things. I don't suppose I shall like it. But . . . well . . . I can't help it if Daddy is poor. And I can't help it if I sha'n't have the things I'm used to. I can do without them, I guess, but . . . but . . . I can't do without Daddy."

CHAPTER III

THE FLESHPOTS OF EGYPT

“WELL, what do you think of it?”

Amy's expression had already told her father what she thought of it, but he wanted to hear what she would say, now she was actually in Craigen Street, face to face with all its ugliness and squalor.

“I didn't know there was such a queer-looking street in town,” she brought out at last. “So dark and narrow and crowded. And the people! Babies swarming all over the place . . . nobody looking after them . . . everybody making a noise. It seems like some place else . . . far off in another country. Not America at all.”

Daddy pretended to misunderstand. “Yes, it has a foreign look, sure enough. Whitechapel in London, perhaps. Very interesting, isn't it?”

Amy would have liked to answer, but suddenly she felt a big lump rise in her throat.

“Interesting!” She tried to choke back the lump, but it refused to be swallowed. A great wave

of something she had never felt before swept over her and made her shudder with a sort of sickening disgust. All she could do was to turn her face from Daddy so he wouldn't discover what was happening to her.

"Do you remember what the Children of Israel did to Moses and Aaron in the wilderness? They murmured against them, saying: 'Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we did eat bread to the full: for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness . . .'"

Amy's chin went up with a determined jerk. "You didn't bring me, Daddy. I came of my own free will. And I'm not going to murmur. Only . . . it is different, you know. And to think of *living* here!"

Daddy smiled mischievously. "Oh, you'll get used to it. Forty years from now it'll seem quite like home to you."

"Forty years!"

"That was the length of time of the Children of Israel's little picnic, wasn't it? But here we are at No. 9. This is our house, that is to say, the second and third floors are ours. Look out, now!"

Don't tread on the kiddies. They're so thick on the ground one has hard work to avoid it, I'll confess. But they're nice kiddies, even if they aren't as clean as they might be, poor little mites, and we don't want to run them down. Be careful going upstairs! It is dark and no mistake!"

Amy, picking her way gingerly up the narrow flight, shuddered at the bare idea of what she might be setting her foot upon. It seemed to her she was moving in a sort of dreadful nightmare.

A door on the floor above opened unexpectedly, letting out a shaft of light. A familiar form bent over the rickety baluster-rail. Amy gave a glad cry:

"Oh, Ellen!"

She would never have believed the sight of her old nurse's homely, good-natured face could make her so happy.

"I been in an' out, lookin' for yez for the last hour an' a half," Ellen explained. "The tag-end o' the furniture come last night, an' I been up ever since the crack o' dawn gettin' the place to rights, so yourself'd not die o' the homesickness the first time ye set foot in it."

Ellen backed a step or two, as if from the pres-

ence of royalty, swinging open the door behind her with a proud flourish.

"Ye won't find a speck o' dust in the place. It's your father has had every inch of it painted and papered new, from the floors to the ceilin's, and if it ain't a picture I wouldn't say so. It's as clean as the eye in your head."

The eye in Amy's head was in danger of a sudden shower-bath just then, but Ellen didn't know it, for without waiting for any more she started out on a tour of inspection, Daddy following close behind as eager as a boy to hear what she had to say. And she said a great deal, just because she wanted to hide what she felt.

"Oh, Daddy, this *is* pretty paper! I like the plain background for the pictures and things, don't you? And where in the world did you ever get this darling old corner cupboard, and that spindle-legged table? Auntie Jean would simply *love* them, wouldn't she? And this room out here is the dining-room? Of course it is! It's just lovely, Daddy. And Ellen's kitchen is back of this? Oh, Daddy, I'm glad we don't have to go out into that awful . . . I mean that dark hallway every time we want to get up-stairs to our bedrooms. Whoever thought of this

cunning staircase? It's like a little corkscrew! About as big as a minute, but as pretty as ever it can be! I feel as if we were playing house in this funny little place. Everything seems so tiny after home. . . . I should say Grandfather's."

Daddy had gone to a world of trouble and expense to make it all attractive and comfortable for Amy. Watching her, when she did not realize he was doing so, he could see the hard struggle she was having to appear pleased. Though she did not succeed in deceiving him, he was gratified, for even the struggle was something and, after all, No. 9 Craigen Street, under the best of conditions, couldn't appear very sumptuous to eyes accustomed to uptown splendors, eyes that could not see beyond them.

"It's not all done yet," he explained in a matter-of-fact sort of way. "There wasn't time to do everything, you know. After all, it is only two weeks since your grandfather and aunt sailed, and one can't remodel a house, or part of one, in two weeks. I've had the most important things done first. The rest we can see to gradually, you and I together."

Away down in her heart Amy felt it wasn't worth while to do any more. What was the use? It could

never be anything but what her grandfather called "a hovel in the slums." And yet she wouldn't for the world have Daddy know how she felt about it, for, when all was said and done, she was here because she had deliberately chosen to be. It wasn't Daddy's fault that in the first strangeness of finding it so much worse than she had expected she felt like crying her eyes out.

Daddy stayed only long enough to see her really settled, as he expressed it, then started off, full of enthusiasm, to begin his wonderful work at "the office."

Ellen took herself out to her kitchen, where, in the midst of her shining array of new pots and pans, she felt as proud as a queen. And for the first time in her life Amy was left to look out for herself. After the noise and confusion of the street below, the shock of the dark, forbidding hallway, the little living-room seemed doubly attractive. The novelty, too, of the whole thing appealed to her, and for a while she assured herself it was "sort of fun" to be living like this, playing baby-house in a few rooms hardly larger than some of the pantries at home. She amused herself for a time trailing about from one floor to the other, pretending

she was a grown-up young lady, burdened with house-keeping cares and the charge of a large and troublesome family of active children.

Luncheon interrupted her in the middle of the game, and when it was over she found she couldn't go back and take it up where she had left off. Somehow it had grown stale and tiresome. At home, that is to say, at her grandfather's, if she had felt as bored as this, she would only have had to ring her bell to have her governess or her maid at her elbow in an instant. Or she could order her motor, and drive downtown to the shops and buy things, always an amusing pastime. But now there was no governess, no maid. Worse still, there was no motor, and while, of course, she knew there yet remained some money, her grandfather had lived up to his promise to cut her off with a copper, and all she was to have until she was "of age" and inherited her mother's fortune was what Daddy could afford to give her, and this, compared with what she was accustomed to, was so little that it was as good, or as bad, as nothing at all. Sitting on the edge of her bed, looking gloomily about her sunless little room, so different from the luxurious one at home, the sense of what she had renounced

swept over her in a great wave of desperate regret. She ran swiftly to her door, turned the key in the lock, then flung herself across the bed, sobbing stormily into the counterpane, beating it with her fists.

"I can't bear it! I can't bear it!" she screamed through her clinched teeth. "I hate it here . . . hate it . . . hate it! It's no fair! I didn't know what it was going to be like. I ought to have minded Grandfather. I ought to have thought it over. If I'd only had time to come and see it first . . . but it was go or stay, and I couldn't bear to leave Daddy. But now . . . how can I live here? It's too awful! I can't stand it! I'll die! It's the dreadfulest place I ever was in!"

She caught the hem of the pillowcase between her teeth and bit it through. Never before had she felt like this, so despairing, so helpless. Everywhere she turned was something she "couldn't bear." It was like being caught in a trap. She wanted to get out. She would get out. With a sudden crazy impulse she grabbed up her hat, coat, and gloves, got them on somehow, and rushed wildly into the street.

The doorstep was still swarming with babies . . .

dirty babies. On the pavement a group of older children were playing Mulberry Bush, while a wheezy hand-organ ground out a tango tune which the noise of the thundering elevated and the clang of the trolley-car gongs did their best to drown. Amy noticed nothing as she threaded her way in and out of the press. She dashed over crossings, under the very noses of dray-horses and auto-trucks, then on and on, up streets, down streets, as aimless as a scrap of paper blown about by the gusty autumn wind.

How long or how far she wandered she never knew, but the last ray of daylight had faded before she came to herself. All around her were noise and confusion, eager voices speaking in tongues she did not understand, swarthy faces with strongly marked features such as she had never seen before. Nobody interfered with her, but suddenly she felt frightened. It came to her in a flash that she was very far from home, and this time, when she said *home*, she did not mean her grandfather's house.

She started to run back the way she had come, then stopped with a quick gasp, because . . . she did not know the way she had come. Where was

she? She gazed about her, looking for a street-sign. There was none to be seen. Never before had she been out in the streets alone. Her grandfather had always insisted that someone, "a governess or a maid or a man or something," should be in attendance wherever she went. She knew Daddy had disagreed.

"She will never learn to be self-reliant if she is shielded and sheltered like this. She ought to be thrown on her own resources, made to shift for herself," she had once overheard him say. But she knew very well he never meant this kind of thing, being out alone after dark "in the slums." This was being thrown on her own resources with a vengeance. Well, if it was scary, it was "kind of fun," too. She forgot she was looking for a street-sign and stood still, gazing at the strange thing that was happening.

All along the gutter curbstone she noticed peddlers' hand-carts being ranged. One by one they came, until they extended up and down, as far as she could see. Each cart had its own flaring torch to cast a fascinating glare down on its curious assortment of treasures spread out for sale. The long row, gleaming and glowing in the torchlights, trans-

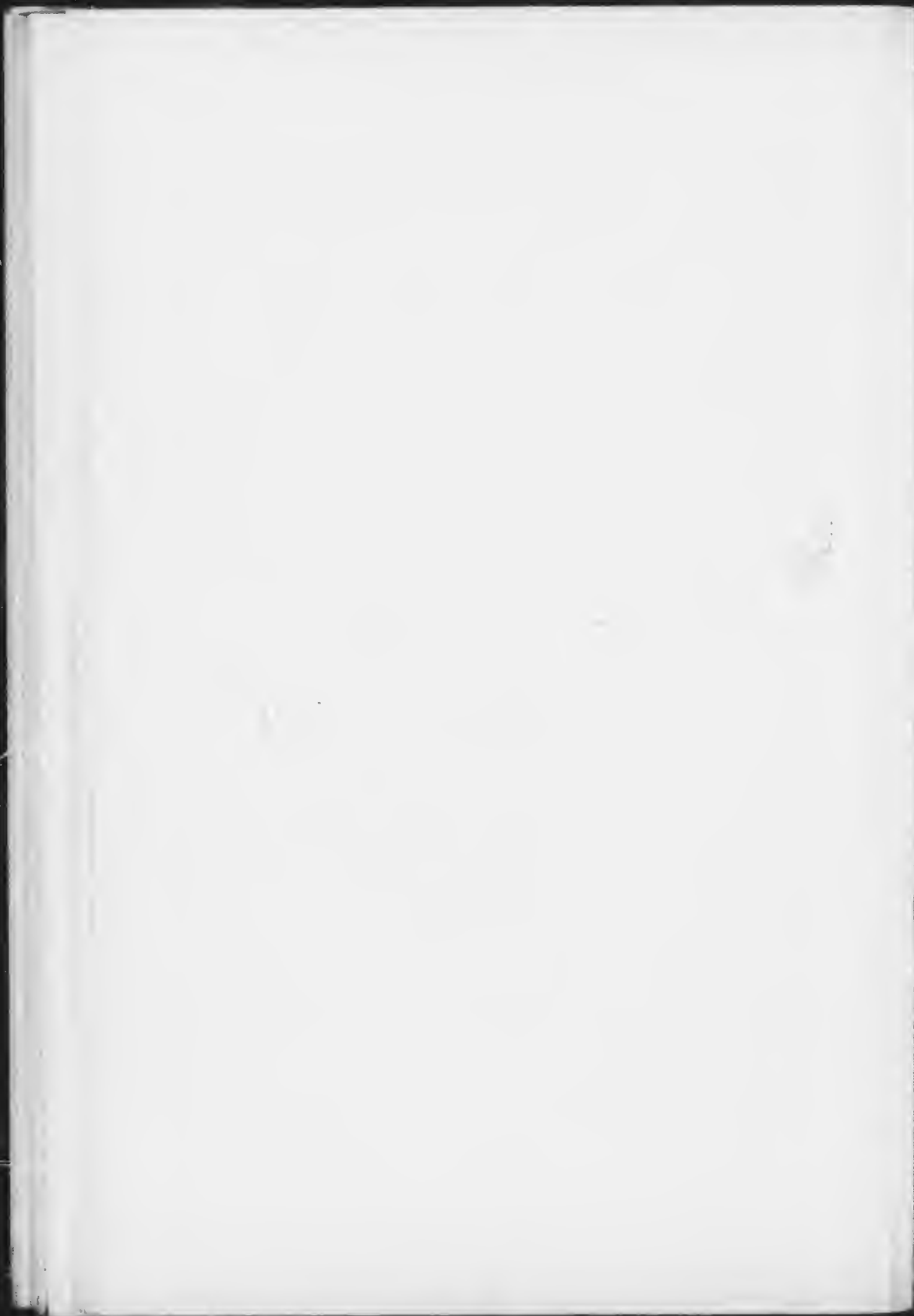
formed the commonplace street into an Arabian Nights' Bazaar, the peddlers (some of whom wore long curls hanging down their cheeks) into olive-skinned, keen-eyed Ali Babas.

Amy grew so absorbed watching the carts gather and the crowds grow that she forgot to move on and did not in the least realize she herself was attracting attention. Plainly dressed as she was, the difference between her appearance and the rest of the world about her made her as conspicuous and strange a figure to it as it was to her. She did not notice the knowing glances exchanged between the two Ali Baba proprietors of the carts nearest at hand, nor their elaborate gesturings. It was only when they began to dispute in high, vehement voices that she came to herself sufficiently to realize what was going on. They were quarreling. One of them, gesticulating wildly, pointed a grubby forefinger at Amy herself. The other, immediately firing up, made a dart toward her, caught at her sleeve, and held her fast. Both pointed to their carts, then at her, then violently shook angry fists in each other's face.

Amy tried to wrench herself free. "Let me go!" she cried. "I don't want to buy of either of you.



Amy tried to wrench herself free



I was only looking. Let me go, I say! Do you hear me!"

She might as well have addressed the lamp-post.

In a second a little circle of interested spectators had gathered. Once in a while one would join in with an approving or dissenting word, but this only seemed to add fuel to the flame. Amy no longer felt there was any fun in her adventure. She was badly frightened. She had all she could do to keep the tears back.

"Let me go!" she repeated, stamping her foot in desperation.

The hubbub only increased. A big sob caught in her throat. She choked it back, but it rose again and this time got the better of her. Her shoulders shook, her chest heaved. She couldn't see, because of the swelling tears. Then, quick as a flash, the noise was checked, the clutching grasp on her sleeve loosened. She was free. What had worked the miracle? When she looked up the crowd had scattered, the two Ali Babas were quietly rearranging their stock, the regular business of life seemed going on as if it had never been dropped, and no one appeared to be concerning himself in the least with her, except a tall, upright young fellow standing

at her elbow, who looked down at her kindly out of the bluest, most friendly eyes she had ever seen.

"Don't be afraid. Nothing will hurt you."

Amy felt the foolish tears gushing up again, from sheer relief.

"Oh, please tell me how to get back home! I don't know where I am. I've lost my way," she stammered brokenly.

"Where do you live?"

"Ten-fifty-nine Fif . . . I mean No. 9 Craigen Street."

The boy bent his tall head. "I'm sorry. . . . The noise here . . . I . . . I don't think I heard you right. The street you live on is . . ."

"Craigen Street," Amy repeated very distinctly. She saw his fine, straight eyebrows draw together in a puzzled knot, but when he spoke it was in quite a matter-of-course way.

"Craigen Street is a long way from this. We're in what is called the Yiddish quarter now. These are all Jews here . . . Polish, Russian, Roumanian. That is why you didn't understand them. But they wouldn't have harmed you. The two men were only having a bit of fun, pretending to quarrel about you. See! That's the car you must take. I'll see you

safely on, and then if you tell the conductor to let you off at . . .”

For a second Amy hesitated to own up. Then she brought it out with an effort:

“I can’t ride. I’ve got to walk. I came out in a hurry and I forgot . . . I mean . . . I didn’t bring my purse along. I haven’t any carfare.”

This time it was her companion’s turn to hesitate:

“Neither have I.”

He made the statement simply, courageously, not in the least shamefacedly. If Amy had not liked and trusted him before, she would certainly have done so now. She smiled faintly up at him:

“How funny! Both of us to have come off without our pocketbooks. Well, I don’t mind walking, if you don’t.”

He saw she took it for granted he was going her way. “No, I don’t mind walking,” he returned quietly, and fell into step with her, with as gentlemanly a good grace as if it were not perfectly easy to see that his clothes were in the last stages of shabbiness, his shoes absolutely past all hope of mending.

If Amy had not been so fagged out, she might

have noticed other details beside these. That, for instance, he did not speak unless he was addressed. That, though his hands were bare, red from the cold and roughened by hard usage, they were well-formed and clean, the hands of one who does not neglect himself. But she was too tired to think of anyone but Amy Burke. Every step she took was pain, and it seemed as if there were no end to the steps, as if she were going to have to walk on forever.

"Oh, you . . . John Graham!"

At the sound of the words her companion stopped short and Amy, lifting her heavy head, saw they were face to face with two girls of about her own age, one perhaps a year or so older, but both as certainly not of her "class" as if they had been labeled "Ninth Ward."

"Whatever in the world are you doing, John Graham? Miles out of your way. You'll be late for night-school if you don't turn 'round this minute and come with Nora and I."

It was the smaller of the girls who spoke. Her voice, like her face, was bright, a little hard, very self-assertive, the sort of voice that insists on making itself heard.

Amy's companion flushed. His level eyebrows drew together again in that same little troubled knot that Amy had noticed earlier.

"Never mind me, Sally," he responded. "You and Nora go ahead. I'll follow when . . . I'm going with this young lady to Craigen Street. I'm going to show her the way."

"Craigen Street!" Sally almost screamed the syllables after him. "What do *you* want in Craigen Street?" she demanded, turning on Amy with a "your money or your life" sort of expression.

Amy looked her haughtily up and down. "I live there."

"What number?"

"Nine."

Sally gasped. She pointed her finger at Amy as if she were accusing her:

"Then *you're* the new tenants, hey? Think of it, John, two floors in Nora's house, two whole floors where the Bradys and the Castles and the Cohens and, oh! a whole bunch more used to live, just three people are going to live there now. You'd ought to see the fuss they had fixing them up! Paper on the walls to beat the band and paint and furniture—phew! It's like some place tony belonging to rich

uptowners. First-off I wouldn't believe it when Nora told me. But when you go in your own self and see with your own eyes . . . Say, ain't I telling the truth?" She wheeled suddenly toward Amy and shot the question at her as if it were a bullet from a gun.

Amy nodded sullenly. It made her "furious" to feel herself called to account by a girl like Sally, whom, somehow, she could not help but answer.

"There! What did I tell you? A man by the name of Burke, that's what Collins told Nora's mother, didn't he, Nora? And he's the agent, Collins is. Burke, and Burkeses woman, and Burkeses—— Say, what's your name?"

"Amy."

"Burke, and Burkeses woman and Burkeses Amy," Sally announced, completing her inventory with a flourish. Then, laughing aloud, she gave her head an affected toss. "Dear me, I forgot my manners. Glad to make your acquaintance. I'm Sally Leonard. I have the pleasure to make you acquainted with Nora Cavanagh. Nora, Burkeses Amy. It seems you know John Graham already, however you picked him up. And now you'll kindly excuse the three of us. We got to go to night-

school. See you later! Come on, Nora! Come on, John! Burkeses Amy can find her way home alone all right now, sure, if she ain't a silly chump. Craigen Street is easy as pie. First-off, you turn this corner, and then you follow your nose for half a dozen blocks or so, and then you go to the right, and then . . ."

"I'm going to see her safe home," said John Graham quietly.

"But you'll be late," insisted Sally. "You've gone miles out of your way already. Burkeses Amy should be grateful for what you've done as it is and not let you take extra trouble on her account. A favor's a favor, but nobody wants to be imposed on!"

Amy could bear no more. It was bad enough to have this "common" girl treat her as an equal, act as if they were on a par, call her Burkeses Amy, without the respectful Miss she was accustomed to from everyone but her family and close friends; discuss the way she and Daddy were living (as if they hadn't a right to live as they chose!). But to have her turn 'round and say this poverty-stricken boy, from goodness knows where, had done her a great service by going miles out of his way to show

her hers, and that she was, therefore, under obligation to him . . . this last was more than her pride could endure. She flung a look of scorn at Sally, wheeled about suddenly, and, without a word, darted swiftly away.

A second later a pang, like the thrust of a red-hot knife, shot through her ankle, and she was down on the pavement in a crumpled little heap.

CHAPTER IV
THE WILDERNESS

A HAND was laid on her shoulder. Amy shrank away from it with a shudder.

"Don't touch me!" she cried, shivering all over with fright, shock, and pain.

The hand was instantly removed. "I don't want to touch you, if you don't want me to. But I'm afraid you're hurt. I'm so sorry."

Amy looked up. Nora Cavanagh was gazing down at her out of great Irish blue eyes. Earlier, Amy had hardly noticed Nora, she had been so completely cast in the background by Sally, but now there was a vast comfort in her presence. It was like unexpectedly seeing a friend where one had thought there was none but strangers.

"It's my foot!" she wailed.

Nora put a strong arm about Amy's waist. "Don't mind me. I'm good and husky. I can lift you, see! Don't you be putting your weight on the hurt foot. Lean on me as hard as you need to.

Now, do you think you can step out with the well foot? Try it once."

Amy gritted her teeth and tried. Inch by inch the two labored along. Nora did not say another word. Once in a while, without being asked, she stopped and allowed Amy to rest and catch breath, then patiently plodded on again, with Amy's dead weight hanging like a millstone about her neck. But at last they reached the house.

On her hands and knees Amy crawled up the loathsome stairs, the stairs that only this morning she had hesitated to tread with the thick soles of her stout little boots. Nora went ahead and knocked on the door, so that by the time Amy reached the top of the flight Ellen was there to lend a hand, to say nothing of a tongue.

"Oh, Miss Amy, what a fright you have give me!" she gasped. "When I come out av me kitchen an' you wasn't anywhere around, an' it got so late an' your Daddy like to be back any minute an' what should I tell him . . ."

"Miss Amy" stopped her short with a querulous groan. "Oh, hush, Ellen!" The next moment she had burst into loud crying.

Nora stared. In Craigen Street "folks" didn't

fuss over such trifles as a turned ankle, and only the very young "kids" ever cried. A child of any age at all would "think shame" to be caught doing it. While she helped Ellen get Amy to the couch, where the hurt foot was bathed and bandaged, Nora's brain and eyes were busy. Never had she seen so wonderful a room as this. Why, it was like Paradise! How could a girl, living amidst all this luxury and beauty, be fretful and complaining!

"I think I must go now," Nora said, suddenly recollecting her manners, that it was rude to stare, and impolite to stay too long.

Amy didn't care whether she went or stayed. She had forgotten all about her. It was old Ellen who was just starting to thank her for her help when the door opened.

"Oh, Daddy!" With the cry Amy's foolish tears started afresh.

Nora, slipping still further into the background, saw "Daddy" come forward, his brows knotting anxiously as he saw his girl stretched out on the couch, her face pale and tear-stained. But, as soon as he found what the trouble really was, he laughed encouragingly:

"Pooh, that's nothing! Nothing at all. No

bones broken. You'll be up and about, as good as new, in no time at all."

At which good news Ellen turned historian and began telling all she knew about the accident and how "the first I ever knew was when Miss Amy come limpin' in at the door, be the aid av the young gur-rl over there, the same as she was a baby."

Daddy turned, rising to greet the stranger "like she'd been the grandest lady in the land," according to Ellen.

"And so you came to the rescue?" he asked, his handsome eyes smiling down at her gratefully. "You helped my girl home?"

Nora nodded shyly.

"That was kind. I hope you have been properly thanked." Evidently he had his doubts.

Again Nora nodded.

"Do you live in this vicinity . . . near here?"

Nora hesitated a second. She did not know what vicinity meant, but if she explained that she lived in the same house she thought, maybe, that would cover it.

"I live upstairs."

"Good! Then you'll come in often, I hope, to

see my daughter. Amy and I are strangers here. We know no one in the neighborhood."

"I'd like to," returned Nora, making a great effort to overcome her timidity and behave like a perfect lady. "But I don't believe I can. I'm out all day. Working. In the shop."

"What shop?"

"A shirtwaist shop. In the Wedge Building. A man by the name of Styles is boss. You will be after knowing him, perhaps?" It was her nervousness that made her fall into one of her mother's tricks of speech.

Daddy shook his head. "No. I'm afraid I haven't the pleasure. But I'm interested in shops. I wish you would tell me about yours. I think Ellen is trying to tell us that in about five minutes dinner will be served, eh, Ellen?"

"Sure, sir!" and Ellen started for the door, taking the hint in her own quick Irish way. But before she could get across the threshold Daddy had stopped her.

"Our young friend here will dine with us. You'll give us that pleasure, Miss . . .?" He stopped short, waiting for Nora to help him out with her name.

"Nora Cavanagh."

"You'll give us the pleasure, Miss Nora Cavanagh?"

His smile was so hearty, his voice so kind that Nora forgot her shyness.

"I'd love to, your—your honor," she murmured, uncertain how to address so grand, yet so condescending, a gentleman. "But——"

"Don't say but.—Just run along up and tell your mother.—I hope you have a mother? . . ."

Nora nodded.

"Tell your mother you are going to have dinner with some new friends who will take very good care of you. We don't want her to be anxious, you know. And by the time you come back Amy and I will be ready."

As she sped upstairs Nora wondered what he meant by ready. "Sure, nobody could be more ready than them this minute. If he was going to a ball, he couldn't be grander dressed."

As for herself, she told her mother the wonderful news in breathless haste, while she "did over" her thick, black hair, washed her face and hands, and slipped on another shirtwaist—the best she had.

"What under the sun did you ask her to dinner

for?" demanded Amy petulantly, the moment Nora had left the room.

"Because I wanted her," Daddy promptly answered, pretending not to notice the supercilious emphasis Amy had put on the *her*.

Amy scowled.

"I shouldn't think you'd want anybody like that—a common shop-girl—to sit at the table with us! I'm sure Grandfather wouldn't. Grandfather was very particular about the girls he let me know."

"I have no doubt of it, dear. But there are certain points on which your grandfather and I never did agree, you know. He was very particular that you should know only girls out of rich homes. I have entirely different plans for you. I shall be sorry if my plans don't please you, but such as they are I have as much right to them as your grandfather has to his. If this young girl is as ladylike as she seems by nature to be, she is fit to sit at anyone's table. In any case, she has shown great consideration for you, so she is going to sit at mine. And, as you are going to do the same thing, I think you had better have Ellen spruce you up a bit. You look rather seedy. I'll call her on my way upstairs, shall I?"

Amy nodded. There was nothing else to do. Oddly enough, though Daddy had never spoken to her like this before, she had no trouble in understanding precisely what he meant. His tone was not in the least like her grandfather's when he had "turned 'round and read the riot act to her," as old Ellen would have expressed it, but it was not a whit less firm for all that. Amy told herself that she had not disliked Nora "first off," but if Daddy was going to stand up for her against his own child, she would dislike her from now on, with a vengeance. All the while Ellen was making her tidy, Amy had hard work to keep back the tears.

"That's a decent young gur-rl is to be settin' down to dinner wit' youse the night. I see her goin' out to her work airly, airly mornin's since ever I been here. But that's nothin' against her. The face of her makes me think I seen her before, an' I was rackin' me brains to find where would it be, when, lo an' behold ye! it come to me all in a flash. The face of her an' the face of the Blessed Virgin that hangs in your grandfather's picture-gallery, up home, is as like as two peas. Did you be noticin' it? The same dark hair, an' the same big eyes. Manny of the pictures of our Lady don't

be good likenesses of her at all. But the wan I do be speakin' of, in the gallery, is her very image. I'd reco'nize the resimblance annywheres. An', be the same token, an' meanin' no disrespect, it's the livin' image of this young gur-rl the same."

Nora came down in an astonishingly short time, in all the glory of what Craigen Street called her "glad rags," and then Daddy carried Amy into the dining-room, propped the hurt foot up on a hassock, and dinner began.

At first things were somewhat stiff and formal. Amy was nursing her grievance as well as her foot. Nora was shyly trying to behave as if she were accustomed to a daintily spread table, plenty of delicate food. Only Daddy was quite at his ease.

"I want to hear all about that shop of yours," he said, with one of his hearty, irresistible smiles. "As I told you, I'm interested in shops."

"Maybe"—Nora hesitated—"maybe you are boss of one yourself?"

"No," said Daddy, wondering at the look of disappointment that followed quick upon his answer to her question.

"I'm sorry."

"Why?"

"I think you would make a kind boss."

"Kinder than Mr. Styles?"

"Oh, yes! Much kinder."

"Isn't Mr. Styles kind?"

Nora did not reply at once.

"He's all for business," she said after a moment.

"When you are all for business, you haven't the time to be very kind."

Daddy nodded. "Quite so," he assured her. "Is your shop light, airy? Is it a comfortable place to work in?"

A troubled look stole into Nora's shadowy eyes.

"I hope you won't be mad at me," she brought out stumbingly, turning very red, "but if you ain't boss of a shop, perhaps you are somebody who finds out about everybody. I mean—oh, I've forgotten the name. He's higher than the cops, but he works with the police . . ."

"You mean a detective?"

Nora nodded.

"No, indeed. I'm not a detective. Nothing you say to me will get you into the slightest trouble. Is that what bothered you? You were afraid it might?"

Again Nora nodded. "If the boss was on to it

that us girls had a grouch, we'd all get fired," she explained. "The boss says he pays us to work, not to talk, and when we are talking we ain't working, so he docks our wages, and that is hard when we sew so many hours and get so little for it. Still, it's a bad thing to lose your job—even if the lofts are kind of bad and they say the building isn't safe if there should ever be a fire."

"Does your boss own the building?"

"Oh, no! He only rents it. A very, very rich man owns the building. The agent for this house, Mr. Collins, knows about him, and he told my mother he owns blocks and blocks of other buildings besides. And our foreman said once he was 'rotten with money,' he has so much. Once, when there was a fire nearby to us, and a lot of girls were killed and hurt in it, we girls got kind of scared and we made up a letter (it was a very genteel letter!) and we sent it to the gentleman who owns our building, telling him we heard it was not considered so very safe, and if he had no objections perhaps he would be so kind as to make it a little more safe. We never got any answer, excepting that the gentleman told on us to the boss, and the boss was furious, because the gentleman said if we weren't satis-

fied we'd better be fired, or the boss could clear out, either way he liked. I tell you we got laid out. Styles said if ever anything like that happened again and any of us wrote to Mr. Guthrie, that's the owner of the building I've been telling you about—Mr. Alexander Guthrie—we'd get our walking papers, every last one of us."

"I don't believe it!"

At sound of Amy's voice, quivering with indignation, at sight of her flushed, resentful face, Nora grew suddenly white. For a second it seemed as if trouble were brewing. But it was only for a second.

"Amy never believes anything unless you can bring a sworn affidavit to prove it," Daddy said laughingly. "But tell me, do you like to make shirt-waists? Is there nothing you would like to do better?"

In a flash Nora's face was all aglow again:

"Nothing I should like to do better? Oh, there are lots of things I'd like to do better. But there is one thing I'd like to do the best of all."

"And that is?"

"Sing."

"Have you a voice?"

"At the music-school, the Settlement Music-

school, where I go to take lessons when I'm done with the day's work at the shop, they say I have a voice. And they say, if I could study hard and didn't get discouraged, I might learn to sing some day. But it's not easy to do all that. The sewing makes your eyes tired and then your head goes back on you, and you have to pinch yourself to keep awake evenings, let alone learn more things."

"But if you could give up the sewing."

The light faded quickly out of Nora's face. "There's no chance of that. My mother works hard and gets pay for it, but together we don't earn more than our room-rent and what we put in our mouths and lay on our backs. Even so, we're lots better off than some, but the both of us must keep at it if we want to live. So, you see, I can never sing."

Daddy shook a warning finger at her:

"Don't say that. If you feel it is in you to sing, make up your mind that, no matter how unpromising things look now, some day your chance will come. Never let go the thought that some time you will surely be a singer. Do what you have to do now, cheerfully and dutifully, but keep your mind fixed on your dream. Then, little by little, it will come

true. When one makes a good resolve and holds to it trustfully, through thick and thin, never faltering, never giving up, there is nothing in the world that can stop the dream from coming true, because all God's universe is going to turn to and lend a helping hand. You think I'm talking nonsense? Try it and see!

"I knew a fellow once who had a strange thing happen to him. It must have been Midsummer Day, for, you know, very curious things happen on Midsummer Day. The fellow *fell awake!* And he had a dream. He dreamed his brothers and sisters had lost something that, by right, belonged to them and it was 'up to' him to find it and give it back. He didn't in the least see how he was going to be able to do it, for he was living far off from them at the time, and he knew that in all probability he would have to continue living far off from them for many years to come. But he never let go his dream. He hung on to it like grim death. First, a beautiful princess wove a spell about him. She tried to make him forget his dream. Then a funny little cross-grained fairy appeared on the scene, and she cast another spell and tried to make him forget. A stern old ogre caught him in a tight net—there was al-

ways something that held him back. But he never let go his dream. And, lo! one day all the things that had bound him tight were loosed and he was free to go and live with his brothers and sisters, and, what is more, he took the cross-grained fairy with him, and she——”

Nora's eyes were shining. “Did he really go?”

“He is living with them now.”

“And you think he will find it—the thing they lost?”

“He is looking for it. I *know* it will be found. If he doesn't find it, someone else will, but I *know* it will be found!”

Nora clasped her hands and her breath came very fast.

“I will be a singer!” she declared, very solemnly, as if she were taking a vow or giving a pledge.

“Good!” cried Daddy, and somehow, in spite of herself, Amy said “Good!” too.

Nora's face glowed. “How kind you are to me!” she exclaimed gratefully.

“I've not been kind,” Amy brought out shamefacedly, scorning to sail under false colors.

“Oh, yes, you have!” Nora insisted. “You *care*. I could see you did when I said I wanted to

be a singer first-off, and later, when I said I would be one, you said 'Good!' If I ever am one," she quickly corrected herself, "I should say, *when* I am one, I will always remember that it was both of you kind people who showed me the way."

There was no use trying to harbor a grudge against anybody with a spirit like this. Amy gave it up.

"I wish you'd sing something for us now," she said, thawing out all at once. "Daddy and I love music. We have a friend who composes the loveliest songs and things. Will you sing for us?"

The answer was given in the language of Craigen Street:

"Sure!"

As soon as Amy was cozily settled among her cushions on the living-room couch, Nora sat down before the piano. She was singularly free from the airs and excuses Amy was accustomed to meet in her friends uptown who had "parlor tricks" and were asked to show them off. She just simply, naturally did what was required of her. But her heart beat so it almost stifled her. She asked herself sternly how she had dared attempt to sing before anybody so grand as "Burkeses Amy" and her

Daddy. They knew what good music was, for on the rack lay a song by Robert Franz, and nearby lay others the names of which she had grown familiar with at the Music School—Schumann, Grieg, Rubinstein, Debussy.

Her fingers trembled upon the keyboard, but she persisted bravely, and after the first two or three bars, she grew more steady. She did not see Amy and Daddy exchange pleased, surprised glances when they found what it was she had selected. She did not hear the hall-door softly unlatch, nor notice that it was held open from the outside by a careful hand. She only saw the twilight gathering over an unknown, mysterious region called "the country"; she only heard the plaintive note of the whip-poor-will sounding lonesomely out of the gloom.

"It is called 'The Hour of the Whip-poor-will,'" she explained, wheeling around on the piano-stool to face them when she had done. "It is by an American composer. His songs are as lovely as the songs of Franz or Grieg, my teacher at Music School says. And some day his name will be famous, like theirs. The teacher says he is a true musician. His name is Worthing, Harleigh Worthing, and——"

"Here he is himself," interrupted Daddy, spring-

ing to his feet and holding out both hands in welcome to a young man who had just appeared in the open doorway. "Come along in, Harleigh, old fellow! Here's a young lady who knows what good music is and——"

"Can sing it."

This time it was the newcomer who interrupted Mr. Burke. As he spoke he nodded approvingly at Nora, smiling kindly into her bewildered eyes, which, in an unaccountable way, suddenly brimmed over with tears.

CHAPTER V

A LUCKY GIRL

DADDY proved a false prophet when he predicted that Amy's ankle would be well in no time. That night she could not sleep for pain. The next morning old Ellen confidentially advised Daddy:

"Betther call in a docther, sir, till he'd cast an eye on it."

But when the doctor had come and cast the eye, Ellen and Daddy exchanged rueful glances. "A week or ten days on the couch without touching her foot to the floor!"

"A pretty prospect!" thought Daddy.

In the old days it would have been bad enough. But now, with her father at the office all day, and Ellen busy with her housework, what in the world would Amy do?

"She'll die in her thracks, an' kill us into the bargain, that's what!" Ellen privately lamented. And, though Daddy did not say it in so many words, "them was his sentiments tew."

Yet, as it turned out, Amy did neither. The first day she was too drowsy and dull to care for anything, and, while the neighborhood tongues were busy gossiping about "Burkeses Amy's" accident, the victim herself was sleeping off the effects of her fright and shock in the most natural way. Twenty-four hours of rest worked wonders. By the second day the injured ankle had stopped torturing and the relief from pain was so wonderful that Daddy found the patient in quite an angelic frame of mind when he came to her room in the morning prepared to carry her downstairs.

"I brought you some books and magazines last night, and a puzzle or two. You didn't seem to have much use for them then, but perhaps you'll feel more like taking notice to-day and they may help you through," he explained as he carefully deposited Amy on the couch Ellen had made ready to receive her.

"I'll love them, Daddy," she replied gratefully, and he went away feeling reassured as to this one day at least. When he was gone Amy settled back against her pillows amid her treasures, with a great sense of comfort. Shut in her own protecting four walls, Craigen Street didn't oppress her as it had

done when she ran away to get rid of the very thought of it. She had forgotten all about that in feeling how good it was not to be in pain. Then, too, the books Daddy had brought looked very inviting.

“And when I get tired reading I’ll do a puzzle, and then . . .” She stopped and listened. “Anybody knocking? O—oh, Ellen! Is that you knocking?”

From the other side of the closed hall-door an unfamiliar voice replied:

“I’m Boris Orloff. May I come in?”

Before Amy had time to give the desired permission, the door swung open, showing a girl about her own age, decently dressed, and, on the whole, of attractive appearance, though her face was good-natured rather than pretty, her manners hearty rather than refined.

Amy stared.

“Sally Leonard told me you got hurt,” the stranger explained, closing the door behind her, coming forward and taking a chair with every indication of good-will and the determination to settle down and make a visit. “So I thought I’d come and see you. Else you might think we were stuck up in the

neighborhood and didn't have manners enough to try to make you feel at home."

Somehow or other Amy managed to murmur something about being "much obliged," but whether her guest heard her or not she couldn't tell, for Borisovna went on talking without, apparently, waiting to take breath:

"Yes, I'm awful sorry you had an accident. I think it's fierce to be sick. It puts you back so with your lessons, and then you've got to study double to catch up with your class again, huh?"

Amy nodded, just for the sake of appearances.

"Say, where do you go to school?"

"I don't go anywhere," Amy admitted, flushing a little, she didn't know why.

Borisovna's broad, good-natured face changed:

"Oh, I see! You work in a shop."

It would have taken more self-control than Amy possessed to keep the quick, indignant flash out of her eyes, the resentful ring from her voice. They got ahead of her as she answered Borisovna's question with an emphatic "No!"

Boris regarded her silently for a moment:

"I don't know what I said that should make you

get such a mad on all at once. I'm sure I didn't mean any harm."

Amy had the grace to look ashamed.

"I haven't got a mad on," she responded lamely, trying to "speak Craigen Street" without letting on it wasn't her accustomed language.

Boris laughed. "Well, if you ain't got a mad on, you gave a mighty good imitation. But never mind. As I said, I didn't mean any harm. I just thought, from the looks of things here, your father was well enough off to leave you go to school. If he ain't, I'm sorry I spoke about it. Of course, working in a shop ain't the cinch school is, but it's no disgrace, so a girl would have to be ashamed of it. And if a girl don't go to school, the first thing you think is—'then she works in a shop.' I wish your father could leave you go to school. I'd take you to ours. I go to the Hadley high—a dandy school!"

Amy fingered one of her puzzles nervously, observing to herself with a mental toss of the head: "Well, all I've got to say is 'you don't talk such very good grammar if you do.'" Aloud she brought out at length, without looking up: "I guess I could go to school if I wanted to."

Boris leaned eagerly toward her. "If you wanted

to! Sure you want to! I tell you what it is, when your foot is well, you go with me to school. I'll put you wise so's you won't have any trouble. I say but I'm glad you can go! I don't mind telling you, I ain't a stuck-up, and if a girl is nice like Nora, for instance, I go with her, even if she is ignorant. I know lots of girls can't have the advantages I got but my mother says I mustn't turn up my nose at them. It ain't their fault. If I've got a cinch and can go to school, that's all the more reason I should be sorry for girls that ain't so fortunate. All the same, I'd just as soon go with our own kind, yours and mine, see?"

For the life of her, Amy could not have answered. It made her "furious" to be classed as Borisovna's kind, not to have Borisovna see at once her own superiority. At the same time, she could have shouted with laughter at the idea of there being lines drawn down here in the slums. She wondered what her grandfather would say.

"I'd give five cents to know what's going on in your head!" she heard Boris remark at last. "I must say, I don't think you're very polite. I asked you a question and you don't give me any answer, no more than if I hadn't opened my lips."

"I'm sorry," Amy caught herself up quickly. "I guess I haven't got my wits about me. They've gone wool-gathering, as my father calls it. Do you like puzzles? Let's try these. They look kind of hard. You take one, and I'll take the other, and we'll see which of us will get through first."

Privately she felt pretty certain she herself would. She had always been counted quick and clever at such things, and now she thought it would be a satisfaction to prove to Borisovna that, whether she saw it or not, there *was* a difference between them, and a big one.

"I never took much stock in puzzles, myself," Boris declared frankly. "It always seems to me like wasting good time to fuss with 'em."

"Oh, just try this for fun!" urged Amy, pressing the little box on her.

Borisovna took it reluctantly. The next moment they were both hard at work. The bell of the tall clock in the corner chimed the half-hour, then the hour. Ellen peered in cautiously, thinking by the dead hush Amy was asleep. Then, suddenly, Borisovna drew a long breath.

"Done!" she cried triumphantly.

Amy stared. "I don't believe it!"

The words were out before she could stop them.

"Sure!" Boris insisted.

"I don't see how you ever did it!"

The little note of suspicion in Amy's voice did not escape Borisovna.

"You don't believe me? You want me to prove it?" she demanded, flushing.

"No, indeed. I'll take your word, of course. But I guess my puzzle's a good deal harder. You must have got the easy one."

Borisovna's eyes flashed. She bent forward and, before Amy could prevent her, had snatched her puzzle, shaken it into confusion, and set about solving it. A quarter of an hour by the clock and it was done. She dropped it upon Amy's lap with a satisfied "There!" leaned back in her chair, and raised her arms so her clasped hands made a rest for the back of her head.

"Puzzles are dead easy," she observed "What really gets me are the lessons at school. It's something like to win out on them—specially with the smart girls you're up against in the class."

"Thank you!" said Amy icily.

Borisovna looked mystified. "What are you thanking me for? O—oh, I see! You think I

meant you ain't smart. Pooh! I didn't mean any such thing. I wasn't thinking of you at all. Besides, even if you ain't very quick at puzzles, that don't say you wouldn't be a whizz at lessons. I bet you would. Say, come along on and try! O' course I mean when your foot gets well. You'll like it all right. We have heaps of fun."

"Does Sally go to school?" Amy asked the question, dodging the promise Boris was trying to wring from her.

"Sally Leonard? I should say not. Sally works in the same shop as Nora. You bet she wishes she could go to school."

"Who is John Graham?"

"A fellow who goes to the same night-school Nora and Sally go to. Also to the Settlement Music School. Why?"

"Oh, no reason! I just wanted to know. He was showing me my way home the day I hurt my foot and we met Nora and Sally. Sally ordered him 'round like everything—exactly as if he was a servant—I mean—a relation."

Boris stuck out her under lip. "O—oh—Sal—ly!" she exclaimed scornfully.

"Don't you like her?" Amy asked.

Borisovna's shoulders went up. "I like her all right when she ain't too bossy. The matter with Sally is she's too fresh—too much of a muchness, otherwise she's good enough. One thing she can do! She can play the fiddle—I guess you call it violin. Playing the violin so grand makes her think she's the head of everything. Folks have praised her up till she don't know her place, my mother says. Poor John Graham would give his eye-teeth to play as well as Sally does, but he simply ain't in it with her."

"I never knew that girls who work in shops played the violin."

Boris raised her eyebrows. "Why wouldn't they? John Graham works in a shop—in Hoboken—but that isn't what his heart is set on. His heart is set on being an artist. He works like a horse. He walks two miles, coming and going, every theory lesson night—and theory ain't like music, all fun, I can tell you. No, theory is an entirely different proposition. Terribly hard and dry! I don't see how John does the things he does—I mean work in Hoboken and then get back here to go to night-school and the music school besides. But he's as regular as the clock, and walking two miles both

ways is no joke, particularly when you haven't good shoes, but are walking on your uppers and it's cold winter weather, with snow and ice on the ground."

Amy stared. "Why does he walk?"

There was a moment of silence, during which Boris took time to give Amy a long, searching look. She opened her lips as if she were going to speak, then closed them again.

"He *likes* to walk," she observed at last in sugared tones. "He thinks it's good for his health. There's nothing rests you so much after a hard day's work, standing on your feet all the time, as a nice walk of a couple of miles or so through snow and ice, with frost-bitten feet. It just seems to make you feel good! Gives you appetite for your books."

"You're making fun of me!" Amy exclaimed aggrievedly.

Boris dropped her ironic tone:

"Well, what do you expect? When you ask fool-questions, you get fool-answers."

"I don't think I asked a fool-question. People can take cars, can't they?"

Boris laughed out. "Sure they can—if they have the price. But five cents is five cents. John walks

because he ain't got carfare to ride. Whereabouts have you been living, I should like to know, that you are so green? Didn't they sting you for fare to ride in the cars where you lived before you came here?"

Ordinarily Amy would have fired up and made a sharp retort in spite of the fact that she was in her own house and therefore under bond to treat a guest with double consideration. But the remembrance of her promise to Daddy to keep his secret held her back.

"Say, I guess your foot hurts you, don't it?" Borisovna exclaimed abruptly.

Amy nodded. "A little, yes. But it doesn't matter."

"I saw you biting your lip, like something was giving you a pain. Perhaps I'd better be going. Maybe you'd rather be all alone by yourself."

"Oh, no!" Amy responded quickly. "I'm very glad to have you here. You see—you see, I don't know anybody in this part of the c . . ."

"Oho! You come from another part of the state? Well, don'tcher care. Never you mind if you do feel kind of strange at first. You'll soon get feeling at home. 'Specially now you are going

to school, and I'll make you acquainted with the girls in our section."

"But I haven't said I was going to school."

"You said you didn't have to work in a shop."

The case was as plain as A B C. If Amy had not been so provoked, she would have felt inclined to laugh. The very idea of her—Amy Burke, granddaughter of the great Alexander Guthrie—working in a shop! Fortunately, just at that moment Ellen pushed open the door, admitting herself and a vast luncheon-tray, explaining as she came forward:

"I've another like it outside, so the two of youse can ate and pretend it's a party you're havin'."

Boris had risen quickly, but now she sat down again, her eyes taking in at a glance every detail of the daintily spread feast, the person who bore it.

Amy scowled. She could have slapped Ellen for forcing her into such a fix. It is one thing to play with a girl not in your set, but quite another to ask her to luncheon. Borisovna's eyes, glued to Ellen and the tray, did not see her hostess's inhospitable expression.

"Gee!" she ejaculated when Ellen had disappeared, "this is *some* eats! That your mother?"

"My—what?"

"I said is that your mother?—the lady that brought in the tray?"

For one moment Amy stared blankly into Borisovna's unconscious face. Then suddenly she went off into an uncontrollable fit of laughter. Boris had no idea what the joke was, but the sight of "Burkeses Amy splitting her sides" was infectious and set her to giggling hysterically, so that by the time Ellen re-entered with the second tray she found them both in a gale. Her good face lit up with satisfaction.

"Sure, that's the way I do be likin' to see youse, dearies! Laugh an' grow fat, like the song says."

Amy never knew just how it came about, but by the time Boris was ready to leave she had as good as promised to go to school the minute her foot was well.

That night, when Nora stopped in on her way upstairs to inquire about the invalid, she was told the news. Her eyes shone.

"Oh, you lucky girl!" she congratulated Amy ungrudgingly. "Ain't you tickled to death?"

Daddy, behind his screen of evening newspaper, paused in his reading to hear Amy's answer. For a moment there was no answer. Then—

"I suppose I am," Amy admitted lamely. "I hadn't thought about it."

Nora gave a little gasp. "Not thought about it! My! I wonder you don't jump out of your skin with happiness. If it was me, the house wouldn't hold me! You just watch Sally, to see what she says when we tell her! She'll think somebody has wished the good luck on you for fair!"

There wasn't a trace of envy in Nora's tone, but all at once Amy felt herself to be an enviable girl.

"I wish you could go, too," she said sympathetically.

Nora smiled. "If what your daddy says is true, and I know it is—I can—some day."

CHAPTER VI

A WARNING-CARD

“**G**OING to school may be a cinch for the girls down this way, but I can tell you it’s not a cinch for me!” complained Amy one cold Friday morning, weeks after as she and Daddy sat at breakfast.

“Why so?”

The crisp bacon and egg she was eating suddenly seemed to monopolize all Amy’s attention. She did not answer at once. When she did, it was with an effort:

“Well, you see, I haven’t been used to it, I mean the—the—what they call ‘the system,’ and all that. Studying with governesses is a sort of go-as-you-please stunt; I should say affair. Easy as pie! But high school! High school is right down hard work. And I never saw anything like it, the way some of the girls here are bright. Why, they’re as quick as lightning, some of the girls in our section. It seems as if they just got their lessons in no time. Of course,

all of them aren't that way, but the ones that are any account at all are. And a girl wants to be ranked with that kind or none at all, don't you see?"

Daddy saw perfectly, as he indicated by a spirited nod.

"You'd think the world was coming to an end if their report cards aren't good. The fuss they make! They cry and go on to the teacher and ask her why she marked 'em so low, and, oh! all sorts of nonsense. As if it mattered! Boris Orloff says last term, after the uniform-test, the papers were given back on a Friday afternoon just before dismissal. But, instead of the dismissal bell, the fire-drill gong sounded and all the classes had to march out of the building double-quick. And, then, what do you think? It was all a trick to get them and their old papers out of the way, for after the girls had filed out of the building and were on the sidewalk, they found—true as you live!—they were locked out. The doors were closed and they couldn't get back in. So, if they wanted to make a fuss about their marks, they could do it to the lamp-posts. The teachers were safe and sound inside, where the scholars couldn't cry all over them. Boris laughed like everything. She said it was a great

scheme, for by Monday morning the girls had got cooled down some and could see that they had just about what was coming to them. Boris doesn't have to fuss about her marks. They're always 'way up. She's what the girls call 'a greasy grind.' But, Daddy, do you see the sense of caring so much for just marks and averages and things?"

Daddy considered. "It depends," he said at length. "Marks and averages and things mean nothing in themselves, perhaps, but what they represent means a great deal! Industry—and application—character."

"Then you'd care if I got low marks?"

"I certainly should."

"Oh!"

As Amy walked to school through the frosty air she found herself, like the owl Daddy sometimes told about, "keeping up the power of a thinking." "The real truth is I'm 'way behind," she mused soberly. "Grandfather never cared what I was doing so long as I had my own way. The governesses, Miss Price and all of them, used to praise me up to the skies for every little thing, because they knew it pleased Grandfather, and, besides, it showed what good teachers they were. And all the while I wasn't



As Amy walked to school



getting on a bit—really. Everybody else was going 'way ahead of me. Now I don't know if I can ever catch up. And, if I'm not promoted in February and get good marks and all, I don't know what I'll do. I'll feel so disgraced, for those things *count* down here, and the worst of it is Daddy'll care."

"Heyo! What you looking so mournful about this snappy morning, I should like to know?"

Amy looked around, into the broad, good-natured face smiling mockingly over at her.

"Heyo, Boris!"

"You haven't lost your best friend, or any little thing like that, I s'pose? What you looking so glum about?"

"Do I look glum? I am—a little, but I didn't know it showed on the outside."

"Well, it does. What's up? Or, rather, down? Telling?"

Amy shook her head. "There's a reason, but it isn't worth mentioning. So let's talk about the weather."

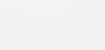
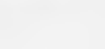
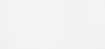
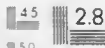
"Certainly. Anything to accommodate, I'm sure. Cold day, isn't it?"

"Real cold—walking."



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"Pooh! I think you're warmer walking than if you're in a car."

"Oh, *I* don't!" Amy objected quickly, her thoughts flying far afield in a flash. "My car's as warm as toast. It's heated by electricity."

Boris shot a keen glance at her. "Say, something sure does ail you this morning and no mistake. What do you mean by *your* car, and heated by electricity, I should like to know?"

Borisovna's tone was challenging. It brought Amy's wits back to the stern present in quicker time than they had taken to wander off into the luxurious past.

"Why, my car's the L, and so's yours, isn't it?" she returned with instantly recovered presence of mind. "And all the L cars are heated by electricity, aren't they?"

It had been what Harleigh called a close shave.

Boris shrugged. "For a minute I thought you were talking about an auto. Somehow, every once in a while you get a sort of auto way with you—auto-cratic way, as Miss Grant would say. As if you were used to riding in your own motor and bossing a whole regiment of slaves. I don't understand how it is, but I've noticed it ever so many times.

Yet, of course, if you really were that kind of rich, you wouldn't be living in Craigen Street."

"Why wouldn't I?" Amy ventured, a little rashly.

"Well, first-off, you wouldn't choose it. And, second, you'd be run out if you did."

"Run out?"

"Sure! They'd think there was a screw loose somewhere, sure as you live, and they'd probably be right. When folks that ain't your own kind want to come and live with you, look out! Half the time they're spies, looking for trouble. My folks came over from Russia, but, even if they did, we're Americans all right and just as free and independent as anybody."

Amy laughed. "It's great fun to watch you when you get spunky. It's funny to see all you foreign girls squabbling over which has the best right to be American. The ones who were born just before the ship sailed quarrel with the ones who were born halfway over. It's great fun!"

"Glad you think so!" Borisovna's words were crisp as the frosty air into which they were spoken. "Glad you think so. It's nice we 'foreign girls' make amusement for you. You certainly make amusement for us."

Amy felt herself flushing. "I suppose you mean—I'm a dunce," she brought out bluntly.

Instead of replying directly, Boris turned full on her the leading question: "Where did you go to school before you came to ours?"

For a second Amy hesitated.

"I—that is, I didn't go to school anywhere," she stammered reluctantly.

It was Borisovna's turn to flush. Dropping her eyes, she abruptly took up another subject. She had delicacy enough to realize she might have been touching a sensitive point. Of course she could not have helped noticing that "Burkeses Amy" was a dummy at her books, but if it was because her father had been too poor to "leave" her go to school, why that put a different face on the matter. That was something "Burkeses Amy" wasn't responsible for. In her eagerness to make up for her blunder Boris clumsily stumbled into another: "Any time you want help, call on me."

Amy's chin went up with a jerk. "Thank you. I guess if you can get along by yourself, I can," she announced grandly.

"Oh, very well! Have it your own way. All I meant was to do you a kindness."

For the rest of the way nothing was said on either side. Amy's pride was terribly hurt. Boris felt that her perfectly good intention had been misunderstood, her well-meant offer flung back in her face.

It turned out to be one of those days on which everything is supposed to go wrong. Beginning with her tiff with Boris, Amy went on to find that she had most humiliatingly failed in a test given some days before. Her paper was red-penciled to within an inch of its life. Her next-door neighbor, looking stealthily over her shoulder as she was examining it, laughed derisively:

"Black and white and red all over, like the conundrum about the newspaper, isn't it?"

"No," said Amy, pretending as well as she could that she didn't care, "it's the pink of perfection."

But she did care, and her attempt to brazen it out was as dismal a failure as her test-paper had been.

She and Boris usually went home together. Today she determined to give her the slip. After dismissal she hung back until she saw Boris leave, then took a roundabout way to the elevated station, and, when her train at last drew in, settled herself in a

cross-seat, feeling Jack-Hornerishly self-satisfied, congratulating herself on her own cleverness, even if she didn't say, "What a smart girl am I!" At the next station Boris got on. She stood a moment hesitating in the doorway of the car Amy was in, as if looking for a seat, then turned and walked deliberately into the car ahead, although there was plenty of room in Amy's.

"Thank goodness!" sighed Amy, recovering breath after her narrow escape. "What luck she didn't see me. If she had, she'd have been all over the place in a minute. That's the kind they are down here. Never know when they're not wanted—always pushing themselves forward without waiting to be asked. Well, I can't get rid of her when we get out, that's certain. But I don't care. It isn't much of a walk. She can tag along if she wants to. I won't have to speak unless I choose."

But even while she was adjusting her mind to the inevitable, gathering her books together, as the train drew up at the station before her own, looking out of the window she saw Borisovna walk composedly past her on the platform and descend the stairway. It took her so by surprise she almost forgot to get off when her own turn came and had to scurry

at the last moment or be carried on to the next stopping-place.

"The idea! She never gets off there. It's all out of her way. She'll have to walk blocks and blocks."

Amy was mystified. She was even a trifle uneasy. It was one thing to rid herself of Boris, quite another to have Boris know what she was up to. The troublesome thought that Boris might know haunted her the remainder of the afternoon, only giving way when other more important matters pushed it into the background.

Her father's affairs at the office had been making Amy very impatient of late, detaining him after hours when she wanted him to come home punctually, calling him suddenly out of town when she had arranged some special jollification at home. Often she had been obliged to eat her dinner in solitary state, and once he had even failed to appear after dinner on a Friday evening, the evening when the young people of the neighborhood were apt to drop in for fun, fudge, and fine arts, as Harleigh expressed it. To-night she had not even finished dressing when she heard his key in the lock. She gave a joyous little shout of welcome:

"Hello, Daddy! Good work! I guess I'm glad you're home. I thought maybe you mightn't come. Now I feel just like——"

Whatever she felt like at that moment, the next she felt like something quite different. Her father's voice speaking quickly, urgently to Ellen came up to her with dismal forewarning. She finished dressing in a hurry and ran downstairs. Daddy was at his desk, busily searching, sorting, collecting certain important-looking papers, which he presently slipped into the traveling-bag Ellen brought him.

"Why, Daddy, you're not going away?"

Amy's voice trembled on the verge of tears.

"Yes, ma'am. Must catch train within an hour. Don't delay me, that's a dear. What's that, Ellen? Oh, the mail? Here, Amykin, get busy. Look it over for me, will you?" He tossed the bunch into Amy's lap, continuing at his work while she examined envelopes and read off names:

"One from Auntie Jean.—That's for me!" Her voice was exultant. "One from the gas company. . . ."

"'That's for me,'" teased Daddy, mimicking her tone and manner.

"One from Dodge and Dunham. . . ."

"Indeed! So they're alive, are they? I'd given them up for lost. You may tell them I say so. Say, I ought to have heard from them two weeks ago. As it is, I've placed my order elsewhere. If you can't manage it by yourself, call up Miss Meeks at the office. She knows about it. She'll type off anything you tell her on my letter-head paper, and either she or you can sign for me—*per* your own initials. Understand?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"Any more?"

"One from—let's see—oh, it's a wedding invitation . . ."

"Attend to it later. Go on. Anything else?"

"One from——"

If Daddy had not been so preoccupied, he might have wondered at the sudden way in which Amy came to a full stop in the middle of her sentence, the queer little note in her voice before it dropped off into nothing at all, the odd sidelong look she cast in his direction, the next instant turning her face square away. But he was too busy to wonder. He did not even notice.

"Anything more of any importance?"

"N—no. I—I guess not."

"All right-o. We won't bother about them now, then."

For the next half-hour the place fairly hummed. Then suddenly—silence. Daddy was gone. It seemed as if he had taken all the life of the place away with him. Amy looked about desolately. Her hand went to her sleeve, feeling blindly for her handkerchief. But the tears that had started were never shed. The thing her groping fingers met had the effect of drying them at once. She went to the kitchen door.

"O—oh, Ellen! Dinner ready?" she asked with a great air of unconcern.

"In a quarter of an hour. I'm sorry, Miss Amy. I got delayed waitin' on your daddy. But it won't be over a quarter of an hour before your dinner's on the table."

Amy nodded amiably as she closed the door. She had discovered what she wanted to know. Ellen would not interrupt her for fifteen minutes at least. Although she was alone, she felt herself moving cautiously, as if some unseen eye were watching her, and when at last she sat down beside the living-room table in the light of the reading lamp she fingered the paper she held so that at a moment's no-

tice she could whisk it out of sight. The envelope was directed to Daddy. In its upper left-hand corner were printed the name and address of her own high school. Her lips trembled as she tore open the flap, unfolded the sheet inclosed, and spread it out upon her lap in the shadow of the table rim:

MY DEAR MR. BURKE:—

The work your daughter Amy is doing in English is not reaching a passing mark. As her promotion at the end of the term will be dependent on better work and more effort on her part, I am writing before it is too late to ask your aid in inducing her to improve. Will you kindly call at the school at your earliest convenience any school-day between 2:45 and 3:15 in order to discuss more fully her particular needs.

Very truly,

CAROL V. GRANT.

For one awful moment Amy glared at the paper in her hand as if it were a snake. Then, with an exclamation, she crushed it in her fist, threw it on the floor, and ground it under her heel.

The idea! The very idea! Miss Grant sending a letter like that to Daddy. Suppose Daddy had not been called away! Suppose he had seen the letter, read it! Amy could picture to herself the way

he would look, the expression of his eyes. She brought her jaws together with a sharp snap of determination. Daddy should never see the letter. He had told her to attend to the mail. Well, she would attend to it—with a vengeance!

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CHAPTER VII

NOBODY'S FOOL

“**P**OOH! I don't see what there is about the people down here to 'study,' Daddy. They're 'just folks' like everybody else.”

“Burkeses Amy” hadn't lived in Craigen Street going on three months without flattering herself she knew a thing or two about its tricks and its manners.

For answer Daddy pinched her ear, humming softly: “'E's all right when you knows 'im, but you've got to knows 'im fus:”

“You mean I don't?”

“Well, what do you think? How many of your schoolbooks could you master in the time we've been down here? And these human documents are a long sight harder to read, let alone learn by heart. For instance, there's that young Graham chap, the one you fell in with when you lost your way—the one who brought you back the day you hurt your foot. What do you make of him? I've asked him here a dozen times if I've asked him once, and

the rate at which he doesn't hasten to avail himself of my kind invitation is, what Ellen would call, a caution."

Amy shrugged indifferently. She wouldn't for the world have confessed that John's staying away when all the others had jumped at the chance to come, and to come not once but again and again, made her "mad as hops" every time she thought of it. It made her so mad that she couldn't resist the temptation to give a little fling at him now in passing.

"Sally Leonard says she likes him all right, but she must confess he's slow as tar. She told me she'd think he was a stuck-up if he wasn't always ready when anybody was in trouble. But he's not like the rest of the fellows—he keeps himself to himself. Sally told me he can't play the fiddle to save his life, but nothing can make him give up trying. He plugs away like grim death, she says, and never gets on a bit. Don't you think that's foolish? Not to know when you're beaten, I mean? Perhaps he's the kind that's too stupid to come when he's called."

"Maybe. But from what I've seen and heard of him I don't believe it. A fellow who works hard

all day and then puts in his evenings at night-school, struggling for an education, is nobody's fool. They tell me he spends his holidays at the public library poring over deep books."

"Pawing? What good does pawing over them do him?"

For a second Daddy puzzled over her question. Then he laughed out. "No good—the way you say it, you little New Yorker. Put the *r* in where it belongs and pronounce it *poring* and you'll see it does him a lot of good. But what I'd like to know is why he hangs back from his friends. He's the sort it'd be a privilege to help."

Amy shook her head. "As far as I can make out, the sort that it'd be a privilege to help is the sort that won't let you help 'em. I've tried with Nora and I know."

As she sat at her lonesome dinner, following Daddy's departure for Chicago, this talk which had taken place weeks ago suddenly popped back into Amy's mind, she didn't know why, unless it was that very recently certain things had been happening that made it not quite so easy as she had supposed to size up people while you wait, as Daddy put it.

There was Nora, for example. Whoever heard

of a girl as poverty-poor as Nora, a shop-girl, standing up and refusing to take things when they were offered her—things she needed—perfectly good things, right out of the store? And John Graham! Not coming when he had the chance. And Boris! If Boris had been one of the uptown girls and had acted as she had acted coming home from school that afternoon, Amy would have felt it was as much as to say:

"Oh, so you want to dodge me, do you? Well, don't worry. I'll let you. I'll even help along. I'll do some dodging on my own account."

As it was, of course Boris couldn't have meant any such thing. Amy was sure of that. And yet—oh, dear! What made thoughts so worrisome? It was enough to set you wild, the way they bothered!

The bell rang.

Ellen ambled in from the kitchen on her way to answer the door, and Amy noticed she had her working-apron on. Somehow the sight was the last straw. The hot, rebellious tears began to gather. One rolled down and fell, splash! upon the tablecloth, but before another could follow the funny side had come uppermost, as it always did with Amy, and she broke into a fit of laughter. She pic-

tured to herself Grandfather's face if he could see the figure Ellen cut at this moment, reappearing between the living-room portières.

"My stars, Ellen, but you're a fearful stylish butleress!" she jibed.

Two dish-water soaked hands caught up the dish-water soaked apron with a distracted clutch:

"Glory be! Did youse ever see the like! Me kitchen-apron waitin' on the door! If the young felly inside was *himself*, or Mister Harleigh, now, I'd never have the face to hold up me head again."

The whispering voice warned Amy to lower her own:

"Who is it?"

"Sorra a wan av me knows. A young felly I never laid eyes on before. He's afther askin' for Mr. Burke. I didn't say your daddy wasn't in it, for fear there'd be somethin' important that couldn't wait. But don't ye fash yourself, dearie. He's all right. Let'm wait an' rest his bones, whoever he is. Ate your pudd'n in peace."

For answer Amy rose, pushed her chair back, and hurried into the next room. There, by the mantelpiece, his back turned toward her as he stood

facing the framed photograph hanging against the chimney breast, was a figure she knew—the tall, upright figure of John Graham.

"Good-evening!" said Amy.

John turned to face her:

"Good-evening!"

"Won't you sit down?"

"No, thank you."

His calm refusal of what she felt to be a condescension on her part brought the hot blood to Amy's cheeks.

"Then what under the sun did you come for?" she felt like asking, but of course did nothing of the kind.

A long pause followed. At last:

"Is Mr. Burke——? Mr. Burke told me——"

"My father's gone to Chicago."

This time it was John who flushed. He fingered the brim of his hat for an embarrassed moment, then took a step toward the door.

"If there is anything I can do?" Amy made the suggestion almost timidly.

He shook his head. "No, thank you."

And there the dialogue stuck. Why didn't he go if he was going? But after that first movement he

made no further attempt to reach the door, just stood and fingered his hat and said nothing.

"Good gracious," Amy inwardly ejaculated, "I wonder if we're going to stand this way all night. I'm so nervous I could fly off my feet. If something doesn't happen, and happen quick, I'll scream!"

Then, all at once, something did happen. And it wasn't Amy who screamed, but Ellen. Her terrified cry rang sharply through the quiet rooms, and John, after one second of tense listening, dashed quickly out into the kitchen, led by the piercing screams. Amy would have followed, but something clogged her feet. She tried to lift them, they refused to obey.

It seemed an age before she could get them to move, and all the while Ellen's shrill cries kept on and on. Without knowing how she got there, Amy found herself before the closed kitchen door. She pushed it open. A cloud of suffocating smoke, a glare of orange flame. Someone in the midst of it—John—working like mad. Presently she, too, was working, working under his orders, watching for his silent signals, obeying his quick commands.

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It was as if all her life she and John Graham had been fighting fire together. By and by she found herself wondering why Ellen was swaying back and forth, sobbing hysterically. This was no time for what Daddy called turning on the water-works. Suddenly she laughed out. Why, of course it was. That's where the joke came in. It was just the time—only the stream wasn't strong enough.

"Put on more power, Ellen!" she jeered joyously. "And we'll have the fire out in no time!"

"It's as good as out now!"

"Lord love ye, young felly!" gasped Ellen. "It's the truth ye're tellin'. An' what we'd 'a' done wit'out ye, God only knows. 'Tis yourself is a fire department all by your lonesome, which I'd rather it was youse than the hook-and-ladder, anny time. For wanst that same do be gettin' in on youse, it's as good as drowned yez are with their villain of a hose."

"But, Ellen, how did the fire start?"

"Start is it? Sure, it never started at all. It was flamin' ere ever it began. I'd die in me thracks before I'd do the like again. But how could I know, thryin' out me fat, it'd spill over on me, an' ere a

body could wink the whole place'd be in a blaze? The saints be praised, it's no worse! I can scrub up me kitchen, but where'd I be to clean up afther meself if I'd been burned in me skin the night?"

Long after Amy was convinced all danger was past, and urged John to go with her into the parlor, he chose to linger on in the kitchen, apparently doing nothing, in reality keeping a sharp, detective eye out for any lurking, smoldering spark that might break out later and give trouble. But at last even he was thoroughly satisfied. Drawing a deep breath of relief he turned to the door:

"I guess I'll go now."

With a quick impulse of gratitude Amy held out her hand. Her chin quivered, but the words refused to come.

John did not seem to see. He backed awkwardly away, his own two hands thrust clumsily behind him.

"Aren't you going to shake hands?" Amy followed it up, her voice trembling, but very friendly. Looking into his face she saw his firm lips tighten, his square jaw set.

"I—my hands are—too dirty."

The flimsy excuse came with an effort. It did not deceive:

"If it's a question of dirt, mine are as bad as yours. The pot can't call the kettle black. We've been in this thing together, you and I, John Graham."

Her little grimy palm went out toward him again. But even now it was not grasped. John looked down at it loftily for a moment, so it seemed to Amy, then backed away another step. There was no mistaking it. He was deliberately refusing to take what she offered. His reason she did not stop to consider. It was enough that her friendly advance was rejected. She had felt his staying away to be an affront. This was the cut direct. It didn't make it any better to "consider the source." In fact, it made it worse. With a sudden resentful fling she brought the despised hand back to her side:

"All right for you, John Graham!"

A second later she would have dashed, blind with anger, out into the dining-room and away, but Ellen's voice stopped her:

"Miss Amy—Miss Amy—looka here!"

Holding John's wrists fast in her strong Irish grip, the old woman dragged him, resisting, toward where

Amy stood. One look at his hands, then a smothered cry:

“Oh—John!”

“Thole the pain a minute longer if ye can, ye poor lad! Till I bind up your hands in coolin’ oil.”

Through a maze Amy saw John drop heavily on a nearby chair, saw Ellen stirring a queer mixture of lime-water and sweet-oil, saw herself running for rolls of soft linen from a cupboard where Ellen had carefully stowed them, saw the suffering hands swathed in the soothing stuff, and at last saw the deep furrows of pain fade somewhat from John’s set face.

“Come on out into the parlor. Ellen says you mustn’t go home until she’s oiled your hands some more. If you can’t be comfortable, be as comfortable as you can. You might as well make the best of a bad job.”

Rising, John smiled mistily down at her:

“I don’t call it a bad job. I call it a pretty good job.”

The smile, his way of making light of what he had done, of the pain he was suffering, caught at Amy’s throat. She wheeled about abruptly.

"Come on out!" she repeated in a voice that did not sound in the least like her own, and disappeared into the dining-room.

John made no attempt to follow. Instead, he put a quick whispered question to Ellen, a question that startled her into instant attention:

"Is there another way out?"

"Another way . . . ?"

"Yes—out. I don't want to go back in there."

"Why don't ye?"

"No matter. Show me the way to the hall."

"There ain't no way exceptin' through them front rooms."

"No back fire-escape?"

"Sure, there's that. But it'd be the death of ye to thry go down it wit' them useless hands."

For answer he strode toward the window. Ellen was there before him:

"She told ye, 'Come on out,' lad. Ye'll have to mind her."

"Why?"

"Because everywan does. Her word is law. Ye wouldn't dare defy her. Th' ould man'd have ye dhrawn an' quarthered."

"The old . . . Who?—What . . . ?"

Ellen's eyes grew wild. She groaned, wringing her hands miserably:

"May God forgive me, I broke me promise."

There were sounds of voices beyond.

"Your word, lad, your word! Ye won't tell on me," she implored.

"Just put your head in and take a peck, Harleigh. Isn't it the worst fright of a place that ever you saw in your life? Looks as if a cyclone had struck it. And—oh! This is John Graham who put it out and saved our lives and got his hands burned and everything. And, oh, John, didn't you hear me say come on out? This is our friend, Mr. Worthing."

As Amy spoke, standing with her back propping open the dining-room door, she beckoned to John, and this time he followed.

They were very kind to him, pressing him into the most comfortable chair, shading the lamps so the light would not worry his eyes, asking nothing of him but to sit in state while Mr. Worthing played the piano in a way that ordinarily would have lifted John to the seventh heaven of bliss. But now their

very friendliness made the whole thing a misery. He bore it as long as he could. Then awkwardly he got to his feet:

"I guess I'll be going."

Amy's protest was instantaneous.

"Oh, no, you can't! Ellen must do up your hands again. You know she said . . ."

What Ellen said was left hanging in midair. What she did was to answer Amy's call of command with the promptness of a soldier obeying his superior officer. All the time she was attending to his burns John wondered stupidly what the woman meant when she declared everyone had to mind "Burkeses Amy." Why had they? When no answer came he let it go without a struggle. His mind was numb, like all the rest of him, except his hands. The feeling that used to be distributed throughout his whole body was concentrated in them now. When the bandages were taken off he was blind to the fact that Amy went white as a sheet, he was deaf to the sound of the telephone bell in the next room responding to Harleigh's urgent call to Central to give him someone or other, and do it quick.

"Now ye can go, if ye like, me lad. An' I'll give ye a botthle av the good oil to take home wit' ye.

Put in a night's sleep and to-morra ye'll be as good as new, or almost."

He tried to smile his thanks to Ellen, tried to smile good-night to "Burkeses Amy," but all the while felt he was making a fizzle of it, and the worst was he didn't much care. What his mind was really fixing itself on was the effort he would have to make to get out of the place in good shape—not to show how weak-kneed he was. He managed to get downstairs and as far as the street door.

"Hello, old man! You don't want to sit down on the doorstep, do you? I wouldn't if I were you. Too chilly!"

The pleasant shock of Harleigh's crisp voice put new life in John. Harleigh's arm gave him a steady-
ing brace. He laughed weakly in default of a better response and let it go at that, making no attempt to talk. It didn't disturb him that the way they were taking was not the one that led to the place he called home. He didn't notice. He just went on and on, acting on the common assumption that, if one travels far enough, he is likely to arrive somewhere. And, sure enough, they did arrive somewhere. John drew back at sight of the handsome entrance hall, the rugs, the palms, the uniformed attendants.

"I don't live here," he stammered protestingly.

"I do," said Harleigh unconcernedly, and with a firm hand led him forward and into a waiting elevator.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE DAY'S WORK

DOCTOR DANE screwed up his lips as his deft fingers gently unwound the bungling bandages about John's throbbing hands.

"Nothing surgical about these!" he scoffed good-naturedly. "There are nurses *and* nurses."

John dimly wondered if it would be disloyal to the good old woman who had tried in such friendly fashion to help him if he were to return the doctor's genial smile. While he was wondering the smile vanished. Instead of the jolly sunburst of wrinkles at the tail-end of each eye, appeared two perpendicular lines between the heavy brows, two lines that looked like a deep-cut number 11. Then orders began to snap out quick and fast like the crisp explosion of percussion-caps, and John grew dizzy watching Harleigh pass to and fro, swiftly, silently, fetching, carrying. The dizziness grew when Harleigh and the pendulum of the great clock in the corner became hopelessly mixed, the pendulum seem-

ing to bring basins filled with strong-smelling liquid, bottles, bandages, no end of things, Harleigh to be swaying back and forth with a lulling regularity, ticking loudly all the time.

"Let him go! He's all right! No harm done! While he's unconscious he won't feel the sting of the antiseptics, and, Lord knows, he has troubles enough of his own without any more. You did well to call me. You have a good head in an emergency. There might have been complications here. May be yet, unless we can ward 'em off. He's in no shape to fight off infection. He's all run down. Fine, big, strapping frame on him, but suffering from what is technically called malnutrition. In his case, literally—starvation."

Harleigh drew in a long, shuddering breath.

"Sure as you live," insisted the doctor. "Every symptom of it. All the signs right under your nose—his nose rather."

"Doctor! Don't joke! It's too—hideous!"

"True for you! Hideous it is. But it's life, my boy. The seamy side of life. It's ugly enough, but pulling a long face won't make it any prettier. And let me tell you something—things won't be any better till we stop talking drivel, stop driveling,

and—*do!* 'All men are my brothers!' The dickens they are! Show me, and I'll believe you! Show me!

All the while he was talking the skillful surgeon fingers had been busy. Now there was a moment of silence as the doctor gently raised John's head to hold a tumbler to his lips.

"Very well," said Harleigh. "I will show you."

John, lifting his heavy lids just then, saw the jolly sunburst of wrinkles reappear at the tail-end of each of the doctor's eyes and wondered drowsily what made him so happy. Now, if the doctor were John, he'd have a right to be happy. As it was . . .

John's eyes closed again as he drifted out upon the deep sea of happiness that stretched on and on to the beautiful land of boundless bliss.

"'Off agin, On agin,
Gone agin, Finnigin.'"

quoted the doctor, laughing as he watched his patient drop back to sleep.

"He'll be about like this for some time—days, perhaps. Meanwhile there'll be some stiff nursing, constant change of compresses, bathing, giving of nourishment. Don't be afraid to back out if the

prospect looks glum. I wouldn't blame you. It's no picnic. Only, if you do want to throw up the job, now is the appointed time. I can call up the hospital and have him ambulated off in a twinkling. What say, young sir? Speak now, or forever hold your pieces."

Harleigh considered.

"I tell you what I'll do. I'll have a nurse in—here—till the worst is over. Then, when the watchful waiting isn't quite such a continuous performance, I'll undertake to attend to the case myself. How's that?"

"Fine!"

"Do you know a nurse who could come right off? To-night?"

"I sure do."

"Can you get her and send her along?"

"I sure can."

Harleigh brought his hand palm downward on the doctor's knee:

"Doekie, you're a brick!"

"Same to you, sir. Now, how about getting this boy to bed? I'll do the trick if you'll lend a hand. Wasted as he is, he's too hefty for a woman to handle. And your great huskies out there in the

hall might dislocate one of their brass buttons if they tried to do a stroke of real work. Give me a lift and we'll have him in bed in no time."

Together they "did the trick," and so skillfully that from first to last John never "batted an eyelash," as the doctor expressed it. Nor did he wake when, around midnight, the nurse appeared, relieving Harleigh of what to him had become a night-watch that had all the appearance of stretching on into the years.

That nurse never succeeded in counting for more than the blurred shadow of a dream to John. She came and went without disturbing him in the least. Later he had to trouble his recollection to recall a white-capped presence that had given him warming, cooling things, and been very soothing and comforting at times when he had only a dim sense that someone—it might possibly be himself—was ill at ease. There were long stretches of darkness, brief flashes of light. Then the darkness and light became night and day, only now it was the night that passed in a flash, the day that lingered deliciously with nothing more disagreeable to interrupt its perfect peace than the frequent invitation to sit up and take a little nourishment, or the muffled echo of bewildering

music being made behind closed doors in the room beyond. If he had ventured to do such a rash thing as *think*, John might have supposed life—that is, the great noisy, pushing, hurrying, hungry thing he knew as life—had stopped entirely, or if it was going on at all outside, had changed its tempo and slowed down to a very leisurely, contented pace.

But "Burkeses Amy" could have told him that it hadn't. She knew better. In the excitement of the fire, the news of what had happened to John (telephoned her the same night by Harleigh), she quite forgot her own worry. But, though apparently it slipped her mind, it really lay a dead weight underneath the more impersonal thoughts.

The first thing she realized the next morning was that something had happened overnight that made to-day a dreary thing to face. She "got up the wrong side of the bed," with none of her usual week-end holiday spirit, in a mood to see nothing but gloom.

She did not have to plan out what she would do. She had decided that last night. All that remained was to do it. As soon as her breakfast was eaten she called up Miss Meeks:

"Daddy said you would come here and type off

a couple of letters for him—some things he didn't have time to tell you about yesterday before he left. I know what's to be done about them. If you'll tell me what time you'll be here, I'll wait for you."

Amy was extremely particular to say nothing that was untrue. It did not occur to her that there is very apt to be something rotten in Denmark when one has to steer so carefully between the exact truth and what is not the exact truth. She would have scorned to lie, but it took her considerable time to think up the way to express to Miss Meeks what she wanted her to believe. "I know what's to be done about them" was by no means the same as "Daddy told me what's to be done about them," yet it would carry the same impression. It did. Miss Meeks never doubted that Amy was acting under her father's orders when she described the reply that was to be sent to Miss Grant in response to her warning card.

"I'll word it in my own way," the secretary explained reassuringly. "Some of your father's letters he dictates and I take them down in shorthand word for word. Others he depends on me to write, just giving me a general idea of what's wanted. If he's too busy to do it himself, I sign for him *per*

my own name or initials. Sometimes I write for him as secretary."

Amy swallowed down a troublesome lump in her throat and nodded:

"Yes, that's what Daddy said. He said you or I could sign for him. Or you could write in his place. I'd much rather you'd do that, if you don't mind."

Miss Meeks didn't mind in the least. She wrote a very brief businesslike letter to Miss Grant:

DEAR MADAM:—

Your kind communication of the —th arrived just as Mr. Burke was leaving for Chicago on an absence of some days and I am writing in his stead according to his order to say that the matter you have taken up will receive immediate attention. Mr. Burke would be glad to comply with your request for a personal interview but, as you see, circumstances make it impossible. In the meantime his daughter has been advised of your dissatisfaction with the rate of her progress and I am sure will try to do better in the future.

Hoping this will prove satisfactory, I am,

Very truly,

CHARLOTTE D. MEEKS.

There was nothing about this letter any more than the others to indicate it wasn't what it pretended to

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be. At least Miss Meeks' conscience was clear, so when at last she "got into her things" to go home it was with a sense of having done her duty up to the hilt, as she expressed it. She left all the carbon copies for Amy to hold until her father's return, taking the letters themselves along with her to post.

As soon as she was gone Amy flew to Daddy's desk, drew out Miss Grant's warning card, with its carbon-copy answer, and tore them both into tiny scraps. Daddy should see neither.

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"That's what you get for your trouble, you mean old thing!" Amy addressed the absent teacher. "If you think you can make mischief between Daddy and me, you're very much mistaken."

Calling things and people she didn't like "old" seemed to Amy a sort of way of getting even with them. Actually Miss Grant was not old. She looked so young, in fact, that a girl could easily make the mistake of thinking she could "come it over her." Only, if she did, she never repeated the blunder. If Amy realized why the warning card rankled so, she was not honest enough with herself to admit it. The truth was she had a tremendous admiration for Miss Grant, the sort of feeling that made her long to have Miss Grant like her in return. It made

her cheeks tingle when she thought what must have been in the teacher's mind before she wrote that note. "Dunce! Shirk!" The prospect of facing an ogre in his cave could not have filled Amy with greater dread than meeting Miss Grant the following Monday. And the worst of it was there was no one to tell her troubles to. No one to advise and comfort her. Even if Daddy had been at home, this wasn't a thing she could confide to him, and poor little Auntie Jean, who had always been a standby in the past when anything in the way of comfort was needed—poor little Auntie Jean was now like the Happy Land, "far, far away."

"That reminds me!" Amy exclaimed, jumping to her feet so suddenly that the little rocking-chair in which she had been sitting almost turned a somersault backward. "That reminds me, I had a letter from Auntie Jean. I'd forgotten every last thing about it. Where is it, I wonder."

It did not take much of a search to bring it to light, and, oh! how good that big, square, bluish envelope did look! Amy's eyes, devouring it hungrily, filled with homesick tears. Her fingers trembled as they drew out the thin, closely covered sheets. It was a long, long letter, full of all the

queer, quaint little contradictory characteristics of Auntie Jean herself and, when all was said and done, it was quite as lovable :

Of course you know I'm breaking a rule, Amykin, when I write to you like this. But I can't help it. You are my own dear little girl and I think of you so much and long for you so hard that sometimes it seems as if I should have to steal away and take the next boat home. I suppose one reason I am so homesick may be that I haven't been quite as well as usual lately. I caught cold or something, in Venice, and can't seem to shake it off. Grandfather is very angry. He says I must have been careless, but I know I have not. I hate being a bother to him, yet I cannot help coughing and every time I do it upsets him terribly, sends him into quite a rage. He has been very irritable ever since we came over. The least thing provokes him. I think he misses you, yes and Daddy too, much more than he is willing to confess. I don't dare mention your names. I wish I did. I think if I could talk about you and get letters from you and know that everything was all right again, I think I'd be much happier. I can't bear to have dissension in the family—to have us separated this way. I'm always fretting in my heart to go home and be with you again. . . . The other night I was thinking about you and how, although Christmas is a long way off yet, I'd be beginning to get things started if I were home, and all at once, before I knew it, I was crying. It was so dismal to think there was only one person belonging to me on this whole great big side of the world. Grandfather caught me at it—before I could hide the tears and oh! how he scolded. I tried to tell him the way I feel. He wouldn't listen. It was such a shock to him to have you and Daddy carry out

your own ideas in spite of him. He can't get over it. It's queer the way he broods over it—and I know he does brood over it, for though he doesn't say anything I can see from little things he drops every once in a while how his mind is working. One thing I've noticed that I don't believe he realizes himself, and that is that he's got a lot of respect for Daddy—more than he ever had before. I believe, 'way down in his heart, he respects him for sticking to his principles and not allowing himself to be bought over. But that doesn't interfere with Grandfather's putting his foot down, as he says, on sending you a box. He forbade me to buy so much as a bit of coral, or a chip of turquoise—you remember what nice coral and turquoise one can get in Naples?—I may be wrong (you must never take me as an example, Amy—just as a warning) but I can't help it if it is wicked and undutiful to do what I'm doing now behind his back. Of course I ought to "walk straight up to the captain's office," as Daddy says, and face the music—own up and make a clean breast of it. That's what Daddy would tell me to do. But Daddy is brave: I'm not. Copy Daddy, dearest. Don't pattern yourself after me, for goodness' sake. What I was going to say is—I can't send you a present, because I'd be found out. Murray watches every breath I draw. I think he spies out and reports to Grandfather. I never did like Murray. He's the most disagreeable valet Grandfather ever had, I think. Don't you? Oh, dear! How I keep wandering off the track! I can't send you a present, but I'm going to do something that may serve the same purpose, and oh, you can't think how happy it makes me to do it. I am sending you in this a draft of exchange, as they call it, for a trifle which you can spend in any way you choose. It's not as much as I'd like, because Grandfather wants to "see the worth of his money" when

he gives me my allowance, and I can't save much without attracting attention. You won't mind it's not being more, will you, dear? Anyhow, I hope whatever you spend it on will give you as much pleasure as I'm having in sending it.

The trifle was two hundred and fifty dollars.

In the old days such an amount wouldn't have seemed anything extraordinary to Amy, but now her eyes fairly popped out of her head with delight. Two hundred and fifty dollars of her very own! To do what she liked with! Her mind became a screen on which a quick succession of moving pictures passed bewilderingly.

A dress for Nora—a good dress of fine material, prettily made. . . . A suit of clothes for John, new shoes, an overcoat, a hat. She had noticed that he needed them all.

“Something lovely” for Daddy in the shape of—there wasn't any shape to Daddy's present, just a general, vague impression of something exceedingly nice that he had wanted very much for a long time.

Another beautiful something else for Harleigh—a treat for Ellen! . . .

Amy had not been so happy for weeks.

CHAPTER IX

VICTIMS OF CIRCUMSTANCE

THE long, dreamy, drifting time came to an end at last.

One morning the sun shone warmly in at his window and John opened his eyes and knew he was awake.

"Hello!" said Harleigh, appearing in the doorway laden down with towels, sponge, basin, soap.

"Hello!" John answered.

"Ready for a wash-up?"

"A—what?"

"Wash-up—scrub, you know. Don't agitate yourself. You'll have nothing to do but endure the torments. I'm by no means expert yet, but I'm some scrubber, all the same. I can do you now so I don't spill more than two basins of water into the bed, per bath, or lose more than one sponge, three soaps, and a towel among the sheets and pillows. That's going some, I tell you. But you ought to have seen Miss Iynch at it. *She* was a whizz!"

John looked as well as uttered his question, "Miss . . . ?"

"Uh-huh, Lynch. She said the family descended from the first fellow who was given an inch and took an L, see? She's the nurse. Trained. Fresh from the hospital. Uniformed, well informed, chloroformed, disinfected, pasteurized. Absolutely up to date. Everything I know she taught me. I learned about nussin' from 'er."

John smiled at the stream of nonsense. "I wonder if I remember, or if it is only something I dreamed about—someone in white—with a white crown on her head or something."

"Sure! You have her spotted. Only the crown or something was a cap of the traindest-nursey description. She kept tab on you all right during the thirty-six hours she was here. Played you as if you'd been billiards or bowls. Kept score on a kind of chart she had. And if a breath you drew or a wink you wunk or a drop you swallowed got away from her without going down on that blessed thingummy, it wasn't her fault. You're a marked man from now on. You can't escape. Your record is taken. Your picture might as well be in the Rogues' Gallery. You . . . Phew-ee! What's happened?"

Did I upset the basin? Serves me right for boasting. *The dickens!* It's a second flood."

While he was repairing the damage Harleigh's chatter ceased. He worked in silence, or if he spoke it was only to say something in reference to John's condition, the rapid rate at which he was improving:

"The great Dane says it's astonishing."

Again John puzzled.

"Doctor Dane. He says you've a splendid constitution, wonderful clean blood. He says, the way you're healing up, you'll have the use of your hands in no time. A week or ten days more and——"

A quick spasm of pain shot across John's thin face:

"The use of my hands—ten days?—How long have I been lying here?"

"Just three and a half. Why? What's the trouble?"

"I've lost my job. That's all."

Harleigh tried not to look John's way. It was easier to speak lightly when he wasn't confronted by what looked like a classic tragic mask.

"Pshaw! Suppose you have lost your job! Plenty more where that came from."

"Not for me."

"Nonsense. Why not?"

No answer.

On the pretense of getting the washing litter out of the way Harleigh left the room. Some instinct told him John would be better alone. He did not return until it was to bear in the patient's breakfast tray:

"You've graduated from soft, very soft drinks and been promoted to poached eggs and so forth. What do you say to that? Doctor says you can have anything you like now, so long as you take it frequently and enough of it. But he insists on enough of it, and his *enough* means good measure, pressed down, running over. So just brace to this, and as I didn't precisely distinguish myself as a bather, I'll buckle down in earnest to the feeding act. Let's see if I can't steer your breakfast straight without any sidetracking or landslides or other, what the insurance companies call casualties."

As it happened, there were no further accidents. Nothing occurred to hinder Harleigh's hand. It was John's throat that threatened to block proceedings, being dry and choked, and altogether opposed to undertaking its customary function of swallowing.

Harleigh was glad when the whole thing was over. John's face reflected what he was going

ough, and Harleigh could not keep his eyes averted all the time without, as he meditated, giving them both away.

He explained to John that he would have to go about his regular business, but the housemaid who cared for his rooms would capably look after him. She was a steady, middle-aged, motherly woman who knew all about his mealtimes, would have his trays up at the appointed hours, and, if John couldn't *spoon* for himself, would be ready to do it for him.

"Make yourself at home. My house is yours. Here are the keys. I'll leave 'em with you in case you'd like to take a walk in the corridors, although I don't advise so much dissipation at the first go-off. But here are the keys and use your own judgment."

With one of his bandaged hands John gestured the keys aside.

Harleigh stood a moment, a brand-new thought flashing into his mind to disturb its peace. He dropped his bantering tone:

"I say, now you're awake and can move about, I want you to make me a promise. Don't harry yourself about that lost job of yours. 'Tisn't worth it. And, for goodness' sake, don't wait until my back is turned and then start out to hunt another. No-

body'd take a fellow whose hands are done up to imitate kettle-drum sticks. Give me your word I'll find you here this evening when I get back."

There was a pause. Harleigh's eyes were on John's face. As he looked the face grew set as a locked door.

"Why don't you ask me to promise you'll find all your things here when you get back this evening?"

The voice matched the face. It was as hard and immovable as a shot bolt.

Harleigh laughed:

"If I had any doubt about the things, the promise wouldn't help me much, would it?"

"It might."

"Well, I haven't any doubt about the things."

"You'd better. I may be a thief for all you know."

"You may be. But I'm not worrying about it. What I'm much more afraid of is that the minute I'm gone your mind will begin to get in its fine work. The things you'll think will be bosh and nonsense. You'll tell yourself you're a burden. That, if you tiptoe off and leave me unbeknownst, it will be good riddance to bad rubbish. I know the sort

of reasoning. I've been there myself. Of course, I suppose I could settle the whole business by locking you in and giving the woman the keys, telling her to feed my little caged pet through the bars for fear he'll give us the slip. But I won't. I'll leave the keys with you. And you needn't promise anything. You're free as air. *I trust* you. So-long!"

The next moment he was gone.

What happened in the quiet room after that there was no eye to see. There might have been an ear to hear if John had answered the telephone, whose bell presently set up a frantic ringing. But it rang and rang and no one took down the receiver.

At the other end of the wire "Burkeses Amy" got impatient.

"Party doesn't answer," was all the satisfaction she could get from Central, which wasn't any satisfaction at all, for she had heard from Harleigh about half an hour ago that John was awake and she wanted to say hello to him before she started out for school.

School! She shuddered at the thought of it! Her resolve to show Miss Grant had lasted three days and a half, during which time she had struggled with her books as she had never struggled with anything

before. But it was precisely because she had never struggled with anything before that she found the odds so tremendously against her now. The old trick of letting go when holding on grew the least bit bothersome, was a trick not to be overcome at the first try. Taking things easy had grown to be a habit. It was ten times easier, for example, to sit through study-hours dreaming about what she'd do with Auntie Jean's money than to buckle down to her lessons, when half the time she had no more idea than the man in the moon what the lessons were about.

Her little flurry with Boris had apparently blown over. At least, there was no sign of ill-humor in the greeting between them when they met, which, as it happened, was not until school was over on Tuesday afternoon.

"Oh, heyo, you Burkeses Amy! What do you think of the latest?"

"The latest?"

"Didn't you see? Posted on the bulletin-board yesterday morning? My! But you're the grand lady to walk past with your chin in the air and never so much as peek to see what your section's let in for now. That bulletin-board makes me tired! Seems

as if it had a new stunt for us poor little things every morning. Fresh turns each performance. And the latest is the worst of the lot."

"Gracious! The worst? What is it?"

"A competitive essay. Two weeks to write it in. All papers must be handed over at the close of Thanksgiving holiday. Thoughtful way they have of helping us enjoy our vacation, huh?"

"I should think so!"

Amy's head spun. This was the last straw. Piled on top of her already staggering load, it was not only backbreaking, it was heartbreaking as well. And Daddy was away, so she couldn't even ask him what a competitive essay was. Well, perhaps she could worm it out of Boris on the way home—get her to explain without having to betray her own ignorance. She heaved a heavy sigh, pretending resignation:

"If that's the way it is, that's the way it is. Anyhow, standing here and scolding about it won't help us any."

"Goodness! what's come to you that you take things so cool?"

"Come along. Let's be getting about our business."

Boris nodded:

"Sure, that's what I'm going to get about. Don't let me keep you. Good luck!"

"Aren't you coming?"

"Not to-day. I'm for the library to look up topics. You don't catch little Boris leaving everything till the last minute and then having spazzums because she's too late for the fair. Little Boris likes to be comfy."

"So does little Amy."

"That's where she's wise. Goo'-by!"

With a casual wave of the hand Boris was gone.

Amy gazed after her, curiously dismayed by the indifferent gesture, the prospect of making her way home alone. It was all very well to look down on Boris from the upper plane of her own superior refinement. Time and time again Amy had wished her to Timbuctoo with her loud, chattering tongue, her restless eyes, her manner that was just the reverse of the shrinking violet's. But now that the things she had disliked were withdrawn from her, Amy could find a hundred reasons in proof of their being by no means so bad as she had believed. After all, Boris was a good sort. Big-hearted, cordial,

loyal, never low-spirited, always seeing a bright side or, if a bright side were invisible, taking it on trust. She wished Boris had been going her way. She wished Boris had suggested her going along to the library to look up topics. She wondered why she hadn't suggested it. It was funny that, all of a sudden, Boris should have plans for after school, when nothing had ever happened before to prevent her from joining Amy on the way home. One thing was certain, there'd be no means of finding out from Boris this afternoon, at least, what a competitive essay was. If only Daddy . . . The thought of Daddy brought with it inspiration. . . . the dic'y!

"I'll look it up in the dic'y. That's what he always tells me to do."

Spurred on by the bright idea, she hurried home, telling herself that every minute counted now, since two days of the allotted fourteen had already slipped by her without her knowledge.

"It's like the 'Ten Little Indians.'

'Twelve little school-days
Crowded high as heaven,
'Fore you've your lessons learned,
Bing! only 'leven.'

That's the way it's going to be. I've got to start in right off and buckle to, this time, or I'll be left. And then . . ."

Somehow the dictionary trick never would work for her as it worked for Daddy. It wouldn't now. She supposed Daddy would have been able to find *competitive* in two minutes, but search as she would she could discover no such word. Plainly the dictionary people had been careless and left it out. There was *compearer*, and right after *compearer*, *compeer*, but nothing in between with a *d* in it. It was only by accident that, her roving eye happening to stray across the opposite page, she found what she was looking for:

"Pooh! Who'd ever think of spelling it with a *t*? A *d*'s just exactly as good. According to that, a body could search all day and never find what she's after, unless she just happens to know the way those old dictionary people spell things. And, even if luck's with you and you get your word, what's the use? You can't make head or tail of their old high-flown definitions!"

It was just here that the miracle happened.

Under the pressure of Amy's disdainful thumb the pages of the offending dic'y flew past in a flickering

mist and out flashed a folded paper, falling lightly to the ground.

Amy replaced her book on its shelf, then stooped to pick up the scrap, meaning to throw it into the trash-basket. It was pressed and bent, as Daddy often pressed and bent scraps of waste-paper when he wanted to utilize them as bookmarks, and because of the association Amy's idle fingers began to pluck at the little object Daddy's dear ones had handled. The paper was common enough, but it was whole, and it had printing on it. Printing done in red ink.

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Amy's eyes, resting first on the sheet in a glancing, uninquisitive way, grew fixed, intent as she read on. When the last word was reached she turned back to the beginning and reread every syllable.

Goodness! It was like something in a fairy-tale, where you have only to say, "Hocus-pocus!" and wave a wand, like the old witch in "Hänsel und Gretel," to have the things you want come fluttering down to you from out of nowhere. Amy hadn't said hocus-pocus or waved a wand, but the thing had come, all the same. She wondered if, somehow, without knowing it, she had worked a charm. Even

while she laughed at her own absurdity she felt there was something uncanny about the paper, the way it had appeared just in the nick of time, tempting her to use it, when all the while she knew that to use it would be to do what wasn't right. The old witch in "Hänsel und Gretel" had magicked good children into unresisting shapes. Was she being magicked out of the old truth-loving Amy into something distorted, dishonorable, without raising a hand to prevent it?

To prove that she wasn't, she flung the Chester, Bobbs letter straight into the trash-basket.

She wished Daddy could see her now. Or—did she wish it? Daddy had a disconcerting habit of taking the wind out of her sails sometimes, when what he called her mock heroics were a little too mock. She could picture to herself his quizzical eyes fixed on her teasingly, while he gravely quoted from his favorite "Sentimental Tommy":

"Ain't I a noble boy, mother?"

Nobody's sense of self-righteousness could outlive such a prick as that, and really, when she came to think of it, Daddy would be right. Just throwing the letter into the trash-basket was nothing wonderful. It would be a pity if she was so weak as to be

obliged to put a thing out of her reach in order not to give way to its temptation. She hoped she wasn't that sort of girl. The real test would be to face the temptation and resist it. There'd be some merit in that.

She picked the Chester, Bobbs letter out of the trash-basket and hid it in her blouse.

CHAPTER X

THE STRANGER WITHIN THE GATES

ALL through the day Harleigh found his mind much more taken up with John than with the work he was trying to do. Yet, when evening came and he was free to go home, he made excuses to himself for delay, all the while knowing that the fact was he dreaded to face the music. What the actual music was that he dreaded to face he would have found it hard to explain. Certainly, he told himself, he had no misgiving as to his things. He had meant what he said when he answered John's question of the morning, "Why don't you ask me to promise you'll find all your things here when you get back this evening?" with the return question, "If I had any doubt about the things, the promise wouldn't help me much, would it?"

He had no doubt about the things. All the same, when he stood before his closed door, his finger on the button of the electric bell, he hesitated to ring.

"Mr. Worthing."

"Oh, that you, Hester? Isn't it past your time? Or are you on night duty this week?"

"No, sir. That is, yes, sir. I should say—I stayed after hours to catch you and report, sir. I thought I'd better tell you—to prepare you."

Harleigh's heart gave a suffocating bound.

"Prepare me. Great Scott! What's there to prepare me for?"

"I don't know, sir. Only this I do know—when you told me have the young gentleman's nourishment ready for him on time, and he had the key for to let me in with, I had it on time. I was punkchal, the same as if you'd been there to see. The first was along around ten o'clock. I had my tray ready to the stroke. I thought maybe the young gentleman might be taking a nap, therefore I didn't ring, just tapped very light so's not to disturb him if so be he was. He didn't answer, and I was going to rap louder, when I thought I heard a queer sound inside. I put my ear to the door and, believe me or not, as you please, sir, the sound I heard was the sound of somebody crying. Not loud, or violentlike, but the same as you'd cry if your heart was broke and there was no one to mind your letting go or think shame on you for giving way when you hadn't ought

to, like as to say you was a coward to do it, sir."

She paused for breath. Harleigh urged her on with an impatient "Well?"

"I waited a bit before knocking louder, and then the sound stopped suddenlike, as if the rapping had stopped it. Only nobody let me in. And that's the way it's been all day long. Me at the door, as regular as the clock, knockin' and ringin' till I was black in the face, and the young gentleman inside (if he *is* inside) never so much as leaving my foot cross the doorsill. If I haven't done as you told me, Mr. Worthing, and given the nourishment you ordered, frequent and regular, it's not my fault. I couldn't get in. But I'll tell you this, if it hadn't been for you telling me you'd left the key with your friend inside, so's he'd open the door to me when I rung or rapped, I'd 'a' got so uneasy I'd 'a' had the men up to force open the lock. I told myself, 'Better wait till Mr. Worthing gets back before you raise the house,' which I hope I was right, sir. Anyhow, that's what I did, and that's what I got to stand by, be it right or wrong."

Harleigh threw a reassuring nod toward her to ease her mind.

"You did perfectly right, Hester. It was a good thought not to draw anyone's attention to what was going on, or rather to what wasn't going on in my rooms. I'm glad nobody knows."

"Thank you, sir."

Hester was delighted to be approved.

A crisp green bill passed from Harleigh's hand into hers. The next moment he was alone.

A nervous tingling crept down his spine. His forehead grew moist at the thought that it was *up to* him to clear the mystery behind that closed door. One of his hands dived into his pocket, searching for a handkerchief to mop his temples with. The handkerchief came and with it came something else—a light metal object that bounded out and down, striking the floor with a cheerful clink.

Harleigh stooped, staring blankly as he picked the thing up. It was his pass-key, the pass-key he had drawn off his ring in the morning to leave with John. How, under the canopy, had it come back into his own pocket, he wondered. Hurriedly he thrust it into the lock, turned the knob, and pushed open the door, then closed it softly behind him, switching on the electric light to make the shadows

and the silence less grewsome. Somehow the place seemed gloomier, stiller than it ever had before. Beyond was the little room he had fallen into the habit of calling John's room. Peering in, he could just make out a motionless form lying stretched on the bed. He had to fight a cowardly impulse to turn and summon help before he could bring himself to approach the figure. Never in all his life had he hated to do anything as much as he hated to lay his fingers on the shoulder of that quiet shape:

"Hullo, John, old man!"

There was a lifetime of waiting before the words got any response. Meanwhile Harleigh's knee-joints turned to loose hinges, threatening to collapse if he didn't stiffen them up directly with tremendous resolution. Then suddenly he felt John stir beneath his hand, stir and move and make an effort to sit up.

The strain was over.

Harleigh laughed out with nothing in the world to laugh at, just with sheer relief, because he couldn't help it.

"Ah! 'Kathleen Mavourneen, what, slumbering still!'"

"Have you been home long?" John asked the question, blinking owlishly at the light.

"Only a few minutes. How did you make out while I was gone? Did you eat your food like a good little boy? Did you like what Hester brought you? Did she bring you plenty?"

"I got on—all—right."

"Lyre. You haven't had a mouthful. Like the rank idiot I am, I walked off with the key and left you locked in here all alone to starve in your tracks. If you'd be so kind as to land me one square between the eyes, I'd be much obliged, and serve me jolly well right, too."

John stared. "Then—you mean to say—you didn't intend to lock me in?"

"Mean to lock you in? Didn't I tell you I was leaving you the key? I never dreamed of locking you in, man. How that key got back into my pocket I'll be everlastingly hanged if I know. But that doesn't help you any. You were to have nourishment, according to the great Dane, Philadelphia train fashion—every hour on the hour, and, by George, I've carried out his prescription like a . . . Hold on! I know what I'll do. I'll order up a dinner this minute that'll put the lights out on any

dinner ever you ate. I don't generally presume to feast downstairs. It's too rich for my blood, much less pocketbook. But to-night I owe it to myself to kill a fatted something or other and I'm going to do it. I've starved you, now I'm going to blow you."

The bluish lines marking John's lips stiffened into the ghost of a smile:

"Starve me! Huh! It'd take more than twelve hours of fasting to starve *me*."

But Harleigh was already busy at the telephone and didn't hear. What he did notice, however, was that when the dinner actually arrived John barely touched it.

"I say, what's the matter? Anything wrong with the eats?"

John shook his head.

"Oh, I know! You've forgotten the trick, for want of practice. Listen and I'll instruct you in the lost art. You gracefully spear a mouthful of chicken (size of mouthful depending on size of mouth—only, of course, there *are* limitations. It wouldn't be considered good form, for example, to take a whole poultry at one bite). Use your fork in preference to the knife. Then . . ."

"If you don't mind, I'd like to tell you something," said John.

His voice was so low, his face so drawn that Harleigh dropped his fooling, instantly turning as serious as John himself:

"Tell away."

"You don't know me . . ." John began irrelevantly, then stopped short.

Harleigh looked his bewilderment.

"All you really know about me is that you first saw me at Mr. Burke's. I oughtn't to have been there. That is, he asked me to come, but I had no right to go. When he asked me he didn't know the truth about me. If he had, he wouldn't have asked. That was why I never went, it wouldn't have been square. But the last time I could see he was getting—huffy—or something—anyhow, he didn't understand having his invitation turned down by a—by a fellow like me. I like Mr. Burke a lot. I wanted him to understand. So I went to his house that night to tell him. And then—then—he wasn't there. Nobody was there, excepting the little girl and—and—and the lady in the kitchen. I couldn't tell—them. And then came—the fire."

Something in the low, husky voice drew Harleigh toward it. He bent forward across the table, forgetting to eat, anxious only to hear what John might have to say.

"When a fellow is hunting a job it's up to him to carry a clean slate, else he has no show. In the decent places they look you up, ask for references, call for what they call your record. One of the questions is, 'Have you ever been guilty of a misdemeanor?' If you have, the jig is up. They turn you down. The bosses that'll take any old thing floating 'round, nobody worth his salt wants to work for."

"Yes," said Harleigh, to show he understood perfectly, also if possible to help along the laborsome sentences.

"Some can put up a big bluff when they've things to keep shady. I'm no good at that. I've got to give it to them straight, and, so you see, there's the hitch. I can't get a job. No boss'll take me—when he knows."

Harleigh's breath came hard, as if he had been running. It would have been less exhausting, he felt, to have been running than to be obliged to sit there helplessly waiting for John's halting sentences to be

dragged out one by one like heavy weights from a bottomless pit.

"But you did have a job, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did have a job. It was a bum one—but, such as it was, I was glad to have it. Now it's gone and . . ."

"That's all right," said Harleigh. "There are others. Better ones."

"The way I make it out," John went on, disregarding the forced cheeriness of Harleigh's tone, "the way I make it out a boss is no different from any other party you'd run up against who meant business. If a good boss'd expect you to hand in a clean slate, why wouldn't a good—friend? Mr. Burke wanted to be friendly to me. You've been a mighty good friend. I'll be on the level with you, the same as if you'd asked for references. I'll give it to you straight and then—you won't have to kick me out. I'll go myself. That's what I went to Mr. Burke's for that night, to tell him and then—clear out."

"Well?"

"You said this morning while you were trying to give me that scrubdown—you said the nurse had me spotted—remember? You were fooling, I know

that. But some jokes hit pretty near the truth. You said I was a marked man—my record was taken—my picture might just as well be in the Rogues' Gallery. . . . Mr. Worthing—that's just where—my picture—is."

You
n—
Gal-
my

CHAPTER XI

A SQUARE DEAL

THERE was a long pause.

“It was for stealing. Now you know why I warned you to look out for your things when you went away this morning.”

“I wasn’t afraid,” said Harleigh. “I’m not afraid now.”

A quick gleam shot across John’s face, fading as rapidly as it had come:

“All the same, I’m a thief. I’m down as one on the police blotter. My face is—where I said it was—along with all the other—rogues of the town. Now I’ll go.”

“Hold on! Not because of what you’ve told me.”

“Don’t you believe me? God knows I’m not fooling.”

“Neither am I.”

“But I tell you I’m a—I’m a . . . You can’t get away from facts.”

“I don’t know about that. Some facts you can.

Some facts you're bound to get away from, because they're falser than lies."

"I don't know what you mean."

For the first time John's gray face showed a faint color. His breath came hard, but his dull eyes looked as if a fire had been kindled behind them. Harleigh saw, and something leaped out of the heart of him into spoken words before he could stop to weigh or balance:

"I'll tell you what I mean. What I mean is nothing you have done will make me believe you're a bad fellow, Graham. There may have been an accident or a miscue. You've been pinched into a tight box, maybe, by some devilish turn of hard luck. But you, the real *you*, is all right. I'd swear to it. What do I care about a police blotter? I'll trust my common sense. You're an honest man. I dare you to look me in the eyes, John Graham, and tell me it's not so."

John Graham didn't take the dare.

"You've said too much not to say more," Harleigh continued. "Fire away. Out with the whole story—or, if you want me to, I'll take you on trust."

There was a knock on the door. Someone came in to remove the dinner dishes. During the inter-

ruption no one spoke. It was only when the last dish had been carried out and the door finally closed that, without more ado, John began:

“I wasn’t born in this country. I’m English. When I was a little chap my father brought me over—or rather, started out to. Halfway across he died. I can’t go into it. They buried him at sea. I wanted to go over the side with him. I tried. They were very kind to me—the passengers. One woman, she was called Anna, she took care of me. We were steerage and so was she. She gave me a home when we landed—did her best for me, poor dear. I was a kid. I didn’t know how hard she had to work to keep us. At first she let me go to school. She was proud of me when I got good marks. It almost broke her heart when she had to take me out and turn me loose on the streets to hunt a job. I was perfectly willing, but I couldn’t bring in much. We managed to scratch through until I was sixteen. That winter everything went wrong. Anna was run down by a truck, almost killed. They sent her home from the hospital before she was able to be on her feet. They needed her bed. My boss was laying off hands because work was slack. I got fired. I suppose I wasn’t much use. I’d shot up as tall as

I am now, outgrown my strength, as they call it. I hadn't much muscle then. Besides, I'd caught cold and the coughing took time from the work. I tried my hand at clearing away snow. Got a shovel somehow, and went out on my own. That would have been all right, but one day, when I wasn't looking, one of those ambulance chaps drove up and picked me out of a drift and carted me off. They said I had pneumonia. When I got back home Anna was all in. She'd had nothing much to eat, except what the neighbors could spare—when they thought of it. I started right in to get work, but bosses aren't on the lookout for patients they've got to build up. . . .

"Early one morning I was on my way out when I noticed something was wrong with Anna. She wasn't asleep. She wasn't dead. She lay there giving herself such a lot of trouble just to breathe that I knew she'd quit breathing if I didn't get busy and put something in the way of food into her before it was too late.

"So I—got busy. That's all there was to it. There was a milk cart at the corner. The driver was off delivering bottles. A cop saw me and . . . It's all right, I suppose. There's got to be law and order. I can see that. I stole the milk, and I'd no

kick coming when they took me up. Only I wished they had let me off long enough to give poor old Anna a sip or two. They wouldn't and—she—went. There was a man working for prison reform. He'd never laid eyes on me before, but he was a good friend to me. He managed so I wasn't put behind the bars. But he couldn't prevent them from putting my name on the blotter and—doing the other thing. He was working to get a writ—or whatever they call it—when he died. That's all. He was the best friend I ever had, excepting you and poor Anna. And I wasn't able to show him, any more than I could her, or can you, what I . . . Never mind! Good-by!"

Harleigh was on his feet in an instant, his hand on John's shoulder:

"No, you don't! Not if the court knows it! You stay right where you are. Sit down. You've had your say, now it's my turn. I've a notion—hooked from my friend, James Burke, by the way—that there's a screw loose somewhere in the machinery of life as we're living it. What he holds is that, in the beginning, each man of us was born with a right to a square deal. It's as much his right as his fingers and toes. Somehow or other there's been a mixup

and a lot of square deals have got lost in the shuffle. That being the case, it's plainly up to us to look through our outfit to see if, by hook or crook, we haven't more than we're strictly entitled to—if some other fellow's square deal hasn't got doubled up with ours, like the laundry things not yours, your washer-lady sends back with your linen and doesn't know where they come from. Hasn't even the grace to say telephone-operatically, 'Error! Excuse it, please!' when she's swiped 'em off of some other poor chap. Now I swear I haven't swiped yours. But the night you came here, after Dane had gone, before Nurse Lynch showed up, I got to thinking things over, and as I made it out there's a full-size square deal, warranted all linen, marked John Graham in indelible ink, waiting for me to hand over to you. If you'll kindly collar it, you'll greatly oblige."

"What do you mean?" John faltered.

A smile lit Harleigh's eyes. "To tell you the truth, I'm not dead certain I know, myself. The thing is kind of hazy in my own mind as yet, but I shouldn't wonder if it worked out somewhat after this fashion: You and I keeping on this way, you living here with me, I mean. At least until we can

get a line on the thing you're best fitted to do. Then, when we've got the line, and drawn it in and found the kind of fish you've hooked, why, we can set about frying it, see? Meanwhile I'll be your banker and your boardin'-house lady and whatever else is needed, and you can square up when your foot is on the ladder and you've a good chance of getting on top. What do you say? Is it a bargain?"

John did not answer.

"Silence gives consent," said Harleigh. "Shake!"

Dumbly, John shook.

Hours later when the hush of night had settled on the place Harleigh heard John, in the next room, moving restlessly in his bed.

"Hands hurt you?" he sang out cheerily.

"Nope," came the prompt rejoinder in a voice no less cheery than his own.

Later still, having dropped off to sleep, he started half awake, roused by a queer sound he drowsily connected with Hester, who seemed to be telling him about someone crying, "not loud or violentlike, but the same as you'd cry if your heart was broke and there was no one to mind your letting go or think shame on you for giving way when you hadn't ought to, like as to say you were a coward to do it."

He had a confused notion the sound came from John's room, but before he could ask what was up sleep overtook him and he was dead to the world.

At breakfast next morning Harleigh handed over his pass-key to John, also two other articles:

"Kindly pocket this blooming thing, will you? I want to be certain you've got it. No more now-you-see-it-and-now-you-don't tricks for me. I'll have a duplicate, so we'll both be free to come and go as we please. On my way out I'll explain you to the clerk at the desk. I've taken a *pardner* and you're IT, see? Otherwise they might hold you up. They're cranky about letting people in unless they can prove they're tenants or 'are expected by' tenants. After this you're a tenant, understand? . . . Then—a—this little card—I want you to take it down to Rivers Brothers, Men's and Boys' Apparel, Broadway. Ask for Mr. VanBeuren. He'll fit you out according to specifications with all the *apparel* you need. He'll know. I'll 'phone him. He's a good old sort. Used to fit me out with apparel when I was a kid. Also—a—this old leather dingus.—There are a couple of dollars or so in it for running expenses—by running I don't mean walking when you ought to take a car, I mean lunches and trolleys and that sort of

thing. It's no gift, recollect. It's a straight loan, to be paid back when convenient. I'm going to keep account of every cent. You'll see. I'll be a regular Hamlock when it comes to squaring up. And now—by-by! I'm off. Be a good little boy, or when papa comes home he'll attend to you later."

It was all so sudden, so quickly begun, so soon over, that Harleigh was off and away before John had time to gather his wits together. The door shut and he was alone, staring mutely down at the three commonplace objects on the table before him—a key, a card, a pocketbook. Three commonplace objects? Three fairy gifts they seemed to John.

The telephone bell rang, and this time he answered.

"Oh, hello! Is that you, John? This is Amy Burke. I called up yesterday, but couldn't get you. How are your hands? It's dreadfully late and I ought to be on my way to school this minute, but I felt I just had to call you up so you'd know I haven't forgotten what you did for us the other night. Daddy—my father's coming home to-day. I'm so glad I can hardly stand it. When I tell him how you saved our lives, when Ellen got the fat in the fire, I guess he'll . . . My! D'you hear that?"

The clock striking half-past eight! I'll be late as sure as preaching. Good-by!"

John smiled as he hung up the receiver. She hadn't given him a chance to get in a word edge-wise. They said that was the way it always was with women. Women always wanted to do all the talking. He didn't know. The only woman he had ever known, outside of Anna, hadn't talked much.—Such a little shaver as he was at the time, he couldn't be expected to get things very straight, but his impression was that she hadn't talked at all. She was most beautiful and grand, or he had thought her so, and had always remembered her that way. He had been afraid of her until she took him in her arms. Then, the way she did it, he knew she liked little boys. She hugged him close and kissed him hard and he wasn't afraid any longer. He had wanted to ask her what made her eyes so big and shiny, but there wasn't time. After she had hugged and kissed him, she gave him over to his father without a word. And that was the time his father had taken him away to the ship. He wondered if she ever knew what had happened halfway across.

One of the things that had made him think a

good deal about "Burkeses Amy" was that she reminded him, somehow, of the one who had kissed him. Not that they were a bit alike. The one who had kissed him was a grown-up, a lady. Amy was nothing but a young girl. The lady was tall, Amy was little. And yet there was something about the one that recalled the other. Whatever it was, it was something that made him think about them, wonder about them, yes, and always be longing to see them again. That was the way he had felt through all these long years about the lady. That's the way he had felt about "Burkeses Amy" ever since that evening, months ago, when he rescued her from the clutches of the push-cart men.

He had never listened to the neighborhood gossip about "the Burkeses," though there was enough of it and to spare. Craigen Street considered itself no fool. It knew a thing or two, and it was certain there was a mystery somewhere, for it was plain to be seen that neither Burke himself nor "Burkeses Amy" bore the stamp of the neighborhood. They were in it, not of it. For all his decent, friendly ways, Burke wasn't like any other man in the ward, not even Alderman Quade, who wore a stovepipe hat all day long, in doors and out, "as elegant as

a king itself." "Burke's a nob, that's what he is. The question's, Why would a nob the like of him be comin' down here to live? And Burkeses Amy! Young as she is, she's a way with her'd make you think of one o' them swell uptowners in the movies! Craigen Street wasn't particular, but if Burke was a spotter or the like of that—if he was trying any double game on them, well—they'd fix it, so he'd wish he'd never been born, that's all."

Poor John, remembering his own secret, turned a deaf ear to the buzz of chattering tongues. Then came the night of the fire and Ellen's mysterious words—her fright at having "broke her promise."

"Ye'll have to mind her, lad; everyone does. Her word is law. Ye wouldn't dare defy her. Th'ould man'd have ye dhrawn and quartered."

The words had been haunting him ever since. Who was "Burkeses Amy" that her word should be law? Who was Burke that he could have anyone drawn and quartered who disobeyed his girl?

CHAPTER XII

MONEY TO BURN

BEFORE James Burke had time to fit his key in the lock the door sprang open, he was caught in a whirlwind embrace. Amy clung about his neck, struggling to tell in a single breath all that had taken place since he went away.

"And we ought to give John Graham something splendid," she concluded, "for the night Ellen's fat caught fire, and the house would have burned down over our heads, he worked like a hero. He put it out without a fireman or a hose, or anything. His hands were so hurt Harleigh had to take him home and have Doctor Dane and a trained nurse, and John lost his job. He's getting better now, but this morning, when I called up, he didn't say a word about how he was, so I don't know, and, oh dear! I *am* glad you're home!"

Daddy's clear, outringing laugh caused the little chandelier to reverberate:

"That's what I call a mince-pie welcome. I feel

like old Squeers. 'Here's richness!' But too much, all at once, will give me indigestion. Serve it slower, puss. Let me Fletcherize."

He drew her down beside him on the couch. She sighed contentedly as she snuggled into the circle of his arm, holding his hand what time she began afresh, punctuating her sentences with love-pats:

"Well, then, I've missed you like—like furiation! When you're gone the place here just aches for you. Everything goes on the same as usual, only it's all absolutely different."

"Doooid loocid!" teased Daddy.

"I don't care! That's the way it is. I told Ellen the other day I've found out who's the noisy one. I always thought it was I. But it's you. The place was still as death when you were gone. It was awful. Now it's alive and breathing again. Oh, Daddy!" she broke in upon herself irrelevantly, "doesn't it say in the Bible that charity covers a multitude of sins?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Nothing much. Only I had a letter from Auntie Jean and—it set me thinking. Once I heard two of the maids up home—at Grandfather's—talking. They didn't know I was anywhere around, and one

of them said to the other that, if Grandfather flattered himself the charity he gave would cover the sins he did, he was jolly well mistaken. D'you remember that English Catherine? Well, it was she said it, and I know she was talking about Grandfather, because she called him 'the master' before she began referring to him as 'he.' What did she mean?"

James Burke laughed, although he felt the question was "no laughing matter," and was cudgeling his brains for an evasive answer:

"If you looked words up, as I've so often told you to do, you'd find that charity, in the Biblical sense, doesn't mean alms-giving. It means love. And love certainly covers a multitude of sins. See how mine covers yours!" with which he gathered her into his arms, mischievously holding her fast in spite of her struggles, so that the conversation ended in a scramble, from which they both emerged flushed and tumbled, quite unfit to sit down to the dinner Ellen presently announced.

It was after dinner that her father asked Amy to show him Auntie Jean's letter. His face changed as he read.

"What's the matter?"

"I almost wish you had gone with them, child. It might have been better all 'round—for all concerned."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, can't you see? Your aunt is eating her heart out with loneliness. Can't you read between the lines how homesick she is? That cold she describes would vanish quickly enough if she had your warm, loving arms about her neck again. As it is . . ."

"Well?—As it is?" Amy shook his arm gently to jog her father's memory back to herself and the fact that she was waiting for the remainder of his sentence. "As it is, Daddy? What'll happen as it is?"

James Burke made a movement as if he were shaking a load off his shoulders. "I don't care to speculate, Amy. I wish you could write to her. I wish I could. If I knew a way to smuggle the letters into her hands, I'd do it in spite of the—ogre and all his works."

"You mean Grandfather?"

Amy couldn't keep the surprise out of her voice. She had never heard her father speak disrespectfully of Mr. Guthrie before.

"Forgive me. I was wrong. Apologies to Grandfather. If Murray were not so perpendicular, a little less of a valet, a little more of a human creature, I might . . . But it's out of the question. Our poor little rich girl must do without the very things she craves most. We can't help her."

"Oh, Daddy, you don't mean . . . ?"

"Come, let's not discuss what I mean. When your aunt wrote that letter she had what I once heard a Frenchman describe as 'les 'omeseecks.' She has passed them on to me." He drew a long breath. "Let's forget it. 'The time has come to talk of many things' . . ."

"'Of shoes . . . and ships . . . and sealingwax,
Of cabbages . . . and kings,'"

Amy chanted gayly.

"'And why the sea is boiling hot,
And whether pigs have wings,'"

he promptly capped her quotation. "Also, what are you going to do with your pocketful of good red gold?"

There was a pause.

"What do you think I ought to do with it?"

"Come, young person, none of that. A girl of fifteen, 'going on' sixteen, is old enough to decide for herself. You can't shift all your responsibilities on me any longer. It's your fortune. What are you going to do with it?"

"You won't laugh at me if I tell?"

"I promise to listen with a gravity nothing shall upset."

"Well, then, I thought as long as I had money to burn I'd—burn it."

"What?"

"First-off—I mean, *at first*—I planned to give Nora a dress, and John Graham a suit, shoes, everything he needs. But it won't do. They wouldn't allow it. They are both of them positively suffering for the things, but they'd perish rather than 'take them off me,' as they say down here. I sounded Nora the other day, and, my! you should have seen her stiffen. She grew starchier by the minute until, to save the pieces, I laughed it off, pretended it was all 's'posin'."

"Good for Nora!"

Amy's eyes widened:

"Why, I thought you believed in the people that haven't things sharing with the people that have."

"So I do."

"Well, then . . . ?"

"Do you?"

"Of course I do. It seems to me anybody who needs anything as much as Nora needs a dress ought to be glad to accept what's given her, no matter where it comes from. She ought to be glad and say 'Thank you kindly' into the bargain. That's what *I* think."

"Wait a minute. Are you certain that's what you think?"

"'Certain?' Of course."

"Then I'm to understand that, if Nora, or some other girl down here, one who happened to have enough and to spare of something you happen to lack—I'm to understand you'd be glad to accept what she offered, and say thank you kindly into the bargain?"

Amy was about to reaffirm her original statement with emphasis, when suddenly her cheeks flamed scarlet. She turned her face aside to hide its confusion. The words she intended to repeat refused to come. The recollection of Boris and her spurned offer of he'p locked her lips.

Her father appeared to observe nothing:

"There's as vast a difference, I want you to know, between reciprocity and the give-all-take-nothing attitude as there is between reciprocity and the glad-to-accept-anything-and-say-thank-you-kindly-into-the-bargain spirit. Reciprocity is the gentleman's method; the other's the snob's and the flunkey's. I'm glad Nora discriminated. But we've strayed away from the point. How about that conflagrating scheme of yours? You were saying, since you had money to burn, you'd burn it."

Amy nodded.

"Christmas-tree. What do you think? Something from Santa Claus for everybody. Even proudies like Nora and John couldn't object to taking things from Santa Claus, could they?"

"Yes, if they came *via* you or me. A Christmas-tree in these rooms, here, wouldn't be a very subtle way of preserving our anonymity. But the tree is a great scheme, if it's properly arranged."

"How—'properly'?"

"Why, on the co-operative basis. Let the neighborhood in on the plan. Have it understood that everybody is to do his part. We could have a committee (nothing individual), invite the whole ward to lend a hand."

"But then it wouldn't be *my* party!"

James Burke smiled.

"No, it wouldn't be your party. But I thought your plan was to hide behind Santa Claus in the first place."

"It was—only . . ."

"Only you didn't calculate on his so completely obscuring the view. That was the notion, was it?"

"Well . . ."

"Charles Lamb once said something to this effect: 'There's nothing more gratifying than to do a good action in secret and have it discovered by accident.' Lamb understood human nature."

The enthusiasm had died out of Amy's face.

There were moments, and this was one of them, when James Burke was quite aware of forces in his girl's nature working in direct opposition to him. Inherited antagonisms against his principles, that not even her great love could wholly obliterate.

"Lord, Lord!" he mused within himself. "If it's hard enough to toe the mark when both feet are set in the same direction, what must it be when one foot is pulling this way and one that? I don't envy Amy her tug, poor child! Half Burke, half

Guthrie. A Catholic taste and a Protestant selection. I wonder how it will work out in the end."

In her turn Amy was thinking: "I know what's in his mind. He's saying to himself I'm mean. He despises me. He thinks I don't want to do anything unless I get praise for it."

Tears sprang to her eyes. She began to hum "Way Down upon the Suwanee River," tapping her foot to keep time, without knowing what she was doing.

Life was very puzzling. From her babyhood she had heard about "the poor." The first time she could remember was when Auntie Jean bought her a wonderful bank made to resemble a castle on the Rhine. When one dropped dimes and quarters into its chimneys (the slits were constructed to admit coins of no meaner denomination) a succession of delights followed. At the first story the money clinked against a spring that caused a bell to ring. At the next a tiny cock crew, at the ground floor a window flew open and a lady appeared, bobbing her thanks with exaggerated gusto. Young as she was, Amy had known that what she put into this bank was intended for "the poor." It was not to come out to be spent on toys for herself. But that signified noth-

ing. Giving to the poor to the tune of ringing bells, crowing cocks, and bobbing ladies was an entertaining pastime.

Later, there were kirmesses, fairs, all manner of pleasing diversions, exciting, delightful, at which she and her friends danced, sold lacey, fragrant-smelling things to customers who said, "Keep the change for your poor, you dear little benevolent things!" and admiringly pinched her cheek or stroked her hair.

Giving to the poor had been as natural to Amy as breathing, and had cost her about as much effort. That the poor might possibly not care to take what she offered, in the way she wished to offer it, had never occurred to her before she came to Craigen Street to live.

She did not understand things. She did not even understand herself. Why was it, for example, that when she had bitterly resented her grandfather's calling the people down here "dock-rats" and "scum," had stood up for them and for her father for championing them, she should feel equally resistant now on being brought face to face with Daddy's well-known conviction that they were human creatures no different from himself and her, to whom

it would be an affront to offer patronage or gratuities. She did not feel in the least that their lack of education and opportunity lay at her door, that, therefore, she was bound to make up to them, somehow, without any sense of conferring favors.

And yet, as the days went by, she found herself dwelling more and more on the Christmas-tree plan, as her father had conceived it, not as she herself had. Several times of her own accord she brought the subject up for discussion, and once, when Harleigh was there, the three of them spent the entire evening discussing ways and means, so that the Thanksgiving vacation was half over before Amy realized she had been devoting the best of her time and thought to the party, practically none to the competitive essay due at the close of the holidays. She thought she would ask her father if "confidentially yours" was a usual form of "complimentary close" for business letters. Her "English Comp." text-book didn't give it among the examples. She had particularly looked and she knew it didn't. But, somehow, her father was never asked. On the contrary, Amy found herself holding back the fact that she had come by accident on the Chester, Bobbs letter, not, as she told herself, that she had any

doubt of its being "perfectly all right." No; indeed! How could a business be anything but perfectly all right that had increased from a merely local institution to the limits of the English-speaking world? And college students and lecturers, and ministers and politicians patronized it. Such people spoke for themselves, as Daddy would say. Only, if what Chester, Bobbs claimed was true, they didn't speak for themselves. Chester, Bobbs & Company spoke for them. It was all very queer, very hard to understand, because of course you always had thought it was wrong to copy or crib or anything of that sort. Why, at school, if a girl was caught handing in a paper she hadn't written herself, she could be expelled. Well, Chester, Bobbs & Company guaranteed as original all their work, with the exception of low-priced sermons. They signed themselves confidentially yours. What did that mean if it didn't mean that, dealing with Chester, Bobbs & Company, you couldn't be caught?

For the hundredth time Amy started to tear the letter to shreds. For the hundredth time she held back. "Victim of circumstances" drummed in her ears. "Forced to perform literary labors for which he has neither the time nor the adaptability."

The days were passing. Try as she might, she could make no headway with her writing. She had nothing to write about. And yet her rating was the lowest in the class. If she couldn't pull up somewhere, somehow, before the end of the term, she'd be dropped, demoted, disgraced. How her father would feel then! For his sake she could not endure it. She must manage to skin through by fair means or . . .

The unspeakable word literally brought her up standing. Her father had gone out. She was alone in the little living-room. With burning eyes she stared at the letter she had taken out of its hiding-place. It stared back at her with a definite challenge.

"Very well," Amy muttered. "I can't help it. It's no fair. I didn't start even with the rest of the class. I've done the best I could. . . ."

She went to the dining-room door leading out to the kitchen, where Ellen was making a great to-do with the dinner dishes, trumpeting cheerfully in a voice that could be heard for blocks:

" "Will you walk into my parlor?"
Said the flyder to the spy . . ."

"Ellen!"

" "'Tis the prettiest little parlor that ever . . .'" "

"O—oh,—Ellen!"

"Eh?—Yes, Miss Amy!"

"As soon as you've done in there, I wish you'd go on an errand for me. I want you to post a letter. Have it registered. There's money in it, so be sure you make the man give you a receipt. When you're ready, you can come to my room and I'll give it to you."

"Yes, Miss Amy."

All the way upstairs Ellen's persistent voice followed her:

" 'Unto an evil counselor
Close heart and ear and eye . . .'" "

Amy closed her room door softly and turned the key in the lock.



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CHAPTER XIII

UNIMPROVED PROPERTY

THE partnership, as Harleigh chose to call it, between himself and John Graham had existed for some weeks, when one day Mr. Burke looked up from an important paper his secretary had just placed before him on his office desk to find young Worthing standing at his elbow, patiently awaiting an audience.

“ Oh, hello, old man! Sit down, won't you? To what do I owe this unexpected honor, during business hours, when you're usually chained to your editorial chair? ”

Harleigh took the seat indicated. He carried a neatly wrapped package, with the string of which his fingers immediately began to busy themselves.

“ I've something here I want to show you,” he explained briefly, with obvious eagerness.

“ Music? ”

“ No. A sketch.”

“ Your own? ”

"I want you to tell me what you think of it," Harleigh evaded. James Burke shifted uneasily in his place. He knew Harleigh's brushwork, and, while it was always intelligent, it absolutely lacked the touch that gives distinction, the touch that characterized his music.

"I thought you had given up painting."

"Oh, once in a while I daub a bit, just for my own amusement." His nervous fingers fumbled the string clumsily, making no impression on the knot.

James Burke wavered an instant between his innate sense of delicacy and the need he felt to speak out candidly to his friend for that friend's best good:

"Don't you think—er—it's a waste of time?"

"Perhaps. Maybe. But a fellow's got a right to play sometimes, hasn't he? I don't go in for the usual things—golf, tennis, auction bridge. I don't even trip the light fantastic to any great extent."

"True for you. Go ahead. Paint all you choose," James Burke hastened self-reproachfully to reassure him.

Harleigh smiled.

"I always knew you held my universal genius in

high esteem, but just how high I never realized until this moment."

"Your painting, if you really want my honest opinion, your painting does very well for dilettante work, but what I feel is that you've enough to do if you develop your music. Better concentrate your creative energy on that. Give it the best you have in you. It's there you'll make your mark. But if you, yourself, realize the painting is only recreation, why . . ."

The obstinate knot had yielded at last. Harleigh uncovered an artist's panel, which he passed over to his friend:

"What I want is your unbiased opinion. Don't have any scruples. Tell me the truth. Is there anything in this? Anything really worth while?"

Bracing to the ordeal, James Burke took the little panel. Harleigh sat quite still, unconscious of the fact that his jaws were tensely set, his eyes devouring the face before him, hungrily waiting for what its changing expression might presently reveal. A full minute passed in silence. Then:

"You didn't do this," declared James Burke with conviction.

"Why didn't I?"

"Because you—couldn't."

"What do you mean—'couldn't'? Is it so good?"

"So good and—so bad."

"Go on. Out with it. Never mind me."

"Remember, I'm not pretending my judgment is final. It's just a layman's personal opinion. I don't dignify it by calling it criticism, please observe. I may be all wrong, but my belief is that, crude as this thing may be and is, there's genius in it. You've studied, you've practiced. You've gained a sort of facility, the technic one acquires if one has brains and a dexterous hand. But, by George, you haven't the almighty grasp that's here—the insight—the *flaire*. This is big work, Harleigh."

Harleigh was on his feet before the last word had been spoken. His eyes glowed:

"Then I'm right. That's what I felt, that it's big work—no matter who did it."

"Who did do it?"

"I'm not dead sure. Couldn't take my oath on it. Circumstantial evidence points to Graham, but it might be an inspired hall-boy, a gifted chambermaid, anyone who has the run of our rooms and

happened to stumble across my kit and squeezed the last squirms out of the only tubes left that haven't caked dry—yellow ochre, vermilion, and permanent blue."

"You know it is Graham?"

"I believe it is Graham. I've felt from the first the fellow was extraordinary. But I'd still think he was extraordinary if he never did a thing but be what he is. You could judge for yourself from that milk-bottle episode I told you about, and the effect it had on him, the sort of mettle he's made of. Also, the way he has slaved at mean jobs without shirking. Also, the way he has kept it up with his books and that poor fiddle of his."

"Somebody ought to tell him to drop that violin. It's as sad a waste of good material as your . . . I mean, he'll never succeed with it. Somebody ought to tell him."

"Have. He asked me, man to man, the other night, what chance he had of making good with it, and I told him, man to man, not the faintest shadow."

"How did he take it?"

"Bowed to the inevitable. But there are bows and bows. His was a thoroughbred's. Chin up,

eyes level, shoulders back. The inevitable has nothing on Graham, I can tell you."

"Did he say he wanted to paint?"

"No. The first intimation I got that pictures especially appealed to him was one night when Amy was showing him some photographs out of one of your portfolios—old masters, cathedrals, and such. But appreciation's one thing, the creative faculty another. I never dreamed of his suddenly up and doing something like this, right out of the blue, without instruction, without practice, without colors, without anything."

James Burke sat still, considering:

"We don't want to let our enthusiasm run away with our judgment. If you'll leave this thing with me, I'd like to take it to a man I know who is capable of passing on it. He'll tell me at once if we've struck gold or only . . ."

Harleigh broke in with one of his quick darts:

"I don't want Graham to know I've discovered him—yet."

"Very well. Then suppose we say nothing until we see further. After his disappointment about the violin, it would be cruel to raise a second crop of false hopes. What's he doing now? Anything?"

"Odd jobs at the office. I got the chief to take him on as a temporary. John understands there's nothing permanent about it, but he doesn't mind. He's keen for anything, so long as it's work. He hands over his earnings at the end of the week as if my life depended on it, and I take them in the same spirit."

"Good!"

"You're busy, and so am I," Harleigh announced abruptly. "I must get back to the office."

The door closed upon him and he was gone.

He had barely crossed the threshold when the telephone bell rang peremptorily. At first the voice coming over the wire was strange to James Burke, but after a moment he recognized it as Amy's.

"Hello! Wait a minute. What's wrong? . . . What ails you, puss?"

"Why, nothing. Can't you hear me? Is this better? I'm so glad you haven't gone out to lunch yet. I've something to tell you."

"Go ahead. I hope it's something nice."

"Yes, it is. That's why I've come out during noon intermission to telephone you. They--that is, Miss Grant . . . I mean--my--the competitive es-

say I sent in has honorable mention. I thought you'd like to know."

"Like to know! I should say I do like to know. It's the best news I've had in a long time. I'm proud of you! Congratulations!"

If there was any response, the wire failed to transmit it.

"Hello,—Amy! Are you there?"

"Ye—es, Daddy."

"Sure you're O. K.? That still, small voice of yours doesn't sound like it."

"Maybe it's the wire. I'm all right. Good-by, Daddy!"

Surely there was something radically wrong with the telephone when it could take all the timbre from a clear, confident young voice and reduce it to the breathy tremolo of an invalid's semitone.

Daddy reacted curiously. Amy's message was all he could desire, she had promptly denied any ailment, yet he felt vaguely uneasy as he hung up the receiver, and the mood was not dispelled until after he returned from luncheon to plunge into such a press of work as drove less immediate matters from his mind.

The sight of his girl that night brought back the

earlier impression for a moment. But when he again taxed her with feeling out of spirits, she laughed away his fears so naturally he decided he was mistaken and took her word for it that nothing was amiss. They had a busy evening planning out the Christmas revel, for Amy had come over to her father's point of view, consenting to "burn" her money in Christmas candles. It was the Christmas-tree that won her over.

"You can have everything else your own way, the public hall, the concert, the refreshments, everything. But one thing I'm going to have my way. I'm going to have the Christmas-tree. We'll hang a big curtain midway across the stage, so not a soul who isn't in the secret shall know what's behind it. Then, after Sally has 'obliged' with her violin, and Nora has sung, and the rest of the genii have done their little stunts, it'll be my turn. They'll think the show is all over, and—the best will be to come. What do you think they'll do? Nora is wild, as it is, at the thought of having an opportunity to sing. When she gets her Symphony tickets, what do you suppose . . ."

There was a knock at the door. The next moment Nora herself stood before them. They saw in

a minute something was wrong. Her face was tragic.

"They won't let me sing."

"They? Who?"

"The Music School."

"Why?"

"I'm not good enough."

"Not *good* enough?"

"I'm not good enough a singer. They say my voice is all right, but I don't know enough. I haven't had the training. They've put Pauline Baker in my place."

Amy's indignant eyes challenged her father to permit this outrage to pass unprotested. He met their impulsive flash with a quiet headshake.

"Keep cool! Keep cool, firebrand!" he advised. Then turning to Nora: "Tell me just what happened, will you, please?"

"They say, and I know it's true," the girl declared, making a visible effort to speak without prejudice, "they say the audiences down here know as much about good music as anybody. You can't fool them. They wouldn't stand for what isn't first-class. They'd hiss you down. Miss Bailey told me she knew noted speakers who appeared before

the public all over the country and they dread the Cooper Union crowds, they're that critical. Any little slip you'd make they'd pounce on it, so you wouldn't know what had happened to you. Miss Bailey said it would be an unkindness to me to let me stand up to sing only to be laughed at."

James Burke nodded:

"So it would."

Tears sprang to Nora's eyes. She did not know for what she had hoped, or what she thought he would do. But she had been certain, if anyone could help, it would be Mr. Burke. He always helped. And here he was siding with the Music School, without a minute's hesitation. Then, the next moment, she heard his firm voice again:

"So it would be an unkindness to you if we allowed you to sing only to be laughed at. But that wasn't—that *isn't* the idea. We want you to sing to be applauded."

"But if I haven't had the training?"

"What one hasn't had doesn't necessarily set the limit to what one can get."

Amy leaned forward, the better to impress her hearers with what she had to say:

"I knew a girl once—I mean, I heard about her.

She was what Boris calls a rich uptowner—whose mother gave a Charity Concert at the Plaza—only it wasn't really for charity. It was to show off her daughter. And she hired everybody great and grand you could think of to perform. D'you remember, Daddy?—Suzanne Closter?"

"No," confessed Daddy, unabashed.

"At the last moment, oh, I suppose it was a few days before the concert, Suzanne got panic-stricken. She couldn't get through, not possibly. She wanted to back out, and her teacher wanted her to, too. The teacher said it would be 'fatal' to have her try to sing under the circumstances. Well, what do you think Mrs. Closter did? Had Ronzone coach Suzanne. Fancy! *Ronzone!* He drilled her, and drilled her, and drilled her, just on the numbers she was to sing, so when the time came she did really very well."

James Burke smiled:

"'Did very well'—to the tune of . . . Have you any idea what Ronzone's charges are, young lady? Even admitting he'd condescend to coach a pupil not of the social and financial standing of the Closter girl?"

Amy dismissed the suggestions as negligible.

"If Nora could sing on Christmas Eve, there's no knowing who might hear her and, if they liked her, wouldn't it be possible that they'd take an interest and . . . Oh, it might make her fortune!"

"It might—in a story-book."

"No, but really. Mightn't it lead to something, really, Daddy?"

"It might—possibly."

"Then we've no right to let the chance slip. Nora's got to sing."

There was a note of determination in Amy's voice that was new to her, yet somehow strangely familiar to her father. With a quick, impulsive movement he got to his feet.

"You're right. Now listen, Nora. I've no idea if I can do anything with the Music School, nor yet with Ronzone, but if . . ."

Nora stared, her breath came fast, then suddenly she shrank together hopelessly, as if realizing the futility of it all.

"There'd be no way to pay Ronzone. It's no use!"

James Burke's sympathetic eyes sought Amy's. He found there something of the same quality that had been in her voice a moment before—the same

strange yet familiar expression, new to her, old to him. He seemed for a second to be meeting Alexander Guthrie's resolute, shrewd gaze.

"Once upon a time," she said, "I heard Grandfather—I mean, I heard somebody say that if anyone had common sense, and the courage to take chances, he might make a lot by investing in unimproved property. I didn't know or care what it was all about at the time, but it comes back to me now, and I don't see why the same rule wouldn't work with unimproved talent. Anyhow, I know a person who wants to try it. Do you remember the 'party,' Daddy, who told you the other day she'd money to burn and was going to burn it? I happen to know she thinks she has common sense, and I'm sure she has the courage to take chances—so will you please invest in Nora for her 'to the tune of' Ronzone, I mean?"

CHAPTER XIV

THEM THAT WALK UPRIGHTLY

MR. ALEXANDER GUTHRIE sat looking out over the smiling waters of the bay of Naples with scowling eyes.

Nothing would have pleased him more than to board one of the great transatlantic liners lying at that moment in the harbor below and sail for home. But such a course would have been out of the question. It would have been a tacit admission of defeat, an upsetting of all his previously made plans, and, as he had told Amy, he was not accustomed to having his plans upset, his arrangements interfered with. On the contrary, every detail of the journey, thus far, had been conscientiously carried out according to specifications, nor had he the slightest intention of deviating a hair's breadth to the end of the chapter. Why should he? What did it signify if a slip of a girl on whom he had lavished every luxury had turned ingrate. forgotten her duty, all she owed him, and, preferring her penniless

dreamer of a father to him, had gone to live along with the dock-rats in the city slums? Things had come to a pretty pass if such an one could disturb the equanimity of Alexander Guthrie.

And yet, why was it that the journey he had looked forward to with such secret, almost boyish eagerness, had turned out to be so lamentable a failure? He could not account for it. He had known, when he planned the trip, that there would be nothing novel in the experience for him. He had gone over the ground a dozen times. Could it be that he had looked forward to seeing the world again through Amy's ardent eyes? had anticipated it only as it gave him a closer, more proprietary hold on her, the last, the only living creature on whom his heart was set?

"In order to be alone," he had slipped from the privacy of his own suite to come and sit in the lofty, glass-inclosed sun-parlor, the common property of the hotel.

Now he was aware that the vacant chair next his was being drawn forward so close that its broad, wicker arm almost touched his elbow. He looked up, annoyed.

"Lady Denslow."

The name was muttered none too graciously, though he showed its owner the respect of rising promptly to his feet.

With a gesture she motioned him back to his place.

"It is so clear to-day we can get an uncommonly fine view."

The commonplace observation fell from her lips in such a rich English voice, so low-pitched, clear, delightful, that it seemed distinctive.

He nodded.

"It appears to me your daughter is looking slightly better than when our paths last crossed—in Venice."

"There was no reason why she should have looked sick at Venice."

Any suggestion that Jean was ailing always set him on edge. But having great respect for Lady Denslow, her fortune, her social position, her beauty, still remarkable in spite of her years, he made haste to cover the rudeness of his testy reply.

"It is very kind of your ladyship to take an interest."

"Not at all. Miss Guthrie is very interesting. A type one does not often see nowadays."

As her companion made no attempt to follow up the subject she, properly, should have let it drop. She did not do so. There was on her part an appearance of calm determination to pursue it that caused Mr. Guthrie shrewdly to suspect she had placed herself beside him precisely for that purpose:

"The type I mean is the type I myself was reared to conform to. The early, or mid-Victorian, type. When I was a girl parents exacted blind obedience from their daughters. We were brought up to bow to parental authority first, then to that of our husbands. Few had the hardihood to resist. Customs change. The present mode is different."

"Yes. Unfortunately."

"Ah, I'm not so sure of that. I believe in duty, Mr. Guthrie. I believe in duty, in reverence, in ideals, all of which seem sadly disregarded by the young people—by the old as well—these days."

"Dee-generate days, your ladyship."

Her ladyship half smiled:

"I hope you don't feel as profane as you sound. But, while I believe in duty, reverence, and ideals, I may say, *because* I believe in them, I also believe in personal freedom."

"Another name for insubordination."

"If you choose to call it so. Yes, I even believe in insubordination, if subordination means the sacrifice of the right to live, of the right of others to live."

Alexander Guthrie chafed inwardly. If Lady Denslow had been a less august personage, he would not have hesitated to vent his irritation by demanding brusquely: "Well, madam, and what the mischief has all this to do with me?"

As it was, he bowed unsmilingly, hoping she would take the hint, and lead the conversation into more agreeable channels.

She did.

If her life had taught her nothing else, it had taught her to read character, giving her the tact and patience to deal with it according to its kind:

"I believe we both winter in the Far East?"

"That is my plan. If it is also your ladyship's, my pleasure and my daughter's will be doubled."

He could be courtly when he chose.

Meanwhile "my daughter" was tingling with excitement over her first adventure into the unknown regions of independent action. She had just sent off her draft to Amy. How the idea of taking

the reins into her own hands ever occurred to her in the first place she did not stop to ask. All she knew was that one day (to be exact, it was one day in Venice—a day when she was homesick, heartsick, sick in body, and sick in mind) out of the depths of despair there had crept a ray of hope. Her eyes had opened upon another view of justice, right, duty. She saw that blind obedience to an arbitrary will was not always a virtue. There was a limit to endurance under stubborn oppression. For the first time Jean Guthrie saw herself a free-born creature. It marked an epoch in her life, the opening up of strange vistas of emancipation. But the habit of years was strong. She had quickly lapsed back into the old slavish passivity, just as an imperfect spring will sometimes hold for a moment, then mysteriously lose its resilience and become flaccid and ineffectual again. The *spring* in Jean had been set for the second time now, here in Naples, months after the Venice episode, and this time it held. It was a coincidence that Lady Denslow happened to be at hand on both occasions.

Jean returned from her stolen visit to the bankers in triumph.

"I've done it!" she whispered, happening to encounter Lady Denslow in the corridor alone.

"Excellent! The next thing is to tell your father."

"Oh, no! I'd never dare do that!"

"If you have dared do what you believe to be right, why not dare stand by it?"

"Oh, you don't know . . . ! I wouldn't *dare!*"

"Yes, I do know. The courage will come."

Jean shook her head:

"I'm a coward, Lady Denslow. My father has always said so. He says I've a coward's chin. I suppose I have. Even my young niece, not sixteen, has more courage than I have. I wish you could have seen the way she held out against father when he tried to compel her to come with us on this trip and leave her own father. She wasn't intimidated for a moment, and she knew all the while she'd lose a fortune by staying back. Her mother was just like that, fearless, as brave as a lion—not in the least like me. I'm the only one in the family who has no will."

Lady Denslow's austere manner melted. She rested one hand on her small companion's shoulder with an affectionate pressure:

"You've just demonstrated you have a will, my dear. It will grow with exercise. And—your chin is no coward's chin, though it has a naughty habit of taking shelter in that hollow of your neck. Lift your head. Carry it high. Life loves those who look it squarely in the face. I'm sure you recollect what your own great Emerson says: 'God does not reveal himself to cowards.' . . . Cowards flinch—the brave man stands straight. Remember, much is promised 'to them that walk uprightly.'"

Jean turned her neck that her lips might touch the hand upon her shoulder.

"You are very good to me," she murmured gratefully. "And I'm so weak, and you are so strong and—splendid and wonderful."

There was a pause.

"Yes, I'm very strong and splendid and wonderful!" The low voice sounded almost passionately ironical. "It is easy to be strong and splendid and wonderful—after the event. Come. I am going to Posilipo. Will you come along?"

Jean shook her head:

"I'd love to, dearly. But father expects me to stay here. We leave to-morrow, you know—for Alexandria."

Lady Denslow nodded.

"There's just one thing," ventured Jean Guthrie timidly, and stopped.

"Well?"

"If anything should happen . . ."

"Happen? What do you mean?"

"If anything should happen to me—if I were to be sick or—or—a—if I were to—to go away—or—anything . . ."

"You must not think such thoughts."

"There would be nobody to let my brother know, unless you.—Will you permit me to give you his address? And if anything unexpected should happen, will you please write or—cable him—Mr. James Burke, 9 Craigen Street, New York City. Father thinks he dislikes James, but I think, in fact I know, that 'way down in the bottom of his heart he's as homesick for him and Amy as I am. The whole trip has been spoiled for father because he misses them so. You see, they're not like me, dull and ordinary. James and Amy are altogether different, very bright and independent, full of ideas. They keep it up, father's interest. I don't. So, if anything should happen, and you are where you can do it, will you cable James to come over? Tell

him father needs him. And—try not to let it leak out so the papers will get hold of it. Father hates the papers.”

Lady Denslow, puzzled and vaguely troubled, nevertheless nodded in assent.

“Good-by,” then said Jean simply.

“Au revoir. You are only preceding me, you know. I’ll overtake you before very long. Indeed, I hope we’ll meet very soon again.”

“Oh, yes, I hope so too! I hope we’ll meet very soon again.”

The wistful smile that accompanied the words went to Lady Denslow’s heart.

Mr. Guthrie was in their sitting-room when a moment later Jean, in her hesitating, deprecatory way, pushed open the door.

“Come in, come in! Don’t stand there as if you were afraid of your shadow. Where have you been?”

“With Lady Denslow. She asked me to drive to Posilipo with her.”

“Why didn’t you go?”

“I thought you might want me here.”

“What, in the name of common sense, would I be wanting you here for?”

"We're leaving to-morrow. I thought . . ."

"What's our leaving to-morrow to do with you? You don't pack, do you? Haven't we enough paid servants, that you must give strangers the impression you can't be spared? You can be spared. No one better."

"I know that, father," said Jean tremulously.

"Then, why the deuce don't you act on it?"

Jean lifted her chin.

"I will act on it, father," she returned, and walked uprightly past him to her own room.

CHAPTER XV
CHRISTMAS EVE

THE great night had arrived.

“Burkeses Amy,” looking about her at the vast barn of a public hall transformed into a wonder place, radiant with softly shining lights, green with boughs of hemlock, spruce, and holly, found it hard to believe she had ever called it a hopeless proposition, and shaken her head when John insisted “there were things you could do to it that would make it look better.” For weeks past he and her father and Harleigh had been doing the things, and it certainly looked better. The marvel was that, simple as they seemed now, the things should ever have been so complicated in the doing. But there had been times, and many of them, when Amy would have given up in despair if it hadn’t been for the three who stood firm in the face of exasperating delays, disappointments, petty jealousies.

“Oh, yes, it’s all very wonderful now!” she thought. “Looks as if butter wouldn’t melt in its

mouth, but—goodness! *we* know what it's cost to get it this way."

The place was jammed with an eager, expectant crowd, too excited to keep quiet, as it sat in solid rows upon rows facing the curtained platform. Frequently the pent-up energy found vent in sudden explosions, stamping, clapping, catcalls, shrill exasperating whistles.

Harleigh, busied with James Burke behind a mysterious "drop," longitudinally bisecting the stage, whispered:

"I hope music has charms to soothe these savage breasts. If it hasn't, it looks as if it would be *up to the police.*"

James Burke laughed:

"It's your first experience. Properly managed, there's no audience in the city more appreciative, better behaved."

"Properly managed?"

"Kept within bounds. Of course, I suppose, if one didn't hold a tight rein . . ."

"They'd rear up?"

"They might. It's inflammable material. It doesn't take as much as you might suppose to make a mob out of a mass."

The Music School orchestra began to play, and the house came to order.

Mr. Burke had had his way, so far as Nora was concerned. She was to sing, but the authorities, having yielded only under pressure, bore a smoldering grudge they would have been ashamed to acknowledge, but had not hesitated to display on more than one occasion, in many covert ways. At the outset their objection had been general, a perfectly reasonable objection to exploiting any talent not representatively creditable, but the moment they felt their will coerced by the power of Mr. Burke's influence their opposition became particular, directed against Nora personally.

The Ronzone lessons had been kept secret, lest they create new ground for disaffection, also lest they fail to accomplish all that was expected of them and at the last minute Nora be pronounced unfit by the great master himself. All James Burke had thought it necessary to declare was:

"Leave her to me. If she can be drilled into proper form, she'll sing. If not, I'll withdraw her entirely. Make out your programme with the understanding that you have someone in reserve to fill her place in case she can't appear. I give you my

word I'll not risk a fiasco. I'll let you know one way or the other, in ample time to make good in another direction."

And now the great night had arrived and Nora was to sing.

Sally Leonard, keyed to concert pitch, was here, there, everywhere at once, impressing it upon the world at large that she was so nervous she was ready to fly out of her skin.

"And you look as cool as a cucumber," she observed to Nora as they stood together in the shadow of the wings, peeping out upon the sea of faces turned towards the stage.

Nora smiled:

"Then I wish I was as cool as I look."

"Oh, you're not really what I call excited. If you were temperamental like I am, you'd know a thing or two. Miss Bailey says all real artists are temperamental. It's part of their make-up. A real artist is always nervous before she goes on, but the minute she begins to perform—that's another story."

And so indeed it appeared to be in Sally's case. She fairly broke her own record in passages requiring velocity and bravura, until, applauded to the

ech., recalled again and again, her nerves were really shaken, and she was just beginning to wonder what an acknowledged virtuoso would do, indulge in hysterics or face her audience once more with an extra-temperamental bow and encore, when Nora hurried to her, smiling delightedly, and tapped her on the shoulder:

“You must go out again, Sally. There are flowers for you. The usher is waiting. They’re clapping to beat the band!” and with a gentle push impelled her forward through the little door that gave upon the stage.

But Sally had delayed a moment too long. By the time she found herself on the stage again the applause had ceased, no flower-laden usher was in sight. It was a terrible moment. Bewildered, chagrined, a dreadful sensation seized her, something she had never experienced before. A million eyes pricked through her, each one a fiery pin-point. In a second she would be helpless. Already her muscles were stiffening, her flesh becoming lead. Through her panic of stage-fright her active consciousness retained two impressions clear enough to act as stimuli: flowers—escape. Obeying, she madly gathered every blossom in sight, made a clean sweep of all the

decorations, clutched her booty to her bosom, and—bolted.

It took the house a single moment to grasp the situation. With one accord it broke into a roar of derision:

"Come back, Sally! Leave us the trimmings!"

"If you tell the usher, he'll swap bouquets, Sally! Take your own and give us back the ones you swiped!"

"Say, Sally, nothing mean about us! We'll let you have the flowers, but be so good as to leave us the piano."

For a moment it looked as if there was to be a riot, so slight a thing is authority when the lawless spirit of "the pee-pul" begins to recognize its power. The Music School authorities, the same that had declared Nora should not sing, now lay urgent hands upon her:

"Quick! Go on! Sing! They'll be unmanageable in another minute."

"But it's not my turn."

"Never mind. No matter. Go on!"

"They won't listen."

"Make them. You wanted to sing. Now sing!"

Nora knew she was being thrown to the wolves.

For a second she was terror-stricken, then her Irish fighting blood rose quick and hot, in a desperate determination to "show them." She plucked at Harleigh's sleeve.

"Come on!" she whispered hoarsely.

"But you can't sing in this Bedlam."

"I must. They've said so. Come on and—*keep on!*"

The appearance of the two upon the stage had no effect upon the populace. Sally was still being enjoined to "give up the loot!" urged with persuasive catcalls, with whistles that rent the air to "spare us the orchestra!" The poor stale joke was tossed from mouth to mouth, bandied about, until, from being stale, it became nauseous. Still the hubbub kept on.

Harleigh played bravely through the opening bars of his accompaniment, began again, then for the third time, temporizing patiently in the hope that there would come a lull and Nora have a chance to be heard. No use. Looking helplessly toward her, he caught her eye, reading in it her resolution to go through her group of songs or die in the attempt. She knew the confusion would drown her voice, that to the crowd below she must look like

a singer in a dumb show, something absurd enough to increase rather than diminish the sport across the footlights, and yet she began to sing and, what was more, kept on singing.

The first number was entirely lost in the din. It ended and, without waiting, Harleigh passed right on to the second. It seemed to him the silence that succeeded, all the deeper because of the uproar that had preceded it, was just the ominous holding of the breath before a more thunderous outbreak. He dared not lift his eyes to look at Nora, much less the audience. Blindly he kept on and still on, all his thoughts focused on the hope that the spell would hold until the last note had been sung, the last chord struck, and he could lead the girl off the stage in good order.

It did hold, but as they turned to go he felt a premonition of something coming, coming swiftly, surely, inescapably. At first it was nothing more than a breath, as of the air moving among leafy branches, but with terrible velocity gaining, growing, until it grew to a whirlwind that caught them up and threatened to beat them down.

"Let's run for it!"

The muttered words came from between clenched

teeth. He felt her cold hand tremble as he clutched it, hurrying her to shelter. Louder, louder grew the thunder behind them, until, fairly pushing Nora through the little door, following close on her heels, he banged it to behind them. They were safe.

Miss Bailey, wild-eyed, staring, stood like an unappeased Fate just over the threshold.

"Go back, go back!" she cried, waving wild arms in the direction of the stage.

Harleigh gasped.

"Go back!"

"Never!"

"You must!"

"We won't!"

"Don't you hear them?"

"Hear them? I should think we did hear them! That's just the reason we won't go back!"

"But you must . . . ! They're *applauding!*"

"Applauding?"

Nora's white lips smiled ironically as she repeated the word—"Applauding?"

And yet, as they stood listening, above the stamping and the clapping, rose clear and distinct, cries of, "More! More! Mo—ar!"

"By the great . . . ! Come on!"

Harleigh's voice was husky with excitement, and obediently Nora went to receive the ovation that was waiting for her, that all her life long she remembered, because it marked the beginning of her success.

The littlest ones in the audience had dreamed the happy hours away in blessed oblivion. They were accustomed to being dragged outdoors o' nights, hot or cold, dry or wet, to sit in stuffy crowds where, no sooner had they comfortably fallen asleep, than they were jostled awake again, hauled, blindly unre-sisting, into the shadowy streets, where the paving-stones stuck up on purpose to stub the toes, even if they didn't actually trip one up entirely so one fell flat and got cuffed for it. But to-night—to-night it was something quite different, something they were not in the least prepared for.

"Wake up, Tossy! Wake up, Andy! Quick! Or you'll miss it! Keep your eye on the curtain! See it go up? Whatcher say to that? Grand, eh?"

The concert was over, the stage had been cleared, the mysterious "drop" had risen, slowly, slowly. And there stood a tree, dazzling, gorgeous, its top-most point grazing the ceiling, crowned with a lustrous star.

Nothing of the sort had ever been seen in Craigen Street before. And, as if this were not enough, it presently appeared that there were presents on the tree for everybody. For the youngsters, an orange, a tarleton stocking "chuckful" of candy, a toy. For the grown-ups, or growing-ups, things equally appropriate, if not much more valuable.

"Burkeses Amy" was radiant. The disaster that had at one time threatened, only tended to make the ultimate result a more glorious victory. If she had felt nothing else, she would have felt rewarded when she stumbled on Nora hiding in the folds of the drawn curtain, crying with joy over her success, clasping her Symphony tickets to her breast, and heard John's inarticulate tongue struggling to express his thanks for the fine Braun photograph—a Rembrandt—Santa Claus had brought him.

"Well, daughter, how do you feel now, with all your little fortune gone at one fell swoop?"

"Burkeses Amy" and her father were making their way home afoot through a drizzling, cold rain that had just set in.

"All right, thank you. I know I'm as poor as Job's turkey. I'll have to scrimp worse than ever, but I don't care. For once I've done something

grand, as they say down here. If I never get another chance, I can always remember 'I was a corp-ril wanst.' "

James Burke laughed:

"There's something in that! You and Mulvany can look back and be satisfied that 'wanst' you both realized your dream."

"A dream," corrected Amy pointedly.

A curious chill passed down her father's spine. He shivered.

"What's the matter?" she asked, feeling the tremor against the arm she had slipped through his. "Cold, are you?"

"No."

"But you shivered."

"I saw a ghost."

"Ugh!"

She shrugged the absurd idea away incredulously. Yet he spoke but bare truth. The little syllable she had stressed was the key that opened a door through which he saw the wraith of the child Amy vanish forever into the dim stretches of the past, a wistful small shade, on whom the new Amy at his side would be the last to waste a regret.

The new Amy, unfamiliar as yet to his just awak-

ened, startled consciousness, her arm tightly locked in his, gave him a sudden shake:

"You haven't heard a word I've been saying."

"Forgive me, dear. What have you been saying?"

"I just asked if you don't think it's funny how—how distinguished John Graham looks in his new clothes."

"Funny? No. Why shouldn't he look distinguished in them? He looked distinguished in his old ones."

"Oh, well—I don't know! And—and—hasn't he just slaved to make this thing a success?"

"He certainly has."

"And—and everybody has been saying how splendidly he ushered."

"How splendidly he—what?"

"Ushered, since you insist on it. He'd trained his aides beforehand till they were prepared for anything and able to handle it."

"What about that rumpus that almost put an end to everything?"

"Oh, I'll tell you about that! There was a terribly rough-looking specimen who strayed in from goodness knows where. He began to argue, or

something, with John the minute he saw him. It was he kept stirring up the row, but John quieted him down after a bit."

"John's a fine chap. No doubt of it! Gifted, too."

"How do you mean, 'gifted'? He plays the violin—abominably."

"True. Fiddling's simply not his forte."

"Is there anything else that is? You act that way."

"Why . . . Can you keep a secret?"

"You've tried me. You ought to know."

"Well, then—not long ago Harleigh unearthed a bit of a sketch in oil John had made and hidden away out of sight. It impressed Harleigh as quite out of the ordinary, and he brought it to me. I, in turn, took it to a friend of mine for criticism, not liking to depend on my own judgment. My friend, Owen Andrews, president of the Academy, didn't laugh at me as I'd half expected he might do. Harleigh and I had liked the sketch, though we thought it a little raw. But Andrews did more than like it. He took it to the Committee, submitted it for entrance to the prize competition, and, by Jove! they've accepted it. What's more, they are

raving over the new genius they've discovered, talking about his unique method, his extraordinary freedom from *schools*, his 'simple palette.' That simple palette business delights Harleigh. The reason it's so simple is Harleigh had only three colors left, and our young man simply used what he had. Result, he stands an excellent chance of taking a prize."

Amy halted squarely midway of the block, the cold rain beating down on them unnoticed:

"Then, they—you say they think John's a—a genius?"

"That's what Andrews told me."

There was a pause, following which they moved on again, but not before a sigh that was half a sob had escaped her, too late to be smothered.

"It's great luck for John, isn't it, puss? Sounds like a romance, eh?"

"Uh-huh!"

"Aren't you glad—for John?"

"Uh-huh!"—

This time it was her father who stopped:

"What is you, Amy child? Your voice sounds forlorn."

"I suppose I'm selfish—selfish and—mean-spirited

and—petty. I'm sure I'll feel glad later. I mean, because John's a genius, and going to be great and famous and all that. I was glad when Ronzone said Nora would come out all right. Only, somehow, this is different. Being a genius seems to take people so far off—lifts them right out of your reach, and—and makes you feel kind of lonesome and left behind. To be just ordinary and commonplace while others have all the talent—well, it makes you feel—left out in the cold. Don't you think it does?"

They had reached the house. James Burke laid his hand on the doorknob, pushing open the door to admit Amy to the dingy interior. "One needn't stay out in the cold," he answered lightly. "There's always home, you know."

"Yes, there's always home," Amy echoed, steadying her voice with an effort as she mounted the creaking staircase

CHAPTER XVI

“YOUR UNCLE DUDLEY”

HARLEIGH and John, following the Burkes' example, had said good-night to those still occupied about the hall, reached the street, and were ready to swing off at a brisk pace, when Miss Bailey suddenly recollected something she had forgotten to say to Mr. Worthing and nothing would do but he must stop and listen to it, then and there.

“I hate to trouble you, it's so late and all that, and I know you are tired and want to get home, but . . .”

Harleigh, groaning inwardly, turned to John with a whispered, “Hold on a second, will you? I'll be back in a jiffy,” and rejoined Miss Bailey where she was lingering in the shelter of the hall doorway, while John, knowing the lady of old, composed himself to wait, with no illusions concerning the brevity of the “jiffy” in question. He had stood barely a second, however, when, at a touch on his arm, he wheeled about swiftly, ready to congratulate Har-

leigh on his speedy deliverance. But it was not Harleigh who stood beside him.

"You told me inside there," a reedy voice addressed him, half persuasively, half aggressively, "you told me inside there, if I'd fen larks—quit stirrin' 'em up, and all that—you'd see me later. Well, later it is. Here am I. Likewise, here are you. No time like the present, so—*see* me, will ye?"

John instinctively shifted place, as if to escape from an overhanging raindrip, in reality the contaminating touch of his wretched companion's fingers.

"No, you don't!"

The fingers fastened more tenaciously on his overcoat sleeve:

"What'd be the good of me recognizin' you after all these years only to let you get away from me now when the tables 's turned an' I'm under-dog an' you're on top an' you owin' me a favor, as you might say, from 'way back?"

"What do you want?" John's voice was steady, cool, a trifle hard.

"Want? Did I wait to ask you what did you want that there time the bull most had you in stir, an' you so green to the game you'd never a know in your

noddle how to make a getaway? The minute his honor turned me loose, I give the tip to Mr. Barrows, an' Mr. Barrows he come an' squared you with the court."

As John moved out of the circle of light cast by the street lamp, the shuffling figure moved, shadow-like, by his side:

"Did I or did I not tell Barrows?"

"You did."

"Did or didn't Barrows help you?"

"He did."

"Then, what's the matter with your owin' your Uncle Dudley a gooa turn?"

"I've not denied it."

"Well?"

"Well?"

"Come along in, out of the wet, around the corner, see? Down that alley a step. There's a quiet nook where a couple of good friends like us can chin without bein' interrupted by cops or other night-prowlin' animals."

"We can talk here."

"You can, mebbe. I can't. I don't like the wet, nor yet the cold, nor yet the cops."

"Come along, then."

Nothing more was said until the scuffling feet had led the way to a miserable shedlike structure in a sort of mews, hidden away at the end of a sinister-looking alley behind two rows of tall buildings. If the tramp had not stopped then, John would certainly have done so. As it was, he was spared the trouble of refusing to proceed by his companion's turning to him with a grunt of satisfaction and the reassuring remark that, being off the regular beat now, they were not likely to be disturbed.

"Very well. Say your say and have done with it." John's words had a crisp brevity more convincing than argument.

All pretense of conciliation fell from the other. His tone was bluntly mandatory when next he spoke:

"Hand over that pretty picture Sandy Claws brought you to-night."

John started. "You mean—*this?*" he asked, producing the Rembrandt in amazement.

"Gawd, no! What'd I be wantin' that fur? The other one that come in a envelope, same's a letter. The little green one you sneaked a look at when you thought nobody was on to you. You know the one I mean. The one of the gov'nor's ugly mug, with the nice V alongside. Get me?"

John's hand moved straight to his breast pocket.

"I see you do get me," the other leered.

He fingered the bill appraisingly when John handed it over, crushed it in his dirty palm, then thrust it deep into his trousers' pocket. But, as John turned to go, the hand darted out again, its fingers closing viselike on his sleeve:

"Just a minute, *if* you please. If you think this makes us quits, you're off. Keepin' you out of stir's worth more than five dollars. I'm all for fair play among friends. My motto is do others that you've been done by. Now, I've been done by these rich uptown nobs you're so thick with. Yes, an' not me alone, but hundreds of poor, honest men like me that hasn't our rights in this world. We know it. Sure, we know it! I may as well tell you now, open an' aboveboard, we're for doin' 'em back again, good an' plenty. There you are, an' now you have it. Never say I ain't warned you. Never say I don't play fair."

John stood stockstill, held to the spot not half so effectually by the tramp's firm clutch of his arm as by some horror his mind did not grasp, except as a thick, lowering cloud that threatened to crush him under its ponderable weight. A moment and he had

reacted. Wrestling himself free of the other's hold, he turned on him angrily:

"What do you mean—you . . . ? Tell me, or by God I'll shake it out of you!"

"What fur do you speak to me like that?" the whining voice complained, while, writhing and twisting, the tramp made himself free of John's relaxed hold.

"Tell me what you mean."

"What I mean don't hurt you none, to make you speak to me like that."

"You said something about my friends. You called them——"

"Rich uptown nobs? So I did, an' so they are. Well, what's the matter with that?"

"It's a lie."

"It's the truth."

"I tell you it's a lie. I suppose you're talking of Mr. Worthing. If you are——"

"Mr. Worthin'? Who cares about him? Never heard his name before. He ain't rich enough to hurt anybody. It's the others—the man an' the girl! It's them as are rollin' in money stole out of honest men's pockets. It's them that grinds down the poor, with their railroads an' their banks an'

their marble palaces on the Avenoo, an' ownin' half the city besides. It's them has grabbed what Labor's earned."

John laughed out:

"You poor devil! I'm a fool to listen to you. As if you'd ever earned a cent in your life! You don't know what you're talking about."

"Ho! Don't I though! Well, you just wait an' see. But that's as much thanks as a honest man gets for being fair an' square in his dealin's an' givin' a friend the tip beforehand. Don't blame me if, when the times comes, an' me an' them-who-shall-be-nameless is sufferin' for what by rights belongs to us, we get it where we can, an' how we can. Don't blame me!"

John shrugged.

"I won't blame you," he said, turning on his heel.

"If you don't believe me, look in last year's directory, or the telephone book, an' see if a party answerin' to the name of your fine friend that gave the Christmas party so generous don't belong to the gang o' thieves that hang out on the Avenoo, instead o' where they belong, in stir. We keep track o' them. You can't fool the honest laborin'-man.

We don't want no Christmas-trees give us. What we want is our rights."

John's resentment rose hot against himself as much as against the speaker, to whose absurd patter he had bemeaned himself to listen. He brushed past him, shivering with indignation. The voice pursued him relentlessly:

"I don't bear you no malice. Think it over. If you find what I say is true, why, I'll let you 'see me' again later. I'm not proud. I ain't above turnin' a honest penny now an' then. O' course, there'd be more to be got dealin' direct with the girl's folks. But if you like to save her a scare, why——"

It was impossible to go home at once. The dread of being shut in by four walls with this swelling rage in his breast made the icy chill of the streets seem a refuge to John. He walked for hours, until the grinding ache in his feet and limbs recalled the time, not so long ago, but already half forgotten, when such walking and such pain were the ordinary experiences of every day.

The night clerk nodded mechanically as he passed the desk on his way to the elevator. It was none of the night clerk's business at what hour of the

morning guests chose to come in. But when at the elevator door, instead of entering the car, John stopped, thought a minute, then came back, the night clerk stared.

"Do you happen to have a directory here?"

The book was produced, with a condemnatory air intended to discourage any further demands for service at such a time of the clock. It might be no one's business when the guests came home, but it was clearly imposing on good-nature for guests to expect to be waited on at such an unholy hour.

Once inside Harleigh's apartment, John let himself wearily down on the hall chair, and sat staring before him with fixed, unseeing eyes. What if he had found the name he sought where he had been assured he would find it? James Burke was a commonplace name enough. Even granting a James Burke had lived on upper Fifth Avenue, that did not necessarily prove he and the James Burke now living at No. 9 Craigen Street were one and the same. To be disturbed over so ordinary a happening was manifestly absurd.

John rose and shook himself together with an impatient shrug. But, in spite of his good resolution, he paused before Harleigh's closed door, wa-

vering between an impulse to rouse him and the cross-purpose of leaving him in peace. He made no sound, did not even raise his hand to knock, yet somehow Harleigh seemed to be aware of him.

"Hullo! That you, Graham?" he called out drowsily.

"Yes. D'you mind if I come in?"

"Come on."

John obeyed, going straight over to where Harleigh lay, seating himself in a chair beside the bed.

"I want to ask you a couple of questions."

"Fire away."

"Is Mr. Burke a wealthy man?"

Harleigh yawned. "No. Why?"

"You're certain he's not?"

"Dead certain he's not. He's even further off from being one than I am, and that's going some. What started you on that tack?"

"Oh, a number of things! The neighborhood has had entertainments before, but never anything like to-night's. The association has given out Christmas presents, but never Symphony season tickets, or pictures like mine, or five-dollar bills. It couldn't afford it. Somebody with money has been backing this thing. You're sure it's not Mr. Burke?"

"What I tell you three times is true! It's not Mr. Burke."

John sat motionless, troubled by his own misgivings:

"You know a lot of uptown people. There's a James Burke in the directory who lives, or did live, at 1059 Fifth Avenue. Did you ever meet him?"

"Yes."

"Any relation to our James Burke of Craigen Street?"

No answer.

"Same person?"

"Yes."

Again there was a pause, broken at last by John demanding bluntly:

"Why is he living in the Ninth Ward, then?"

Harleigh sat up:

"Say, old man, what does all this signify? What has set you prying into other people's business? It isn't like you a little bit. Why can't you take the good the gods provide and say no more about it? Never mind who pays the bills."

"It's not idle curiosity. You can take my word for that. I've a good reason. I wish you'd trust me. I wish you'd tell me about the Burkes."

"How about the shoe being on the other foot? How about your trusting the Burkes?"

"I'm willing. But there are others who aren't. There's been gossip. There are some who think Mr. Burke is a suspicious character."

"Bosh! If Burke were a moneyed man, which I tell you again he's not, he wouldn't be the first to cast his lot with the lower east-siders."

"I know it. But the others make no secret of who they are. We all know Mr. Phelps is a millionaire. He married one of the girls of the ward—lives there for good. And Miss Pierrepont—she helped the shirtwaist strikers, and is doing a lot in all sorts of ways, but she never tried to keep it dark that her father was the great G. P."

"Neither is Burke keeping anything dark that's anybody's business."

"How about his Fifth Avenue house?"

"It's not his."

John gave a short, sharp laugh:

"I suppose he rented the second floor back? They let out rooms, I understand, in that part of town."

"The Fifth Avenue house belongs to Mr. Alexander Guthrie."

"The Alexander Guthrie? The millionaire?"

"*The* Alexander Guthrie. The multimillionaire. The copper king. The capitalist. The financier. The art collector. The anything-you-like, so long as you make it rich enough."

"What has he to do with the Burkes?"

"Mighty little, at present. Worse luck! But that will correct itself with time and travel. Meanwhile, he's Amy's grandfather. Her mother was his daughter. Dead now. There's another daughter living, but she doesn't count, poor dear. Amy is the only grandchild. The old man idolizes her. It's Amy who is the prize goldfish in that aquarium. I wouldn't like to say how much she'll inherit. But something stupendous. I fancy the old man has dreams of seeing her married to a prince of the blood. No other need, or would dare, apply. He's a fierce proposition—Grandfather Guthrie."

Like the snap of a spring, John's mind sprang back to the night of the fire, Ellen's whispered caution:

"Ye'll have to mind her. Everywan does. Her word is law. Ye wouldn't dare defy her. Th' ould man'd have ye dhrawn and quarthered."

Now he understood. A hundred little things that hitherto had perplexed him slipped quietly into place

as parts of a puzzle, after the keystone link has been found and fitted. But, in this case, the same link that connected the chain severed something else, something within John's consciousness that, unsuspected, had been growing stronger with every day until, now that he felt it snap, he experienced a sensation resembling the mortal weakness a man might feel whose artery has been cut and who is slowly bleeding to death.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ANCIENT MARINER

WHAT remained of that winter stood out in Amy's mind ever after as a sort of finger-post that marked the parting of the ways.

Certain experiences influencing development are often so merged with the commonplace as to escape active consciousness. But there comes a moment when the inconspicuous forces are focused by some event, ordinary enough in itself, maybe, yet vitally significant because it arrests attention, bringing the mind to bear directly on itself and the ultimate point toward which it is tending.

Amy's schooldays differed in no outward respect from those of the scores of other girls with whom she came in daily contact. She was by no means the only backward member of her class. The point of difference lay in the effect of her backwardness upon her character as it stood at this moment, the result of a complex inheritance, a clash of environ-

ments that necessarily made for confusion in a mind not yet adjusted in its process of orientation.

The dreaded preliminary test had taken place, and any day the report cards might be distributed. Amy understood now how it was the girls got so nervous over their "averages." It was in the air. The classrooms were full of the atmosphere of excitement, suspense. One simply couldn't escape it. She wondered how, all this time, she had been contented to drift so idly along with only occasional qualms of conscience, sporadic attempts at application. All the absorbing interests that, day by day, had shouldered out her school work were an indistinguishable blur of recollection now. The only thing that really counted was the big question, promotion or demotion? She saw herself as her father would see her in case she failed to make good. Saw herself as she would look in Harleigh's eyes—in John's. John, who was a genius, who, ever since the Christmas-tree, when he had been told his picture was accepted, had stood aloof until even uncensorious Daddy had noticed it and said he was sorry. Now the decisive moment was at hand and she felt it in her bones, as Ellen would have said, that her mark would not reach sixty, the passing grade.

The close of the session came and dismissal hour. Miss Grant had not distributed the cards.

"D'you know why?"

Boris asked the question, following up the breathless discussion of the situation in the cloakroom.

"No."

"Why, it's Thursday. Don't you see? To-morrow's Friday. To-morrow we'll get our cards, and if our averages don't suit us we'll have all Saturday and Sunday to cool off in."

Amy listened with the rest, but did not, like the rest, leave the building directly the dismissal bell sounded. She was too keyed up to endure the society of her more confident companions. They might have misgivings, she had foreknowledge of defeat. On the spur of the moment she determined to wait and see if she could not waylay Miss Grant, and have a word with her. Perhaps Miss Grant might have some reassurance for her. Always, up to this, at the last moment, even when things looked desperate enough, there had been found some way out. Amy had hitherto lived in firm reliance on her lucky star. But lately her lucky star seemed to have suffered an eclipse.

In her classroom Miss Grant was "keeping in"

a couple of girls detected communicating during study period. Amy slipped into a seat at the rear of the room and waited. It seemed a long, dreary stretch of time before the culprits were dismissed and Miss Grant nodded permission to her to come forward.

"Oh, Amy! I'm glad you are here. I have wanted to see you. I think you can guess what about. But first suppose you tell me what I can do for you, and then we'll talk about the poor marks."

Amy's throat thickened. There was nothing in Miss Grant's words to encourage hope, promise, comfort.

"I want to—to talk to you about——" Her voice trailed off into a husky, inaudible whisper.

"Won't you come nearer—here to my desk? Then you can tell me what you have to say while I am putting away my papers. I can listen, even if my fingers are busy."

Amy dragged forward with lagging steps, heavily conscious of her footless errand, the uselessness of expecting to retrieve in a moment the mistake of months.

The classroom door opened.

"Miss Van Beuren wants to know if you'll please

come to Dr. Snow's office for a minute, Miss Grant? Miss Van Beuren said for me to tell you, if you were here yet, it was very important, and would you be kind enough to come right off."

Nodding her answer to the messenger, who disappeared as abruptly as she had come, Miss Grant turned to Amy:

"If you are in a hurry now, you can see me tomorrow after school. But if you have anything special to consult me about, you can wait for me here. I don't expect to be away long."

"I'll wait."

When she was alone Amy wondered why she had waited. It would have been easy to get away under cover of Miss Grant's friendly suggestion. What was it she wanted, anyhow? If she had failed, she had failed. She was certain Miss Grant would not alter her mark. She knew, all the girls knew, that, kind and patient as Miss Grant was, she was strictly, sternly just, treating all fairly, showing favor to none. The time was past when being Alexander Guthrie's granddaughter would bring Amy Burke consideration she had not earned. Here, she was merely one of a crowd, with no more chances than the poorest of them all. Less chance than some

who, like John and Nora, might be poor in pocket, but were rich in natural gifts, who could buy and sell her in brains any day.

Amy's troubled eyes roved restlessly, her fingers playing havoc with a ripped seam in her glove, till with a quick check, like the prick of an electric needle, gaze and fingers alike were still, and she sat staring at Miss Grant's desk, as she had hastily left it—on a little pile of white cards that stood out conspicuously against the background of clean, green blotting paper covering the desk-top.

Amy's first impulse was to turn her eyes away, not to look, just to get far away, out of reach of—she didn't know what. Her next impulse, the impulse she obeyed, was to take a step nearer, to discover if the cards were really, truly the report cards. Surely there could be no harm in giving just one peep to see if they actually were the report cards. She wouldn't so much as touch them—she just wanted to see . . . She did not have to touch them. The topmost card lay face upward, fairly staring her out of countenance:

"Burke, Amy . . ."

Underneath were the numerals marking her average.

A few moments later Miss Grant returned.

Amy was sitting on one of the first-form seats, her eyes glued to the pages of "The Ancient Mariner," which someone had inadvertently left behind in the rack. Her attention was so fixed upon the text, or something equally absorbing, that she failed to hear the door as it opened to admit Miss Grant.

"Hold off! Unhand me, gray-beard loon!"

Amy gave a quick cry of terror at the touch upon her arm.

"Dear me, you are under Coleridge's spell, aren't you?" Miss Grant smiled. "But you needn't be afraid. You haven't killed the albatross, or committed any other wickedness, I'm sure, so I'll be lenient with you this time."

Amy's hot cheeks flushed a deeper scarlet. She gave a shamefaced, feverish little laugh.

"And now, what can I do for you?" Miss Grant repeated, turning at once to her desk, beginning to sort and put away the pens, ink, and paper—all that littered the top.

Amy closed her book and rose. "I—I don't know exactly what I do want," she admitted lamely. "I was just—I mean, I am just worried about my

lessons. I wanted to ask you—to tell you—to see if——”

Miss Grant turned the key in her desk drawer:

“I see. You wanted to know if we couldn't straighten things out for you a little. I have wanted to know the same thing myself and, you remember, I talked to you about it in November, before—before I felt obliged to send that warning card to your father.”

Amy winced.

“I'm afraid it is a little late in the day now for good marks. If I remember right, your paper was one of the poorest in the class, far below passing grade. I say if I remember right, because there are so many papers it is hard to recollect precisely how I marked each one. But if there is ever any doubt, you may be sure I give the girls the benefit of it.”

“Then I—I haven't passed?”

“I'm afraid not. I think I had to fail you. Of course, you understand this is only a preliminary test. The marks are not entered on the permanent record, but they represent the probable standing the girls will take later, in the midyear examinations. I wish you had done better. I wish you would do better. You are naturally bright enough to rank

with the first in the class. You just don't apply yourself. You ought not to be content to slip behind, for you have evidently had much greater advantages than most here, and yet—look at your rating——”

Before Miss Grant could unlock her desk, to refer to the card, as she was preparing to do, Amy started forward with a low cry.

“No, no!” she implored, her face turned suddenly very white. “Don't look!—Listen! I'll tell you—I *must* tell you. I changed it—my average—on the card. It was fifty. I made it sixty—to pass. While you were out of the room just now, I did it. I didn't intend to tell, but I can't deceive any longer. That warning card you sent my father—he never got it—I couldn't let him—he would have been so ashamed and disappointed. I meant to do better, to make him proud of me—and, then, I didn't do better. I did worse. I sent in—— That competitive essay I sent in—I didn't write it. And now—*this*. What shall I do, oh, what shall I do? I'm a dishonest girl. I'm a cheat. What's to become of me? Of course you'll make me leave the school, but, oh! don't expel me before everybody, for—for—my father's sake.”

Miss Grant might have been the Wedding-guest in the clutch of the Ancient Mariner himself, so scared and helpless she looked. She stared straight into Amy's face, as the pitiful confession wrung itself out, word by word—stared "like one that hath been stunned."

Then suddenly she did the most unexpected thing in the world. She bent forward and kissed Amy's white, twitching lips.

"Why, you poor little thing? You *poor* little thing!" she said, and gathered her into her arms.

.
It was quite dark when they parted, but Amy was not afraid. Nothing alarmed her now, since she had found a friend, who, knowing the worst, still did not believe her to be incorrigible, who, on the contrary, held that the miserable missteps of the past could be retrieved, a future begun on which there need be no blight of old wrongdoing.

That one moment of blinding light, in which she had seen herself at the brink of the pit, made fear of anything except sin impossible. The course Miss Grant suggested, hard as it was, could not terrify. She felt a sort of exaltation in the thought that its very difficulty would keep her senses alive

to the danger of slipping back into the old ways, that the old torpor of conscience could not return so long as she was being whipped forward by a stinging lash she herself plied.

"I will do all I can for you," Miss Grant said, "but you need steady tutoring, and that I have not the time to give. Can't you get someone to coach you under my general direction?"

Amy considered. Her money was gone. The allowance her father was able to provide covered fares and small incidental expenses, but nothing beyond. She knew his income would bear no further drain. If, therefore, she was to get a coach, it must be one who would give his services free, gratis, for nothing. She shuddered. Amy Burke, Alexander Guthrie's granddaughter, an object for charity! Under the influence of her newborn zest for self-flagellation, she clutched the dagger-pointed idea and pressed it into herself, glorying in the chance to prove she could bear the pain.

"Boris would do it. She offered, once, to help me."

"Capital! Boris Orloff is the very one. Tell her frankly how you are situated, and I know she'll lend a hand. Both of you come to me to-morrow

after school. We can plan out the work together so you can make up the lost ground. I know you can do it, if you set your mind to the task."

On the way home, alone in the cold and dark, some of the up-buoying enthusiasm leaked out of Amy's spirits, but she was still determined to do the difficult thing, which to youth so often seems synonymous with the right thing. She meant to ask Boris, and she meant to tell her father. But the moment she got inside her own door she knew her father was not there.

"Oh, Ellen!" she called.—"Where's Daddy?"

Ellen, looking strangely flushed of cheek and swollen of eye, appeared from the direction of the kitchen pantry.

"He's—he's not home, Miss Amy. He was here, but he went out again."

"Where to?"

"He come in quite airly in the da', and—and he thried to get thrack of you, but the school was out, or something was wrong. Annyways, no wan would answer the 'phone."

"Well?"

"And the ship, it was for sailin' at wanst, an'

he'd no more than time to get aboard, if he had that, an' so——"

Amy caught up the word to fairly fling it back in Ellen's face:

"Ship?—Ship? What are you talking about, I should like to know, Ellen Connors? What ship? Sailing where?"

"The ship to the other side—where your grandfather be's. It's him as is lyin' at death's door, sthruck down wit' grief at what's happened your Auntie Jean."

"Auntie Jean? What has happened to Auntie Jean?"

Ellen shook a disconsolate head:

"It's nary a wan o' me knows. Nor your poor daddy, neither. He left what he called 'the cable' for you. Here it is. See for yourself."

Come Smyrna at once. Amy's grandfather needs you.
Loss of daughter brought on stroke.

(Signed) DENSLOW.

CHAPTER XVIII

ALL IN THE FAMILY

THAT night Amy could not sleep.

She no longer was up in the clouds. Instead she groped her way blindly through black mists of self-doubt, seeing nothing before her but defeat. It came to her with a shock that now her father was gone, she was absolutely alone on this side of the water, no one of her own within call in case of need.

The loss of her good little aunt had struck her a benumbing blow. Dully she wondered if people, brought face to face with death, as she had been, thought such trivial, unrelated thoughts as those she was thinking:—Smyrna—where was Smyrna?—

“ ‘Malaga grapes are very good grapes,
But the grapes of Smyrna are better.’ ”

The nonsense line kept drumming away in her consciousness with exasperating persistency.

It was no use. She could not ask Boris to help her. The whole thing was impossible. Boris would

refuse, or, if she didn't refuse, would consent only in order to "crow over" her, and in the end she, Amy, would fail anyhow.

Who was Denslow? Had Grandfather dismissed Murray and got another valet by the name of Denslow in Murray's place? If so, how did Denslow know that Grandfather needed Daddy? She could not *see* Grandfather, sick or well, admitting he needed anybody, Daddy least of all. . . .

Morning came at last and she had slept in spite of herself.

She rose, bathed and dressed as usual, out of her inexperience trying to outline a course of conduct consistent with the calamities that had overtaken her. She dimly felt that people with death in the family secluded themselves, gave up their regular daily duties to devote themselves exclusively to their grief, and she had quite made up her mind to stay away from school, when old Ellen, serving her breakfast, casually mentioned the fact that it was quarter after eight and that if she didn't hurry she would be late.

"I'm not going."

"Oh, you're not, are ye?"

"No."

"Is it sick ye feel?"

"No, but I think I ought to stay home.—Auntie Jean is dead and . . ."

"Lord love ye, your stayin' home from school won't bring her back, dearie. It's herself would tell yez that. The same as, by the same token, it's herself as'd keep busy while there was a craythur livin' to do fur. It'd be different if ye had her here, like as ye could have a funer'l or a wake, or annything dacint, to show your respect. But nobody ever heard of not goin' about your business for the sake of a body didn't show up to its own burry'l, peace be to her ashes."

Ellen's logic might not have been convincing to another, but Amy accepted it, for lack of a better, and started off less low in her mind than would have seemed possible to her half an hour before. It was like old times to meet Boris at the customary corner. Lately they had managed to miss one another.

"Heyo! What do you think of the latest?" Boris began, then broke off abruptly at sight of Amy's face. "What's the matter? Anything wrong with you, huh?"

"My aunt's dead."

"Oh, I am sorry!"

Somehow, after that, it did not come so hard to

throw herself on Boris's mercy. The girl's instant, sincere sympathy opened the way. Before she knew that she had done it, Amy had poured out the story of her difficulties, and Boris had jumped at the chance to coach her.

"You bet I will. And if you don't go through with flying colors, it won't be your fault or mine, either. We'll work like Trojans, and I'll get as much out of going over the old ground as you will."

"Miss Grant told me to ask you to meet me in her room after school. But I s'pose you can't."

"Why can't I?"

"You always have other things to do nowadays. We never go home together as we used to."

Boris's face flushed a dull red:

"That's not my fault."

"You mean, it's mine?"

"I didn't say so."

"But that's what you mean?"

"Perhaps it is, and perhaps it isn't."

"I think you might tell me straight out just what you're driving at. If I've done anything you don't like, I wish you'd say so and let me explain, or do whatever there is for me to do to make up. It's

no fair to harbor a grudge without giving a person a chance to know what it's all about. Like Sally with Nora, for instance."

Boris walked the length of half a block in thoughtful silence, obviously pondering the proposition. Then, with a quick back-toss of her decided head, she said:

"Very well. I'll tell you. Although I'd made up my mind wild horses shouldn't drag it out of me. I wasn't brought up to go where I'm not wanted. That time you tried to *shake* me, going home on the train—d'you remember?—I took the hint. That's all."

Amy's mind groped its way back slowly to the half-forgotten incident:

"You mean you saw me all the while?"

"Certainly. What do you think I am?"

"I'm terribly sorry if I hurt your feelings!"

"Don't mention it!" Boris's sense of humor came to the rescue.

"You have a perfect right to be left alone when you want to be, but, on the other hand, you can't expect other people to stand teetering, waiting to see if you do or you don't, ready to jump when you say 'Come' or stay back when you say 'Stay.'

Life's too short for that sort of thing. I'm perfectly willing to play fair, but I won't be pushed into a place I wouldn't put myself in. I won't run the risk of being snubbed a second time. Once is enough for me."

"I'm awfully sorry . . ."

Instead of following up her advantage, Boris broke the stumbling apology off short.

"Talking of Sally and Nora, of course you know what ails Sally."

"I don't."

"D'you mean to say Nora doesn't, either?"

"I know she doesn't."

"Well, I can enlighten you, then."

"Has Sally told you?"

"Lord, no! I don't have to be 'told' things. I find out for myself. I put two and two together, and if I don't always get four I come precious near it. The night of the Christmas-tree I was behind, standing right alongside them, when Nora urged Sally to go out in front again to get her flowers. Nora meant all right, but you know what happened. Sally followed her advice and—the laugh was on her. You know the kind Sally is. Whenever she slips up on anything she lays the blame

on somebody else. When she got out in front, and the usher wasn't there with her flowers, she lost her head and made a fool of herself. Everybody laughed, and no wonder. It was her own fault, every bit of it. But Sally thinks she is *IT*. Things didn't go her way that night. That was the time when the First Violin had to play second fiddle. See? She'll never get over it."

"But what has Nora to do with that?"

"Why, don't you see? Sally tries to make out it was all a scheme, cooked up beforehand by Nora, to make her go out in front and get laughed at, so Nora could follow and do the 'angel-child' act, for contrast. She thinks Nora was jealous of her—her playing and—other things, and set out deliberately to get her rattled so she'd look ridiculous. She did get rattled and she did look ridiculous, but no one in his senses would lay it at Nora's door."

"I should think not! Even if Nora were the kind to do such a thing, how could she know, beforehand, Sally wouldn't have the presence of mind to carry it off like a Fritz Kreisler or a Mischa Elman? Sally would be the last one would ever suppose would lose her head."

"Sure! She knows that as well as anybody. Nora

oughtn't to worry over it the way she does. She ought to know it's only Sally's bluff. But she's making herself fairly sick, grieving."

"I suppose Nora doesn't relish being misunderstood."

"If it was only misunderstood. A body might stand being misunderstood. But when you're slandered . . ."

"Slandered . . . ?"

Boris modified her verb:

"Gossiped about unpleasantly, then, if that suits you better."

"Does Sally gossip unpleasantly about Nora? I thought you said you'd found out about her grievance all by yourself."

"So I did. The gossip's another story altogether."

"It is?"

"Rath—er!"

"What is it she says?"

"One thing, if you want to know, is that John Graham used to like her and would now, if Nora hadn't butted in and got him away from her."

Amy stood stockstill, staring into Boris's face with stricken eyes.

"No wonder you're paralyzed. Perfectly absurd, isn't it? Why, John Graham never gave Sally Leonard a second thought. If he cares for anyone, I should say it was Nora. But you never can tell, with parties like John, who keep themselves to themselves the way he does. If he cares for Nora, he's a perfect right to. It's nobody's business, and quite natural. For when he first went to the Music School and couldn't play the fiddle, and queer stories were floating around about him and all that, Nora stood up for him like a brick. It was all very well Sally's being crazy about him later on. But first-off it was Nora who stood by him, and I guess he don't forget it. It sets Sally wild. She was bad enough before, but ever since John went to live with Mr. Worthing, and wears good clothes, and they say he's going to be a great painter, she's just ready to throw herself at his head. I'd die before I'd let on I cared for a fellow like that, before he'd given any sign he cared back again. But Sally thinks her temperament excuses everything. I wish the ones who told her she was temperamental, in the first place, had been deported. They've done her no end of harm. Even the Music School people are cooling on her fiddling. I heard Miss Bailey say the other day that some-

times talent that promised big things at the start petered out as it went along, and I think she was referring to Sally. I wonder what she'll think of the latest?"

"Who'll think of what latest?"

"Don't you know? Didn't you see in this morning's paper?"

"No. I never have time to look at the morning paper. Too rushed getting off to school."

"Well, I wouldn't have seen it myself only my father showed me. It's in this morning's *Journal*. John Graham's painting has taken a prize. One hundred dollars in gold and a scholarship at the League. What do you think of that for luck? I tell you what it is! It's 'Good-by John' so far as we're concerned. We won't see much more of him after this. He'll soon be too grand for the likes of us. I'm sorry, because I always liked John. Didn't you?"

"Burkeses Amy's" wits were evidently wool-gathering, so that Boris had to prod her for an answer:

"Didn't you always like John?"

"Like him? . . . John Graham? . . . Oh, yes —I always liked John Graham!"

Boris laughed:

"Good! You sound as if you did. Your voice is as *flat* as some of his fiddling. Come on in! That's assembly, isn't it? After this it'll be more work and less talk for little Boris and Burkeses Amy."

The days passed with incredible swiftness.

Amy worked as if her life depended on it. As a matter of fact, she felt her life did depend on it. It seemed to her if she stopped to think, if she gave herself time to dwell on the things that were packed tightly away in her heart, if she were to take them out, one by one, and really look at them, she would die. Far beneath the calm surface of her daily existence, in depths too profound to plumb, surged tides of desperate emotion. Instinctively she shrank from what would happen to her if once they were loosed.

There was not much to divert her from work these days. In her father's absence Harleigh came less often. John not at all. It was not, of course, that they meant to neglect her. Harleigh explained this from time to time over the telephone, but the fact remained that she was neglected, or felt herself to be so, and though she said she was glad Harleigh's responsibilities had become so much more serious, that John was doing so well at the League, she saw

them in the light of their success, sailing ahead to greater and greater triumphs, while she was left forgotten in a stagnant backwater from which there was no escape.

True to her promise, Boris worked like a Trojan, and it was surprising to Amy how soon systematic study became a fixed habit, easier to honor in the observance than in the breach. Under Miss Grant's supervision and Boris's able tutoring, her naturally active mind threw off its inertia and swung into pace with the best in the class.

"If you keep on this way, I'll have to look to my laurels," her coach told her one day with a complacent grin.

Amy smiled wistfully.

"You don't seem tickled to death, I'll say that for you." Boris's shrewd eyes searched her face, trying to analyze its unfamiliar expression. "It's just as I said. You're smart as they make 'em. But I never saw anybody go so thin and white as fast as you have. I'd give a nickel to know if it's all studying. If it is, then I tell you what, you'd better go back to being an airy ignoramus. My mother says nobody thinks more of education than she does, but, if it was a question of health or education, she'd

choose health every time. When your health's gone, what have you?"

"I'm all right."

"I'd like to take your word for it. But your looks belie you. Of course, missing your father may have something to do with it. My mother says there's nothing'll undermine the health like the longing after somebody you love. She says it's fierce the way it'd pull you down, never mind if you had a constitution like a horse. She knows of a fellow who never had a sick day in his life, and he came over here to this country, out of his own home, and—died. Plain homesick. Nothing else."

Amy shook her head:

"Please don't let's talk about it. I'm afraid, if we do, I'll . . ."

"Sure! Anything to oblige. Mum's the word. But, what if you do shed a briny tear or two? No disgrace. My mother says that's the funny thing about Americans. They're terrified for fear they might show any feeling. I was telling her about your aunt dying and your father going away and you being left alone, and she said: 'Well, it wasn't as bad as it might be, even so. It isn't as if you were left among strangers.' And sure enough it

isn't. If you were left among folks with no feeling for you, then you might complain. But the way it is with us—we're all like relations—poor relations, huh?"

Amy's eyes laughed through their mist, but almost instantly turned serious again, seeing in a flash the contrast between her own point of view and Boris's.

Her own first thought on learning of her father's departure was that now she was a stranger in a strange land. Boris's was that now she had an added claim upon her neighbors, now the original bond was tightened.

Which was right?

Boris's voice roused her from her musing:

"Come back! Come back! When you get that far-away look in your eyes, *I know not where thou art, sweet Genevieve.*"

"I wasn't so far away as you might suppose. I was thinking of you, if you want to know, and what you just said. And I was wondering . . . Well, never mind! I don't believe I'd be able to explain if I were to try. But I'll say this, you've given me an idea—a great, big wonderful idea, Boris Orloff."

"Glad to hear it. Didn't know I had one. Hope it'll be of use to you."

"It will. And to you, too."

"Better and better. I'm not proud. If I happen to give you something in one direction, you're able to give me other things in other directions. Fair exchange is no robbery. Say! Do you see what time it is! I'll be late to dinner if I don't skip."

It happened to be Ellen's day out. She had not yet returned, so Boris being gone, Amy was quite alone in the little flat. When, somewhat later, the doorbell rang, she thought at once it was Ellen, until she realized that Ellen always carried a key.

A premonition of something impending swept over her in a wave—something strange—something vital. For thirty seconds she stood motionless, unable to bring herself to face it. Then, with an impatient shrug, she gathered herself together, laid her hand on the knob, turned it, and pulled open the door.

Just over the threshold stood a tiny wisp of a woman, travel-stained, tremulous, out of whose colorless face stared two eager, burning eyes.

The pair stood confronting each other for one speechless moment.

"Auntie Jean!"

The syllables came from Amy in the hushed voice of awe-stricken wonder.

CHAPTER XIX

THE STRENGTH OF THE WEAK

THE chin Alexander Guthrie had condemned quivered visibly, then lifted with resolution and held firm.

Whatever of the supernatural seemed to Amy to attend her aunt's reappearance among the living, the first words she uttered proved commonplace enough:

"How you have grown."

Amy could not answer.

"Aren't you going to ask me to come in?"

The door shut with a bang. The two were in each other's arms.

"But where," asked Amy at last, "where's your maid? And your bags, and your trunks? What'll we do in this tiny place, with all your trunks?"

This time it was Jean who shook her head:

"I haven't any trunks. You must take me in just as I am. I haven't any trunks, or any maid, or any money, or—anything. I—I ran away."

"Wha—at?"

"Ran away. It's a long story. If you don't mind, could I have something to eat? I haven't touched a morsel since I left the ship. We had a rough passage and—you know the sort of sailor I am."

Ellen had returned, been brought face to face with the newcomer unwarned, and almost expired on the spot from shock. Retreating to the kitchen to recover as best she might, she found herself unable to "raise a hand for to get the dinner." She was torn between her sense of duty to Amy, who ought to be fed, and her sense of duty to herself, who had no mind to traffic with disembodied spirits. For a while she sat with her apron over her head, mumbling prayerlets against the powers of darkness through whose agency "dacent bodies that never had a mind of harm for annywan couldn't be let lay quiet in their graves, belike, but were stirred up to come from goodness knows where, the saints protect us! to give you a turn you wouldn't get over in a month o' Sundays." Then, with true Irish pluck, she had taken up her job and worked off her alarm by cooking a dinner fit for a king.

It was after dinner, when Amy and Jean Guthrie

had settled themselves in the living-room, that the "story" was told.

"As I explained to you in my letter," the hesitating voice began, "Father was never contented from the first. I believe he'd have made overtures to you and James—I should say, Daddy—at the last minute, but of course that never would have done. So—we sailed. Nothing I did or could do managed to please him. Honestly, Amy, I have tried to be a good daughter. If I had known at the beginning what I know now, I could have been different, better, more successful, a credit to you all. But I'm glad I didn't miss it altogether."

"Glad you didn't miss *what* altogether?"

"I'll tell you as I go on. Quite early in our travels we met a most extraordinary woman. An English lady. Lady Denslow. She was extremely kind to me. When I was sick in Venice, she came to my room and . . . I owe it to her that I got well. It was curious how we would part with no plans to come together again, and then find ourselves staying in the same hotel, sometimes in quite unfrequented places, off the beaten path. One of the times our paths recrossed was at Naples (not that Naples is off the beaten path). It was months after

Venice. At Venice I had told her about you and your father. How homesick I was—and she had encouraged me, helped me, made me feel I had it in me to be something worth while."

"As if you weren't something very much worth while, as it is!"

"Oh, no! That is—I hadn't any confidence in myself until I met Lady Denslow. If it hadn't been for her, I would never have had the courage, for instance, to send you that draft."

"Some day I'll tell you how I spent it," Amy broke in upon the gentle, pensive monologue, as much with a view to hastening its tempo as anything else.

"Lady Denslow urged me to own up to Father what I had done, and I went to his room to do it. But—well, it all went wrong. He told me things it fairly killed me to hear. I was no use to him. He didn't need me. If I thought I couldn't be spared, I was mistaken. 'No one better,' he put it. Of course I always knew I wasn't to Father what your mother was, what you are, what—yes, even what your Daddy is. But I never had been told outright, until that day at Naples, that he would be glad to have me out of the way."

"Oh, pshaw! He was in a rage. He didn't mean it."

"Yes. Yes, indeed, he did mean it. He was thoroughly in earnest; though, of course, if he had known what was in my mind, he wouldn't have allowed it for an instant. The more I thought about it, the more I was sure he was right. I was no use to him. I could be spared perfectly well. He'd never miss me. Not only that. If I were out of the way, a big source of exasperation would be removed. He would be happier."

Amy's attempt at denial was instantly checked.

"No, please don't try to gloss things over. I know . . . Anyway, that was the beginning. Gradually thoughts began to form, ideas for slipping out, losing myself somewhere, taking refuge with the nuns. None of the plans would do. There was always some reason why they would be certain to fail, and then things would be worse than ever. But, as Lady Denslow said, thoughts are things. As we give them strength, they grow and grow until at last we see them outside ourselves, not thoughts any longer, but facts, to be reckoned with for good or bad. It was months before my thought worked itself into a fact.

"We had been in Turkey, were on our way to the East, making a short stopover at Smyrna, because father wanted to go to Ephesus. Smyrna is a busy little seaport town. Ships are always stopping there, coming and going, on their way to other points. . . . One reaches Ephesus by taking a train at Smyrna to . . . oh, dear! the name escapes me! No matter! . . . then mounting donkeys or horses sent on ahead, and riding out 'way across country to the ruins."

"I wonder if the grapes of Smyrna *are* better?" Amy broke in whimsically.

"If you interrupt I'll lose the thread," Jean Guthrie reprimanded her. "Everybody in Smyrna was much excited just then over the kidnaping by Beduins of the son-in-law of a wealthy resident merchant. The poor fellow was being held for ransom up in the hills, where no one dared venture to rescue him. It was in the neighborhood of Ephesus, they said, he had been seized. I wasn't particularly anxious to go to Ephesus. I wanted to rid Father of me, but I would have hated to be kidnaped. The night before we were to make the expedition, I was sitting in my room thinking it all over, when I heard a weird sound just beyond the door

dividing our suite from the next. I was frightened and on the point of calling Esther, when the sound was repeated. That ended my fright. I went to the door and tapped, and asked if there was anything I could do to help. A girl, perhaps a couple of years older than you, opened the door. She was crying so hard it was difficult to make out what ailed her, but at last I managed. She said she was Miss Lowney, from Illinois. She was traveling with a 'personally conducted' party, for the time being, but really under the chaperonage of an aunt who was also her guardian. The aunt had stayed back in Italy. Miss Lowney might have been pretty if her eyes hadn't been so red, and her cheeks so swollen, and her hair so tousled. But, standing there in her nightie, somehow she reminded me of you and . . . Well, I would have given her my head if she had wanted it. She didn't. What she wanted was to go on next morning with the 'personally conducteds,' who were bound for Port Saïd and India. But her aunt had got wind of the fact that she and one of the tourists, a young American, were being very deeply in love with each other, and she had wired Miss Lowney to come straight back to Italy. Miss

Lowney was used to *minding* her aunt, so as soon as she got her telegram she started out and obediently bought her ticket to Naples. When she came to and was able to think things over, she wondered why she had done it. But her money was gone, and she wouldn't have enough to start for India. She said it 'would kill her not to go.' I asked what objection was there to the young man, and she said: 'No objection. He's perfectly all right, except he's not so well off as I am, and Aunt is suspicious of everybody's motives.' I told Miss Lowney I'd see what I could do. I told her to dry her eyes and be a good child. There was always some way out, if one only would have confidence. She listened to me quite as if I were someone who really believed what she was saying, and that sort of braced me up *to* believe it. You have no idea how resourceful it made me. I went to my room and sat down and thought the whole thing out. And before I went to bed it was all arranged. I took Miss Lowney's ticket to Naples off her hands, and next morning she and her young man and the tourist party sailed for Port Saïd as if nothing had happened. Then, when Father set out for Ephesus, I started with him, and Lady Denslow, who was one of his guests, and the others,

and nobody suspected that I had anything in my mind but a desire to see the ruins. Riding across country, I lagged until the rest were out of sight, then bribed my donkey-boy to get me back to the place we had just left, where the train was ready to start on the return-trip to Smyrna. It was wonderful how everything happened just as I had arranged. I never went back to the hotel. I smuggled myself on to the Naples boat and sailed that afternoon, booked as Miss Lowney. The trip to Naples and then on here to New York took all the money I had—all my allowance, and you know my allowance is all I have, and—and that's the story and—here I am."

For a moment after the low-pitched, plaintive voice ceased Amy was dumb. Then, yielding to a sudden, irresistible impulse, she broke into a laugh, and laughed and laughed until the tears came.

Miss Guthrie's eyes grew wide.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," she protested reproachfully.

"Of course you don't. That's just where the joke comes in. But if you could see yourself, little creep-mouse Auntie, who never dared call her soul her own, suddenly transformed into Destiny, direct-

ing the course of human events, assisting true love to run smooth, punishing the naughty, rewarding the good, doing all sorts of great, godlike deeds, you *would* see something to laugh at, and, wha's more, you'd laugh at it!" And Amy went off into another gale, fairly sweeping Miss Guthrie along with her.

Yet, before they slept, she turned serious enough.

James Burke's sudden departure had left him with no time to make special arrangements providing for the running of his little household, plus an extra member. He had placed a certain sum in Ellen's hands, but Amy knew it was barely enough to carry them over until a letter could come bringing more, or Daddy himself return. Meanwhile Auntie Jean was penniless. The clothes she wore had seen hard service, they were travel-stained and threadbare. It would be possible to eke out with garments from Amy's own wardrobe, perhaps, but Amy's own wardrobe was none too plenteous at the best. If she had "burned" her money at Christmas time, only she knew in how many places her flesh suffered from the burning. She had made her sacrifice gladly, uncomplainingly. But if she could have foreseen this . . .

"Don't look so anxious, dear. I know what you're

afraid of, and you mustn't be afraid of anything," Jean Guthrie broke in upon her ruminating, with a new voice of quiet courage. "I'm going to turn right to and earn my own living. It will be—*fun*."



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CHAPTER XX

CONCERNING MR. GUTHRIE

THE news that Jean was safe in New York with Amy found James Burke, like an ancient captive, chained to the chariot wheels of an implacable conqueror.

For years he had chafed under galling subjection, first on his wife's account, then for Amy's sake. At last he had been able to free himself, and freedom had tasted very sweet. That the limit of his emancipation was set for good and all by the Denslow cable never entered his mind. He had responded to the summons from a sense of filial duty, hastening to the stricken old man with more of hope than belief in his power to help. He told himself, as soon as he had done what he could, he would go back to his own people and the work he loved. But the blow that prostrated Alexander Guthrie's body had not enfeebled his mind. From his wheeled chair his edicts went forth as imperial proclamations from a sovereign's throne. Never doubting that his daugh-

ter had been kidnaped for ransom, he had offered a prodigious sum for her release. When this failed to bring her back, he doubled the amount. It was the sinister silence following his second offer that struck him down. Knowing the nature of the men he had to deal with, he was certain that, if they held his girl alive, his gold would have produced her.

Nothing in his father-in-law's welcome of him warned James Burke that his days of independence were done, but as week followed week, and he felt no relaxation of the grasp upon him, felt, rather, that in his innocent desire to be of service, he had made himself indispensable, his heart misgave him. The word of Jean's safety came, therefore, as a sort of double rescue, his own as well as hers.

Alexander Guthrie heard the news with a face of flint.

"Amy says she looks a little thin, but is not in the least sick. The two of them seem to be very glad to be together again."

No comment.

"Would you like me to cable Jean to come back at once?"

"No."

"I'm afraid Murray won't be able to do for you as—as one of your own could, sir."

"I don't expect him to."

"But you ought not to be left alone, with only paid servants, I mean."

"I don't intend to be."

There was that in the old man's voice and manner that gave James Burke pause.

"Is there anyone in the family you would like to have with you?"

"Yes."

"Let me know when you wish me to send for them."

For answer Mr. Guthrie gave a grunt of impatience, followed almost instantly by a quick twitching of the facial muscles that made him seem to be grimacing:

"By Gad . . . Jean!"

James Burke hurried to excuse her:

"I'm sure she didn't mean to frighten you, sir. She must have acted on the impulse of the moment."

"Impulse of the—devil! No such thing! She deliberately bolted. The whole thing was carefully planned out beforehand. As neat a trick as ever I saw!"

"She didn't realize you'd miss her."

"I don't."

"I hope you'll forgive her, sir. She—she never put you to defiance before."

"No, confound it! I wish she had!"

James Burke stared.

"If you want to know what I intend to do . . . What I intend to do is this: I intend to go on with my journey as soon as I've shaken off this cursed stiffness. And I intend you to go with me."

"But my work, sir. I can't give that up now. I came to you because I thought I could be of use, perhaps, but . . ."

"By the way, who sent for you? . . . Not Murray?"

"No, sir. Not Murray."

"Who, then?"

"Denslow—whoever he may be."

This time there was no mistake about it, Alexander Guthrie laughed:

"So Denslow sent for you, did he? Confound his brass! By the way, if we should happen to run across him again—his title is *Lady Denslow*. Don't forget it."

"You mean . . . ?"

"Denslow's a *she*, man alive! A woman. A lady of quality. You'll want to be on your good behavior when she's around."

"Is she here in Smyrna now, sir?"

"No. India—or on her way there. But we'll probably catch up with her before we're done."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Guthrie—but it's best to be frank—I can't go with you. I can't stay. You don't need me. My people do. I must be where I'm needed."

There was a moment of tense silence.

"Then you'll stay with me. As for 'your people,' as you call them, you'd have to 'step lively' to be worth to them in New York what I'll make you worth to them in cold cash, if you stay with me. Think it over. See if, *at the price*, they could afford to have you come home. In the meantime, Amy says Jean is setting out to earn her own living, eh?"

"Jean always had a wonderful knack with her needle. Amy says she earned six dollars the first week after she got back."

"Capital! No pun.—I mean it."

"Once she's receiving her regular allowance again, of course she won't . . ."

"She's not going to receive her regular allowance again—for the present. This is the age of

female independence. Young ladies who want to paddle their own canoe, as we used to say when I was a boy, should be allowed to have their way. My young lady is going to have hers. I'm all for giving the public what it wants. Besides, I rather enjoy Miss Jean in her new rôle. It's amusing. I thought I knew her. Evidently she's considerably deeper than I gave her credit for. It will be diverting to get reacquainted with her. . . . Six dollars a week! Well, I suppose if you and Amy can live on the pittance you've been earning, my young woman can live on what she's able to make. Do her good. I remember the time when I was proud of my six dollars a week. So now that's settled. If you've anyone at home besides Amy to inform, you'd better go and inform them."

James Burke, knowing himself to be dismissed, retired to his own room to think things over.

His whole nature rebelled against resuming the old intolerable yoke, yet what could he do? The old man's need of him was pitifully apparent. Try as he might, he could not hide it, and there were times when James more than suspected he did not try to hide it. To one looking below the surface, he gave the impression of a man who, feeling his

emotions to have suffered an indecorous exposé, endures a shame that makes him shameless. It was as if he said: "What's the use of trying to keep up appearances when I've given myself so completely away?"

Then, too, the shrewd turn he had given his proposition left his son-in-law practically no choice. James was too sensible to believe himself the only man capable of filling his place in New York. His mere presence could be dispensed with. It was his *absence* upon which such substantial value had been set as to make it his own unique contribution to the cause he loved, the thing he and he only had to offer. He dared not allow his own feeling to interfere with his people's best good. He saw it all quite plainly. From the beginning Alexander Guthrie had contrived to get him in a tight place. Now he had got him there, it was absurd to suppose he would renounce his own plan. That was not his method.

Before they sailed for the East, James had already adjusted himself to the new order, quietly assumed such duties as his father-in-law's position and state of health imposed on him, and ruefully confided to Amy that he was now "a cross between a

trained nurse, a private secretary, a courier, and a connection by marriage."

The difficult part of his situation was that he was free to act according to his best judgment in none of these capacities. He was always under surveillance, always under orders.

Up to this, Mr. Guthrie had refused to turn his correspondence over to another. The fact that he was obliged to do so now made him doubly arbitrary whenever the subject was broached. James had dreamed that, perhaps, in this connection he might manage to do some good, but the dream was quickly dispelled. His first disappointment occurred in Smyrna, the day before they sailed for Port Saïd.

Among the enormous mass of letters forwarded by his bankers was one addressed to Mr. Guthrie, signed Simon Styles. Styles described himself as the lessee of one of Mr. Guthrie's downtown properties and wrote to suggest that certain renovations and improvements be made in the building he occupied before he should sign a renewal of the lease soon to expire. He had already brought the matter before Mr. Guthrie's agents, but as these had refused to take it up, he was taking the liberty of

appealing over their heads to the owner himself.

James Burke read and reread the letter carefully, a vague familiarity with the name and business of the writer growing as he read. It took some time for the vague impression to crystallize, take definite shape, but at last it did so, and James recollected that Styles was the "boss" of the shirtwaist shop in which Nora worked, the condition of whose lofts his own office had investigated with discouraging results.

"You say Styles wants one of the stairways removed to make more room for the manufacturing?" Mr. Guthrie accompanied the question with a keen glance from his piercing eyes.

"Yes. He says one stairway is enough, and he incloses a blue-print showing the position of the flights, a second blue-print showing the profit in room to be gained by cutting out one stairway and turning it into floor-space."

"He applied to Staynor and Green?"

"Yes. They refused to submit the proposition to you."

"Why?"

"He doesn't say. But it's clearly because they

considered it a case of dollars and cents being placed above human life."

"How's that?"

"Why, he says he employs eighty girls in the shirtwaist loft alone. To permit eighty girls on the fourth floor of that building, with only one elevator and one stairway which might be cut off at any time in the event of fire, is more than inherently dangerous—it is positively murderous."

Mr. Guthrie narrowed his eyes until they became mere slits:

"You use strong language."

"No stronger than the case warrants, sir. My resentment against such a proposed abuse is a good deal stronger than my language."

"That's as it may be. Your resentment is one thing. My business another. Keep the two separate, *if* you please. You may write to Styles that my agents will put the matter through for him. Then write Staynor and Green and instruct them to get hold of a number of contractors who'll estimate on the job. Staynor and Green can close with the lowest bidder."

Alexander Guthrie suspected something of what was taking place in his son-in-law's heart. He knew

James was having a struggle with himself, that, for a time, it was a toss-up whether he would go or stay.

The old financier was not displeased. Gambling on chances was all in the day's work with him. In the absence of other diversion it was good sport to watch James writhe. He bet with himself as to the outcome, but, knowing how he himself had loaded the dice, he found the betting somewhat tame. James would stay. He would stick it out for the sake of what there was in it, not for himself, but his people.

What Alexander Guthrie did not suspect was that, if James stuck it out, it would be as much for the sake of Alexander Guthrie. He, Alexander Guthrie, could pity James for a weak sentimentalist. That James should pity him in return for reasons rather less creditable, never entered his mind. It would not have disturbed him if it had. All that really signified was that he had his man where he wanted him.

The next day they sailed for the Far East, to be gone a year and more.

CHAPTER XXI

“PLAIN CAKE”

JEAN GUTHRIE'S coming did not disturb the even flow of the little household at No. 9 Craigen Street.

On the contrary, she fell in quite naturally with its simple routine and, as the months went by, Amy noticed that the quiet, shrinking personality was becoming a power in the neighborhood. Quite naturally Jean adapted herself to her environment, quite naturally the ward adopted her, so that at the end of an eighteen-month it was as if the relation were one of long years' standing.

“Life's a curious thing, isn't it?”

Amy asked the question abruptly, looking up from the book she had supposed herself to be studying to fix her eyes on her aunt, who sat nearby, plying her needle diligently in the light of the evening lamp.

“Curious?” Jean Guthrie considered the adjective critically.

"What I mean is one makes plans and says, 'I'll do so-and-so,' with the firm determination to do it. And, lo and behold! the thing one actually does is something quite different. It's like looking into a kaleidoscope. You see one pattern one minute. The next, without any noise or confusion or anything, just the slightest shifting of the hand, that pattern is gone and you're looking at quite a new one."

"All of which is suggested by . . . ?"

"Why, I was thinking it's just about two years ago since Daddy and I came down here to live. I can't realize it, but it is. Grandfather had made all his plans for our long trip—his and yours and mine. And at the last minute I backed out, because I couldn't be separated from Daddy. Then six months later you and Daddy changed places, and that's the way we've been living ever since. I've been separated from him, after all, for a year and a half. Grandfather's party isn't what it started out to be at all, and nobody's plans have the least resemblance to what was the original idea."

Miss Guthrie dropped her work for a moment:

"That may be true so far as particulars are concerned. But, in a general way, I know we can

carry out our purposes. It depends on what you are willing to sacrifice for the sake of getting what you want. In this life it is not *this and that*, it is *this or that*. All my life I've had dreams of doing just about what I'm doing now. That is, having a sweet little home, where I could fuss about in my own way without having to consider servants or style or anything like that. I used to dream, when I was a little girl, that I was a princess in disguise going about among the poor and the sick and the unhappy, making everything better for them. For years and years I dreamed the dream, but I never knew how to make it come true until . . ."

Amy bent forward to pat Jean's shoulder with an appreciative hand:

"Oh, *you!* You're a marvel. I never saw anyone like you! I often wonder what Daddy will say when he comes back and sees what you've done with this neighborhood. Why, it's a miracle the way you've transformed it, and all without money or Committees for Social Betterment or Societies for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor, or anything. Nobody ever did anything like it before."

"Oh, don't say that! Once upon a time there was One who did far-and-away more than I have

done. And He did it 'without money or Committees for Social Betterment or Societies for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor or anything' but the Power that was in Him. The same Power is in us, if we'd only believe it."

"But Daddy was working along such different lines."

"Your Daddy just made the mistake good men and women have made since the world began. They think they can help by giving people *things*. When we give people the knowledge of what they are, we are giving them the power to *be*. When we once know the way, we are able to create for ourselves a new heaven and a new earth. No one else can create them for us. I know, because I've proved it. I used to have everything—and I had nothing. Now I have what Father would call nothing, and I have everything."

Amy's brows drew together in a troubled frown:

"I wish I could see things as you do. I wish I felt I had everything—I wish I even felt I had *something*."

"You have something. And you can have much more."

"You don't know what I want. I want talent.

I want charm. I want beauty. I want—oh, I want anything that will help me to . . ."

"What?"

"To get the thing I want."

"What is the thing you want?"

"What, I suppose, everybody wants—love. If you're deadly commonplace, who'll ever care for you? I got through high school with honors, after all my troubles. And I'm doing all right at college, but I'm hopelessly plain cake compared with—Nora, for instance, or—or . . ."

There was a gap which, plainly, Amy could not fill. Jean quietly came to the rescue:

"It just happens that Nora and John Graham are very rarely endowed persons, geniuses in their way. We can't all be alike gifted, you know. But we can each be of value according to his own particular kind."

"Then, to the end of my days, I don't believe I'll ever be satisfied with my own particular kind. Apparently mediocrity is all that has fallen to my share and I—hate it."

Miss Guthrie hid a smile in the needlework she held up before her as if for review:

"That was a long confabulation you had with

Harleigh over the telephone this afternoon. Did he have anything special to say? Any news?"

Followed an almost imperceptible pause.

"Harleigh's terribly excited over something that's just happened to John. The League people have told John he's gone as far as they can take him. They say he ought to go abroad now and study with some big man over there. And he can't go abroad, for the same reason that Nora can't, though Ronzone says she must. No means. You know how Harleigh is when he feels things very much? He's what he himself calls 'all over the place.' He says he's ready to beg, borrow, or steal the money, anything, so long as he gets John to France."

"I see," said Miss Guthrie.

"If only I were twenty-one," Amy groaned. "I'd have my own money and could do what I liked with it. But that's nearly three years off yet."

"If you had your own money and could do what you liked with it, would you send John abroad as well as Nora? Or, Nora as well as John?"

Again the answer was delayed a moment. When it came it was evasive:

"John wouldn't take my money. He wouldn't

take anybody's money unless he could pay it back. But mine would be the last he'd touch."

"Why?"

"I don't know. He never comes here any more. I guess geniuses don't like *plain cake*."

"But if it could be arranged about the money? 'S'posin'?' as you used to say."

"You mean?"

"Would you be willing to give those two the opportunity to make their careers, if you felt it would take them away from us, put them out of our reach?"

"What's the good of beating about the bush, Auntie Jean? You don't mean 'take them away from *us*—put them out of *our* reach.' You mean take them away from *me*—put them out of *my* reach. I've thought of that and . . . Yes, I would. I'd send John and I'd send Nora. I'd send them both, even if they had to be in the same place at the same time—if that's what you want to know. It wouldn't be an easy thing to do, but I'd do it, and—what is it the judge says when he pronounces sentence of death on a criminal?—'may God have mercy on my soul.'"

It seemed to Jean Guthrie she had never seen

anything more touching than the smile that broke through the tears Amy tried to keep back and couldn't. The next instant the appeal in both was veiled by a light, self-mocking laugh:

"'Ain't I a noble boy, mother?' D'you remember how Daddy used to take the wind out of my sails when I was a little girl? He only had to quote 'Sentimental Tommy' and I'd come right down out of the clouds to earth again."

"It seems to me you and Harleigh are much more concerned over John than he is over himself."

"Oh, Harleigh's always laughing at what he calls John's 'austere control.' One never really knows what is going on in John's mind. When he hadn't a whole coat to his back, he had as grand an air as if patched places and shiny elbows were the latest thing among well-dressed men. John was never like anyone else, you know."

It would have given Amy a start if she could have known that almost at that very moment Harleigh was speaking to John about himself in almost her exact words.

"I could understand it better, Graham, if you'd ever been anything like other fellows. But I never suspected until this moment that your close-mouthed-

ness meant you had something to hide—something you'd be ashamed to admit."

John's firm jaws set doggedly.

"Under ordinary conditions it'd be none of my business what you do with your money," Harleigh continued persistently. "But I wouldn't be human if I hadn't wondered what happened to that hundred-dollar prize and the three or four other windfalls you've gathered in on your paintings within the last year and a half or so. Heaven knows I don't want your money. I told you I wouldn't stand for a square-up until you were fairly on your feet, and I meant it. I still mean it. Only, if you're blowing in everything you can raise on anything you're ashamed to own up to, why, then, I say I'm going to dun you from now on, and you may as well know it."

John bent his head, indicating he understood the situation and accepted it.

"And there's another thing—if you had put that money in the bank as I told you to do, and as I always believed you had done, it, along with its interest, and the little I can manage to scrape together, would be enough to start you off for France now, if it wouldn't do any more. A man can live

in Paris cheap enough, and you could take risks a girl couldn't. But, as things are, you're dished, for I won't let you have what I've got in order that you may go into the Latin Quarter and starve, as many another has done before you. You've disappointed me like the devil, but I still like you enough to care what becomes of you as a man, irrespective of what becomes of you as an artist."

John rose and strode to the window, where he stood silently staring out over the brilliant spatter of city lights. The next moment he swung about, returned to his former place, and was about to speak when there was a knock on the door.

Harleigh reached the threshold before John could utter his first syllable.

A hall-boy stood outside, a thumbled, mean-looking envelope in his hand. Taking the envelope from him, Harleigh saw that on its face, in a labored illiterate hand, was written John Graham's name and address.

CHAPTER XXII

THE WEDGE BUILDING

IT was Alexander Guthrie's whim to shroud his homecoming in a fog of mystery. When his son-in-law mentioned that "the girls have seen in the papers we are to sail on the fourteenth of next month. They want to know if it's true. They say they are wild to be told when they may expect us," he made characteristic answer:

"Tell them not to expect us until they see us," and with childish perversity proceeded to make new plans that would delay their sailing for another week or ten days.

But from the moment the ship struck American waters his mood changed. His one idea was to push things through with as much dispatch as possible, and, if James Burke had not already grown accustomed to the anomaly, he would have stared at the amazing power of a mere name to do the apparently impossible.

Alexander Guthrie's name was one to conjure

with. While the other passengers were cooling their heels at Sandy Hook or heating their tempers in the Custom House, he and his party were safely and swiftly landed by means of a specially chartered tender, released from the usual harrowing delay over duties, and sent on their way rejoicing.

Moving as quickly as he could, James could not be quick enough to satisfy the exacting old man.

"Murray and I will motor directly to the Ritz. You're to go to that—to that—er—d——n place where the girls are and fetch them uptown. If they haven't proper dinner-dress, tell them we'll dine in my rooms. No one shall see them. Let them come as they are, but have them come at once."

With soldierly obedience James proceeded toward Craigen Street, while Mr. Guthrie, with a boyish elation such as he had not felt for years, breathed in the unsavory odors of the waterfront, got caught in the press of downtown traffic, and found it all tremendously good.

"Glad to get home, eh, Murray?"

"Yes, sir."

The motor made its way through the jam and press of the narrow streets, was halted, turned aside,

permitted to proceed, then maddeningly stopped again.

At last, just as it was beginning to make a little headway, a traffic policeman barred the road.

"What's the matter?"

Murray passed the question on to the chauffeur.

"Fire. The engines are coming."

In a second all traffic was stopped, leaving a clear path down which plunged the straining horses of the Fire Department, quick to the rescue. The air resounded with shrill whistles, the clanging of bells, the shouting of voices, the echo of running feet.

Alexander Guthrie smiled sardonically, seeing the ease with which the crowd forgot its business and turned, as one man, to the scene of action.

"Go on!" he commanded, and for half a block or so the driver was suffered to obey. Then there was another hold-up.

"It must be a big blaze, sir," ventured the imperturbable Murray, moved for once to forget his customary cryptic calm in the sudden wave of excitement, as a second relay swooped down upon them from another direction.

Alexander Guthrie scowled. This continued de-

lay was beginning to be irritating. He had ordered James to bring the girls directly to the Ritz. At this rate they would be there before him.

"Tell the driver to turn 'round and go through a side street. Anything, so long as we get out of this! I'm in a hurry!"

The driver was willing enough, took the first opportunity to follow orders, and was promptly taken to task by a mounted policeman:

"Hold on there! What do you mean by trying to force through?"

The long-suffering driver turned to his fare:

"Can't do it, sir. They won't let us through."

"Through what?"

"The fire-line."

"Where the deuce *is* the confounded fire?"

"Just to the right, sir—'round the block. What's called the Wedge Building. Regular fire-trap, they say—burning like tinder. There's . . ."

In a second Alexander Guthrie had forced open the motor door. Once in the street, he followed the crowd blindly, breathlessly.

The Wedge Building! His own property! This was a different proposition. He recollected dimly that there had been some difficulty about the in-

urance since he had had one of the stairways removed. The underwriters had made objections—he wasn't at all sure his loss would be covered if the building went down. Why weren't there more engines? Why didn't someone send in another alarm? Why . . .

He was pushed and jostled by the crowd, compelled forward, elbowed back, treated with no more consideration than if he were one of the common herd, one of the hundreds pressing on, like himself, to the place where was going on the immemorial struggle between man and unleashed element. The great difference was that to him the outcome of the struggle was a matter of personal concern, to them it was primarily good sport. He felt a sudden surge of resentment against them for their oblique relation to what was to him so vital a matter.

A hand was laid on his shoulder. He shrugged it off imperiously.

"Fire-line! Can't pass any further."

If the officer's manner was brusque, it was not churlish. He had no wish to deal rudely with an obviously well-to-do, elderly man of good appearance, a law-abiding citizen.

The elderly man of good appearance turned toward the officer a face that was somehow strangely familiar:

"I am Alexander Guthrie.—I own that building.—I must see what is happening to it!"

The officer touched his helmet obsequiously:

"Follow me! I'll do the best I can for you, sir."

At Mr. Guthrie's heels slunk a miserable wretch of the street, a creature of whose presence he had been dimly aware ever since he left the cab. For a moment he turned to the fellow, resentful of his proximity, then forgot him altogether in the fact that the policeman had given him a point of vantage from which the whole great spectacle was plainly visible.

And it was a spectacle.

First, the columns of smoke writhing, rolling skyward in terrible green-gray masses, then the flames growing ever and ever more vivid, rocketing up through the smoke clouds, devouring them as they went.

The crowds on the sidewalks gazed spellbound, with little or nothing to say, filled with the hope and belief that the fire-fighters would get the upper

hand. Then, gradually, as the hope and belief waned, a sinister murmur rose that, coming from no one mouth, seemed to come from them all. Sometimes it was inarticulate, sometimes terribly articulate:

“Fire-trap!—God! look there!—The windows! She’s going to jump!—A—ah!”

How the crowd got wind that Alexander Guthrie was present, no one could have told. But somehow the word went abroad, was bandied from lip to lip—his name, prefaced by oaths, followed by blasphemies. There was that in the tense whispers in which it was spoken as threatening as fists clinched about cudgels. As he became aware of what was going on, the old man shrunk back in alarm, but a clutching hand on his sleeve held him well to the fore.

“This is him! This is Alexander Guthrie!”

It was the tramp at his side who shrieked it out malevolently. In an instant the crowd had closed down upon him with a swoop. He was surrounded, penned in, hearing nothing but a fearsome groaning that stopped the beating of his heart.

“Eighty girls—fourth floor—burning alive—curse him! Millions for charity, not a penny for

justice. D——n his hospitals. Give a man a chance to live and he won't need hospitals!"

Suddenly there was a sense of quick deliverance. Alexander Guthrie looked up. The loathsome presence at his side was gone. In its place towered a splendid, upright figure. A young man, smoke-blackened, breathless, unmistakably a fire-fighter, though he wore no badge or uniform. Before the clear light of his masterful eyes the rest fell back:

"If this is Alexander Guthrie—then he's Burkeses Amy's grandfather! You all know Burkeses Amy! Hands off!"

Another moment and "Burkeses Amy's" grandfather was being guided, guarded through the press, until with a shock he stopped, face to face, with James Burke:

"James!"

Alexander Guthrie's muscles stiffened with terror at the look on his son-in-law's face.

"Amy!—She's in there! In that . . . Oh, my God!"

"What?"

It was not the old man, but the young who uttered the cry.

"She went for Nora—to bring her home. Often did it—lately—Jean says. . . ."

But only Alexander Guthrie heard. The other had bolted through the crowd, back into the heart of the burning hell beyond.

CHAPTER XXIII

BEHIND THE IRON DOOR

IT was ten minutes before closing hour when Amy entered the Wedge Building.

She had timed herself so that she would reach the place as nearly as possible on the minute, but in the cold, clear autumn air she walked with a rapidity that cut the distance down to almost half the usual space.

Her blood was racing through her veins, her flesh tingling, her cheeks glowing. She was glad she had telephoned Auntie Jean she would stop on her way from college, where she had stayed late looking up references in the library, and pick up Nora. Having done her work for the day, she could conscientiously take the evening off for fun, and it was her plan to bring Nora home to dinner, then go with her and Auntie Jean to some place of amusement "for a lark."

But the moment she found herself inside the

Wedge Building she stopped short, her joyous mood suffering a sudden check.

The huge, cheerless structure, sandwiched in so tightly between other less huge but equally cheerless structures, always depressed her, with its tainted atmosphere, its eternal gloom. To-day the effect was so much more than ordinarily dispiriting that, for a second, she was tempted to turn back and wait for Nora outside in the street. Perhaps she would have done so if waiting outside in the street had not been one of the very few things upon which Daddy had put an emphatic prohibition.

Unconsciously her nostrils lifted in a queer little characteristic way of their own when their inner sense detected any unwelcome presence. Decidedly there was an unwelcome presence now. The nostrils dilated in an effort to analyze it. First, a faint, subtle odor of—what? Could it be smoke? Then . . .

From around a turn in the corridor appeared a miserable figure. A skulking tramplike creature who, as Amy came along, eyed her with what looked like insolent recognition. Their garments brushed in passing, and Amy shrank aside, with quick, uncontrollable repugnance. The little movement did

not escape the man. He paused, turned, looked her up and down, and mumbled something back at her which at any other time she would have realized meant mischief. But now she was too preoccupied to give it more than passing notice. The smell of smoke was growing more distinct with every step. She moved forward rapidly, sensing danger, eager to avert it.

She knew the door of the shirtwaist loft was usually kept locked. Nora and Sally had often mentioned it, as "something the boss has no right to do," speculating on its effect on conditions if there should ever be a panic in the loft.

"The boss says the reason he keeps it locked is that the ones inside shouldn't want to get out until their time is up, and he don't want folks from outside trying to get in."

Amy had never tried to get in before. She had always waited for Nora in the lobby downstairs. But now she remembered nothing except her mission—she must give the alarm. Coming upon the right door at last, she threw herself upon it in a frenzy of eagerness. It opened at her touch, but before she had time to cross the threshold she sent a shout before her:

"Fire! Fire!"

The hubbub inside could not stop all at once. It was too great to give even her penetrating cry a chance to be heard by everyone. Some of the machines close at hand came to a standstill, the rest whizzed indefatigably on.

In a second the foreman was at the door, standing with his back to it, his hand upon the shot bolt:

"Who in blazes unlocked that door?"

Amy turned on him fiercely:

"What matter? Don't dare shut it. Don't you hear me? The place is afire!"

"No such thing! Bosh!"

A group of girls collected at his elbow, frightened, clamoring to get out.

"Back you! Back to your machines! Time's not up! Five minutes yet!"

His words acted on Amy as a lighted match on tinder. Something in her caught the spark and burst into instant flame. She turned to the girls:

"Come! All of you! Nora! Sally! He daren't hold you back! You *shall* get out!"

"Who the devil are you, anyway?"

"I'm Alexander Guthrie's granddaughter! That's who I am! Quick! Girls!"

Somehow they bore him down. The door was unbolted, flung wide. Then as sharply banged to again. A cloud of black, impenetrable smoke rolled in, engulfing them, suffocating them, blinding them. Amy's mind worked like lightning. To her rescue came the sharp memory of that night, long ago, when John Graham had fought with fire and won out. Now, in her extremity, she repeated his orders, feeling herself, somehow, his mouthpiece, speaking as one having authority.

"Heads down! Get on your knees—close to the floor!"

Presently Nora was at her side, then Sally. Leading the way, the three crept the length of the endless loft to where Nora said there was a window opening on a fire-escape.

But the moment the rest discovered what the plan was they would have none of it.

"It's no good! We'd dash our brains out! It's all your life'd be worth to set foot on it. It's condemned. They were told to put up a new one! D'you think they did it? Not on your life! Just gave this a fresh coat of paint—the rotten old sneaks! It's rotten like they are! *Paint* won't hold for us to climb down on!"

Without a word Amy opened the window:

"It's our only chance. If *you're* afraid, I'll go down first. If it holds for me, then will you follow? Nora!—Sally!—Oh, *please* follow!"

For a second there was silence. Then the snarling question:

"Well, why don't you go? What are you waiting for?"

"I'd rather give the rest of you first chance."

Someone laid rough hands on her, pushing her forward, laughing savagely:

"First chance to kill ourselves? No, thank you! You're welcome to that kind of first chance. You go down first—we're from Missouri—show us! Old Guthrie's granddaughter go down first—and serve him right, too—the d—— old murderer!"

Amy stepped out on the iron balcony. No one stirred. Step by step she felt her way—felt the flimsy structure seem to give as she set her foot upon it. And yet—it held!

Step by step she descended the slender ladder, hearing always in her ears the cries of the frenzied girls overhead.

"Come on, Nora! Sally, come on down! It's safe! It'll hold. Oh, girls—COME!"

Her voice was almost gay, but deep beneath swelled sobs of anguish. She felt she would die if she could not make the girls follow.

At the first landing below she stopped to look up. Some were following. Now, if she could only, herself, keep on. If she could only compel her feet to descend the rungs that moved under the stress of even her light weight.

Was it wrong to urge the girls to take the chance, when it was only a chance—if it was the *only* chance?

Toward the bottom of the court the light grew very dim. It was hard to see where one went.

"Follow your leader, girls! Watch your step! We're coming out *somewhere!*"

By and by, always feeling about for sure foothold, she discovered a step, then more steps—an iron door, leading out into an open areaway—an alley—the street!

The shout she sent back into the dusk was answered by another shout surprisingly close at hand:

"Yes, I'm here! I, Nora! Sally's here, too!"

"Run! It's so hot! That means . . . The window-panes are cracking! Look out for falling glass!"

Nora would have stopped beside her, but Amy pushed her forward. Sally did not wait to be pushed. Others followed the first two—a long line of shadows, flitting past, strangely quiet, only now and then one giving way and sobbing humanly. Then, of a sudden, the line stopped short. Groping her way back through the thick air Amy reached the foot of the ladder once more.

“Girls! Come on down! We’re safe! G-I-R-L-S—come on down!”

Somehow they must have heard her in spite of the din, for slowly they began to reappear, first at the window, silhouetted sharply against an orange background, then creeping down the ladders, sluggishly, fearsomely. And as each one reached the ground she was told how to find the door.

Then, at last, no more.

The air that before had been thick and hot was suffocating now. It was dark no longer. From the windows a red glare made the court an Inferno of terrible, horrifying reflections.

Amy fled through it in sudden panic, all her courage gone. Nothing remained but primordial instinct—her own life! She must save her own life!

Blinded with fumes she rushed down the steps to the door. It was shut.

The girl who had passed through last must, with crazy obedience to habit, have dragged it to behind her.

Alexander Guthrie caught at his son-in-law's arm:
"You said—Amy . . . ?"

Amy's father nodded mutely.

There was a second when the elder man seemed to be struggling to bring his mind to take in the truth. Then suddenly, with that look of groping effort still reflected in his eyes, he crumpled up like a withered leaf on the sidewalk at James Burke's feet.

Behind the iron door a dead heat quivered like gas over a furnace.

At intervals, shorter and shorter intervals, there were sounds beyond in the court that one dared not hear. There were sights . . . !

One's only salvation was to press tight against the iron door and pray that someone would open it before it was too late.

At last someone did open it, furiously. Someone who would have raced on in the face of withering heat and fumes and deadly sounds and sights if, at the very outset, he had not almost stumbled over a little body that fell outward with the outswinging door.

He stooped, looked, gathered the small figure to his heart, crushing it to him close and close. For some reason he could not see, but he could speak, also he could hear and feel:

“Burkeses Amy! Thank—the good—God!”

Two arms were lifted, laid about his neck. He felt a wet cheek pressed against his own wet cheek. He heard his name spoken as he had never heard it spoken before:

“John!”

Then silence between them.

Still carrying her in his arms he passed out from behind the iron door.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND

AMY shrank sensitively from the notoriety that followed, the reported interviews she had never given, the published likenesses for which she had never sat. There was something peculiarly tempting to the reportorial pen in the fact that she was her grandfather's granddaughter. The picturesque contrast afforded no end of elaboration, it was lugged forward in season and out, made to point a moral and adorn a tale until it was worn threadbare. Alexander Guthrie was an arch-fiend! Amy Burke a fearless heroine!

To the girl the whole thing was torture. The appearing in court under compulsion to testify to shames that already had seared deep into her consciousness. Again and again at night she waked from troubled sleep, brought face to face with the haunting visions of the hideous Inferno out of which John had delivered her only just in time. And now she was obliged to live them over, to describe them

so that others would live them over. Incidents she had forgotten were recalled. Persons unknown were privileged to probe her, to bring out facts of the most personal nature, family differences, delicate interrelations she would have shrunk from discussing with her own heart. She felt as if she were being set in the stocks in the open market-place. A nine days' wonder.

Sorrowfully her father saw another wistful young phantom glide out into the shadowy stretches of the Past. As once he had seen the child Amy disappear, so now he saw Amy, the girl. In a few weeks she aged years.

Life was very difficult. She had thought it was all so simple. To be loved by the man you loved. That was happiness. Now it was just this that gave the sharpest sting to her misery.

In the midst of one of her fits of depression John arrived. She did not have to inquire to be told there was trouble. He plunged in headlong:

"I'll not ask you to forgive me for what I'm going to do, for what I have already done. It's unpardonable. I know that. All that's left is for me to get out. Not to do any more harm."

Amy's brow contracted in the old childish expression of troubled puzzlement:

"I don't know what you mean."

It was very hard to resist her wistful, upturned face:

"I want you to forget what happened that day—the day of the fire, after Nora had told me where you might be and—I went—and found you."

"But I don't want to forget it. I want to remember it. I want to remember it, and I will remember it, when I shall have forgotten everything else in all the world."

John's color deepened:

"I can't go on with it—our engagement. I'm unhappy—I'm miserable."

He saw all the blood retreat from her face as slowly the words sank in, and she began to understand what they signified.

"You mean—you don't—love me?"

He nodded, his eyes downcast, his jaws set.

"Look at me, John."

Then, after a moment of patient waiting, "John, look at me."

Obediently he lifted his eyes.

"Now, tell me—no, don't look away!—now tell me you don't love me."

"I don't love . . . Oh—my little—Burkeses Amy—I—I can't."

She drew him down beside her, mothering him, comforting him:

"I knew you couldn't. Now, tell me the truth. I know you're unhappy. I've seen it all along. So'm I unhappy. But it's not because I don't love you. It's because I do. I mean, because I've something to tell you that it will hurt you to hear. And I love you so I can't bear—to hurt you. Maybe it's like that with you, too. Is it, John?"

"Yes—it's like that—with me, too."

"Well, then, let's get it over right now. You tell first. Then I'll tell. Or, if you don't want to tell first, I will."

He crushed the hand he held to his lips:

"I'll tell first. You know what I am . . . No, don't interrupt! Let me finish, else I mightn't be able to bring myself up to the scratch again.

"When I talked to your father after—after we became engaged, he said he'd tell you all about me. What I'd done—what was done to me."

"Yes, and he did. It made no difference, John.

How could it make any difference, except to make me care more?"

"That's what your father said—to comfort me. He's—*great*, your father! But it does make a difference. It makes a difference to me. I had no business to let you know I cared. If I'd been the right sort of a fellow, I'd have died rather. That's what I meant to do—never to let you know. To die rather than let you know. But when it came to the point I—did what I'd sworn to myself I'd never do. It was a low-down trick, for your father had trusted me. He treated me like a gentleman. He took it for granted I was on my honor, that I'd not forget myself. I did forget myself. I took advantage of him. I let you see . . ."

"If you hadn't, I don't know what I'd have done, for—I must have let *you* see from the first. I couldn't help it. You wouldn't want me to have to do all the love-making, would you, John?"

"Oh—little—Burkeses Amy! After your father talked to me, I thought I could stand up to it. I thought I could make it seem right to myself to offer you . . . Only a man with a clean name has the right to say to a girl he loves her. I haven't a clean name. I can't stand what I've done—drag-

ging you in—asking you to share the mess I've made of my life. I hate myself. There's no happiness in it. It's torture. I haven't the pluck to stick to my bargain. I want you to let me go, until I can prove . . ."

"I'll set you free, of course, if it will make you any happier. But I'm afraid you won't be any happier, because, you see, dear, things are never quite perfect—there's always a flaw. Even if we part . . ."

"I know. Even if we part it won't right the wrong. But at least you won't be engaged to a scamp."

One of her hands was laid across his lips. "Hush! You mustn't call yourself names! Now you've told yours. Let me tell mine."

"No. Just a minute. You don't want me to call myself what I am. That doesn't alter the fact, for it's true! Even if we part that won't right the wrong. I know it's the act of a cad to try to skin out of the consequences of what I've done after I've drawn you in, but . . . Get Worthing to tell you what he thinks of me! He'll tell you quick enough. He thinks I'm a coward and worse than a coward—he thinks I'm a fool."

"Why?"

"Never mind! He's right. I can see it now. I am just what he thinks—I've no pluck, no grit. —I'm the sort of fellow I love you too well to let you marry. Now you know."

"But I don't know. Tell me! Why does Harleigh think those things of you—if he does think them?"

"Ask him."

Amy smiled:

"I don't have to. I can guess. You mean—about the tramp?"

"Worthing told you?"

"No. The tramp told Daddy. Daddy went to the jail to see him. Oh, you strange John! It's like drawing teeth to get anything creditable to yourself out of you!"

"It's not creditable to myself to have submitted to blackmail."

"It was foolish, I'll say that for it! Funnily foolish, you being you! But, after all, you did it to spare me. You see we know all about it. The poor creature had a heart-to-heart talk with Daddy. Confessed he belongs to a club that's going to blow up the world and start society on a new basis. He

says they have a blacklist of all the millionaires, and as soon as they get ready they are going to wipe them out of existence, 'neck and crop.' They had their eye on me because I'm Grandfather's granddaughter. I was to be kidnaped when the right time came, and the money Grandfather offered was to be used to blow him up. In the meantime you were letting yourself be robbed to protect me, and when you had nothing more to give—why . . . You see, I know all about it."

"Yes," said John, "I see you know all about it."

"And I want you to stop calling yourself names, because you look at things in what Daddy calls a quixotic light. I know how you feel. I understand—because I feel that way myself. If you hadn't come to me about ending the engagement, I'd have come to you."

"What?"

"I told you I'd something to say that would hurt you. You've told yours. Now I'll tell mine."

In a few stumbling, labored sentences she told "hers."

"And the worst was, it wasn't a single act like yours—a mistaken impulse given way to on the spur

of the moment. My motive wasn't like yours. I knew what I was doing and I was doing it for myself. I had a chance to think and choose, and I chose deliberately to deceive and cheat. It never occurred to me that I was doing what would lead to something worse next time, until suddenly, like a flash of lightning, I saw what I was up against. I knew I had it in me to be fraudulent, base, the doer of ignoble things. It paralyzed me. If Miss Grant hadn't been just what she was, so wise and patient, if she had shamed me before them all, broken my pride, I think I . . . Well, no matter! She helped me fight down what was in me. That time I had strength to resist. But suppose another time . . ."

"Another time you'd *remember*—and win out on that."

"It's like the blind leading the blind—isn't it, John?—our comforting each other for what we've done. I hope I might win out, but—lately I've wondered. There's something I've never breathed to a living soul, not even to Daddy. What has happened lately has made me wonder if I really could win out. If I'm not (what do they call it?) *committed* to—oh!—the sort of thing I've just been telling you about.

"All my life long I've lived in a queer kind of muddle. Everybody kowtowing to Grandfather to his face, yet behind his back not kowtowing at all. Of course, when I was very little, I didn't discriminate, but as I grew older I began to see and hear. The atmosphere was full of vague unpleasantnesses, rumors, insinuations, innuendoes—things that darted out from the most unexpected quarters, fluttery, waspish things that stung me, then melted into nothing before I could lay hand on them. I could never grasp anything definite. The moment I showed the least sign of understanding, people hushed up and hummed a tune, or had something foolish to say about the weather. I wondered and wondered, but I never got very far. Of course I love Grandfather. He'd never been anything to me—except once—but generous and kind and loving. I supposed he was that way to everybody—at first. It breaks my heart to see him sitting there, in his wheeled chair, helpless, knowing he'll be that way to the end of his days. The investigation was quashed—or whatever they call it. But, oh, John! If Grandfather knew that building wasn't safe! If all that about the fire-escapes was true, their just repainting them when they ought to have been torn down and new ones

put in their place! If he knew beforehand that one stairway wasn't enough and yet had the second removed! If this awful horror could have been prevented . . . ! Oh, it's too hideous! Because, don't you see, I'm his granddaughter. I haven't any choice, after all. It's like that game we used to play when we were children—'Hold fast that which I give you.' And, whether we liked to or not, we had to take what was handed out to us. That was the game. Well, I don't like what's handed out to me in this other game—life. I don't want it. But, if I've got to take it—if it's *in me*—*was* in me always—*will* be in me for ever and ever—what can I do? The only thing I see is not to foist it on anyone else—not to foist myself on anyone else. D'you see what I mean?"

All the while she talked John was undergoing a slow, strange transformation. Now he shook an erect head:

"No, you're all wrong. Even if it were as you say, and we're in the game and have to play it whether or no—have to take what's handed out to us—what becomes of your father's share? The traits you inherit from him? You've those to reckon with, haven't you?"

"Yes. And some day, if I prove they are strong enough to cancel the others, why, then . . . But I'll have to work it out for myself. I'll have to *know*. Just now I feel like something that's been so trodden down and smirched there's no knowing what it really is. It will be a long time before I feel *clean* again. There's been too much—too much muck-raking, mud-slinging. I'm buried under the slime."

"But everybody's calling you a heroine. The papers can't get over your bravery. It's a wonder your head isn't turned."

It was a tragic little face she showed him.

"Yes, and there's a stab even in that. For every minute of the time I wasn't a heroine at all. I was quaking with fear—horrible, disgraceful, save your-own-life-no-matter-what-becomes-of-the-others terror. I had to keep praying to God every second, else I'd have cut and run and left the rest to their fate."

"But you didn't leave them!"

"No, I didn't leave them. But it wasn't because I didn't want to. It was—*luck!* I have the credit of being courageous. Pooh! It's the worst bluff anyone ever put up. I'm a coward clear through. The next time I might betray myself."

For a long moment there was silence. Then John

spoke slowly, with visible effort at first, gradually gaining more and more confidence:

"I tell you what I think, my—Burkeses Amy. I think we need each other. I know I need you, and I think you need me. Somehow, everything is changed by what you've told me. It's no use. I couldn't give you up now! Not if . . . It's a pity you didn't set your heart on a better fellow, but since you didn't, why—such as I am, I'm yours, body and soul! I thought I was trying to do right when I came here to—*tell* you. It was a bluff—I was lying—for I wanted you—want you—want you! Now you know the truth!"

There were tears in her eyes as she looked at him, smiling:

"Oh, you queer, dear John! I suppose all our lives long it will take some terrible cataclysm to make you open the iron door. Will it always be like that? I standing one side and you the other, and a great barrier between that you'll never break down until the last minute—to save my life?"

CHAPTER XXV

THE FIELD-MOUSE

ALEXANDER GUTHRIE, sitting in his wheeled chair, day after day, week after week, knowing himself to be as much a prisoner as the incendiary tramp himself, had plenty of time to think. It was all that was left him to do. Even his son-in-law, always at his side, could not guess how deep the thoughts drilled, what hidden springs they liberated.

That John Burke should stay by him the old man made clear from the start. What Jean might do appeared to be a matter of indifference, until it was discovered that her father's idea was not to hamper her, to leave her free to choose her own manner of life. But it was Amy for whom he strove most painfully to express himself, struggling to conquer the baffling impediment in his speech that, somehow, would not be conquered, in order that he might order things to her liking, command surprises that would please her.

On her side, Amy tried to think up ways to enter-

tain him. She read aloud for hours at a stretch, stupid, statistical reports, lists of stock quotations, anything he indicated he would like to hear. Nora was brought to sing for him, John induced to show some of his canvases. After they had gone Amy told the story of their struggles, and was rewarded with a check that took her breath away.

Waving it jubilantly before Jean's eyes, she cried: "For my two genii! To send them abroad! Mrs. Cavanagh goes along as Nora's chaperon. Also, she'll keep John darned and mended up when he'll be painting so hard he won't know whether he's in rags or not."

"You see, you have your wish," reminded Jean.

"Yes, and I'm going to insist on having it carried out. John declares he won't go. But I intend to make him. He needs it, and—it won't hurt us to wait."

"No," Jean assented, "it won't hurt you to wait. That is, it won't hurt your characters."

Amy's lips pursed whimsically:

"Thank you for the qualification. You're right. It won't hurt—our *characters*. Besides, we'd have to wait anyhow. Grandfather'd never consent to my marrying John. And I'd rather wait years than

do anything to grieve him now, when he has so many troubles of his own. It'd be like hitting him when he's down, wouldn't it? Of course, I can't be certain, but I've always had an idea Grandfather expects great things of me in the marriage line, that he's set his heart on some foreign grandee, someone with a title and *vast domains* and all sorts of cheap-novel accessories. I'm naturally accommodating. As the shop-keepers say, 'I strive to please,' but I declare here and now I wouldn't marry a man with a title, not if he were John himself. I've been plain 'Burkeses Amy' too long to change to anything fancy now."

"Better not make rash statements," cautioned Jean. "One never knows what may happen. Your grandfather has a way of bringing to pass the things he's set his heart on. Besides, you can't tell! John might be knighted. He might become so great a painter that he'd be raised to the peerage or something, and then it would be inconvenient to have to give him up, because once you had said you didn't like titles."

It was about this time, that is, shortly before John sailed for France, that Harleigh gave him what may be described as the surprise of his life.

They were sitting in the dismantled apartment, which had been sublet because, as Harleigh explained, it would be haunted for him after John left, and he didn't care to foregather with spooks.

It happened to be uncommonly warm for a night so early in spring. All the lights had been extinguished except one in the hall, so that the little drawing-room was almost in darkness.

From far below came a faint murmur, as of the city crooning itself to sleep. The shimmer of stars above seemed like a distant reflection of the shimmer of lights underneath.

"It's no use trying to thank you," John ventured.

"All right. Give it up."

"Some day I'll prove . . ."

"Oh, shut up!"

Followed a long silence which Harleigh himself was the one to break:

"There's just one thing I'd like you to tell me before you go. You're such a tongue-tied chap one never knows what's going on in the back of your mind."

"Well?"

"With no intention of trying to force your confidence, there's one thing I would like to know. A

man mayn't be a spy, even if he does watch out to see which way the wind blows. He's a right to do that, hasn't he? when it's a question of two capsizing if they happen to be in the same boat without knowing it."

A curious chill ran the length of John's spine. What was coming?

"Go on!"

"You are the last man in the world whose plans or wishes I'd want to interfere with. But, if you keep a fellow in the black dark, you mustn't be surprised if he staggers up against things without meaning any harm."

"What do you mean? 'Staggers up against things!' What sort of things?"

"Oh—intentions—hopes—sentiments!"

John's heart gave a sudden dive. When he spoke his voice was steady, only with noticeable effort:

"Sentiments toward what? Toward whom?"

"It would be the deuce of a complication if we both cared for—the same girl."

"Do we?"

"That's what I want to know."

Again a long silence which, again, Harleigh was the one to break:

"You're to be in Paris for a couple of years at least. So's Nora. You'll both be in the artist game, both getting lots of applause, having successes, disappointments, all the big emotional ups and downs that go with that sort of thing. Even if you don't especially care at the outset, the fact of your being thrown together so much over there, where you'll depend on each other for sympathy and encouragement, would tend to make you care. And, unless I'm jolly well mistaken, you do care at the outset, don't you?"

The question shot out like a stone from a sling.

John's answer was less prompt, less direct:

"I'm very fond of Nora."

" 'Which being interpreted' may mean nothing at all. On the other hand, you being what you are, it probably means you're passionately in love with her."

"It means nothing of the sort."

"Then I'm to understand you're *not* passionately in love with Nora?"

"Not passionately or otherwise. I'm not in the least in love with Nora."

Harleigh was on his feet almost before the words

were out. His hand came down on John's shoulder with the force of a sledge-hammer:

"*Good work!*"

"Why? Are you, then, passionately in love with Nora?"

"Lord, yes!"

"Congratulations!"

"What on?"

"The fact. Nora's a mighty good girl."

"Sure. But that doesn't say she'll have me. Just at present congratulations don't 'sit' well. One doesn't congratulate what the poet calls 'a soul in purgatory.'"

"No. One congratulates him when he gets out."

"I'm by no means out. But now that I know I'll not be poaching on your preserves, with a clear conscience I can at least try to get out. And—anyhow—I'd be glad to feel that you're looking out for Nora over there. Making things as easy for her as you can. Letting me know if there is any way in which I can make them easy."

John gave the promise without rewarding Harleigh's confidence with his own. It was characteristic of him that, guarding his own secret, he should as conscientiously guard Harleigh's.

No suspicion of the truth entered Amy's mind, and if during the two years that followed she was tormented by doubts and fears, born of the gossip that reached her from time to time, linking John's name with Nora's, she was just enough to lay the jealous pangs at her own door, not John's. Never for a moment did she distrust his will to be constant. It was her own lack of power to hold any man's devotion that wrought the mischief. Why should any man care for a girl so commonplace, whose only claim to distinction was money? Especially a man like John?

Jean took her to task one day for her habit of "praising herself down":

"You mustn't do it dear. It's destructive. Think positive, upbuilding thoughts. Believe in yourself."

"Ho! That's easy enough to say when you've made a place for yourself in the world as Nora and John have. As *you* have."

Jean smiled:

"Perhaps you were too young to understand how things stood up to the time Father and I started out on our journey. Or, perhaps, even if you were young, you understood anyhow. Everyone knew I was a colorless little nonentity. I knew it. Fa-

ther used to tell me so often enough to leave no room for mistake. I used to rebel against fate for having given your mother all the beauty and the gifts—charm, intellect, everything. She had so much more than one woman's share. A little might have been spared for me. It was natural that Father was proud of her. He was proud, prodigiously proud. It was her right to be made much of. It seemed to be my misfortune to be always in the way. I used to feel Father resented me the more because I had not died instead of her. The more I realized his disappointment in me, the more I drew back into my shell. The more I was what I condemned myself to be. That is the way the law works. That's what 'To him that hath' means. Nature never wastes. If one makes little of oneself, even that little shall be taken away. It was Lady Denslow who opened my eyes. One day she told me her experience. It was wonderful of her to do it, for she is very proud and reticent. A very *grande dame*, indeed. She did it as a sort of warning. I'm sure she'd not mind if I told it again to you.

"It seems she was brought up to be absolutely subservient to her parents' will. They married her to a man she didn't love and she let her-

self be sacrificed, although she rebelled against it in her heart and knew she was doing a great wrong. Her husband was of her own class—a man of title, wealth. He was high-principled and all that, but uncommonly arrogant and autocratic. When her son was born she gave him a double share of love. She idolized him, and yet she didn't dare assert herself when his father domineered over him, trying to crush out his individuality as he had hers. The boy submitted only so long as he had to. The moment he was of age he went his own way. Somehow it was possible for the father to beggar him, and there were years of dreadful privation and suffering that, in the end, wrecked his health. All this time his mother was forbidden to see him or help him, and although it tortured her to know her son was suffering, she allowed herself to be browbeaten, overruled, and never openly declared her own independence. Sometimes, in secret, the son came to see her. He married, and when his child was born he brought it to see its grandmother. At last the young wife died. Then for the first time the son pleaded with his mother for help. He besought her to take his boy. She thought of her husband and—refused. She never saw her son again or the little

fellow, her grandson. It was as if they had disappeared utterly from off the face of the earth. When Lord Denslow died every effort was made to find the heir. Useless. Lady Denslow knows she has only herself to thank. She blames no one else for what she brought down on her own head. But, ever since, she has been trying to help others to live, to teach them they are the masters of their fate, the captains of their souls. She taught me. I have been trying to teach others. I want to teach you."

CHAPTER XXVI

LADY DENSLOW

THE fact of John's early error had made so slight an impression on Amy's mind that, when he wrote her briefly that the Government had bought one of his pictures and hung it in the Luxembourg Gallery, adding, "All of which is very gratifying, of course, but I sometimes wonder what the people who are praising me would say if they knew where another picture of mine is hung," she had to pause and cudgel her brains for the connection.

"Poor chap! 'Still harping on my daughter!'" quoted James Burke, his face grim with sympathy, when Amy showed him the paragraph.

He had worked valiantly to right the fatal wrong, but all to no purpose. Apparently it was one of those strange cases of injustice for which the law has no redress. No one knew precisely why the other person had no authority to act, but the result was always the same. John's likeness was not withdrawn from its hateful, undeserved position.

From time to time Mr. Guthrie had to be informed of the progress of his *protégés*, and it was in the course of her latest report, following directly on the heels of her great news, that Amy told her grandfather in detail the incident that was shadowing John's life.

Had she been relating the story to an interested, sympathetic listener, she could not have controlled herself to the extent of keeping her voice steady, her face impassive. As it was, there was no temptation to give way, because her grandfather showed not the slightest interest in the little tragedy. His eyes, the only features that had entirely escaped the blight of his shattering malady, were as indifferent at the end as at the beginning. Deep down in her heart she wondered if anything not closely concerning himself could pierce the callous shell of the old man's monumental egotism.

It may have been a month later when, having gone down to Craigen Street to spend an hour with her aunt, she received a hurry call home again. It was her father who telephoned.

"What's happened? Anything bad?"

"No. Don't wait to ask questions. Your grandfather wants you. That's enough."

"But you might give me a hint as to what I've t face."

"Forbidden. Come and find out. Oh! before yo ring off, tell Jean her old friend, Lady Denslow, in town. A message has just come saying she is a the Ritz. Your grandfather has asked her to mov straight over to the house to stay. She's acceptec I am on my way now to arrange for extra fal-lal and all that sort of thing. Jean will probably wan to come uptown with you."

Jean did, and the two hurried off together.

"Isn't it curious I never used to be afraid of any thing. But ever since I've—had John to care for nothing ever happens but I think, 'What if it should be bad news about him?'"

Jean shook her head reprovingly:

"Once upon a time there was a little field-mous that went out to seek his fortune. All unbeknownst his mother followed after to see that nothing bad befell him. The field-mouse went fast and he went far, and, by and by, he came to the king's forest. No sooner had he got there than there was a great sound of trampling feet, rattling accouterments winding horns. And, lo! it was the king and his courtiers starting out on the hunt. The poor little

field-mouse mother grew weak with terror, so that her heart gave out and she could run no further, but got in the path of the hunters and was trampled to death. Before she died—"Oh, me! oh, me!" she cried. "All the world is pursuing my son. They will never rest until they capture him!" And the field-mouse himself never knew there was a hunt."

Amy laughed:

"And the moral of that is?"

"Think it out for yourself."

They parted at the door of Mr. Guthrie's sitting-room, Amy going in to meet whatever might be in store for her, Jean passing on to oversee such arrangements as were being made for Lady's Denslow's reception.

"Well, Grandfather?"

She sent her question ringing cheerily on before her, although her field-mouse mother-heart still quaked in spite of Auntie Jean's fable.

She had grown so familiar with her grandfather's labored speech that she gathered at once what he wished her to do. Seating herself at his side, she took from his knee a sheaf of business-looking documents loosely clamped with a metal clip. It was plain she was to read the letters, but why she was

to do so was a puzzle, for at first she could make neither head nor tail of their contents.

The imposing letter-heads of official departments, the signatures of persons in authority whose names she did not know, threw no light on the confusing texts. She shook her head perplexedly.

"Go on!" Mr. Guthrie commanded.

Presently she discovered that each communication was a step leading toward a given point—the Man-Highest-Up. The approach is slow but sure, and the end of all was that the Man-Highest-Up had the honor to inform Mr. Alexander Guthrie that his recent application had been received and contents noted, and that, in compliance therewith, it gave the Man-Highest-Up pleasure to inclose the accompanying photograph, assuring him that all record in connection with the case in question had been expunged from the blotter. Hoping this would prove satisfactory to Mr. Guthrie, whose munificence to the department, etc., etc.

Gazing, bewildered, at the photograph, Amy forgot her grandfather, forgot herself, forgot everything else in the world except the joy she knew was in store for John. Her eyes misted over with tears. She pressed the faded print to her heart

with an irresistible impulse of self-betraying love.

A curious sound, something between a snarl and a sob, shocked her back to consciousness. Looking up, she saw her grandfather's twisted lips quivering with rage. He could have wept with self-contempt. The truth had broken in upon him in one breathtaking flash. He saw himself Fate's cat's-paw, unconsciously playing into the hands of Love to further an affair he would die rather than consent to. His idol, the inheritor of his millions, married to a peniless nobody!

History was repeating itself with awful accuracy. But in this case the offense was the worse, because the man's name had been dishonored in the most blasting of ways.

Amy felt the withering flame of her grandfather's scorn pass from himself to her.

"I'm sorry, Grandfather! I wouldn't have had this happen for all the world. But as long as it has happened, you may as well know the truth. I love John Graham dearly. I've always loved him. I've promised to marry him some day. Nothing can make me break my word. But I promise you I won't marry him until you're willing, or—

until—it can't grieve you any longer. Please forgive me for hurting you. I never meant to give you pain."

She waited a moment, hoping for some sign of understanding, forgiveness. None came. What she read in his eyes was battle—he would fight to the finish.

There was a tap on the door—Jean's voice asking permission to come in:

"Lady Denslow is here. James says you left word she was to be brought to you as soon as she arrived."

There was no time for excuses.

On the threshold stood a tall figure, a queenly-looking woman who, passing Amy without seeming to notice her in her confusion, went at once to the wheeled chair.

The tense moments that had preceded her entrance must have worked on Amy's imagination, for as she looked at the stranger she had a singular impression of having seen her before, of being well acquainted with the high-bred way in which her head was held, the clear, unwavering light of her steady eyes. Her mellow voice, too, was entirely familiar, with its low-pitched "carrying quality," its delicate rising

inflections that robbed her sentences of all appearance of dogmatic utterances.

She spoke to Mr. Guthrie as if they had met but yesterday. There was not a trace of shock or pity for his changed condition in her words or manner. With consummate tact she guided the conversation so that his share was mainly inferential, sparing him the humiliation such a nature would feel in his own helplessness. Nothing could have been more delicate, nothing more deft.

Completely under the spell, Amy forgot to slip away, as she had intended to do, and stood there wrapt, gazing at Lady Denslow as if she had been a staring, gaping child of ten.

"And this," said the musical voice at last, "this is the little granddaughter of whom I have heard so much?"

She extended a slender hand.

Waked suddenly from her trance, Amy flushed guiltily. With uncharacteristic awkwardness she tried to take the outheld hand, shifting the fateful papers to leave her fingers free. The sheaf slipped her hold, scattering the papers broadcast on the floor.

Alexander Guthrie noted the clumsy accident with

dumb impatience. He measured Amy from head to foot, then turned to Lady Denslow in a painful attempt to apologize for so maladroit a performance.

But Lady Denslow did not see. With charming graciousness she was stooping to help Amy recover the scattered papers. Suddenly she gave a smothered cry:

"What is this?"

All her fine self-command was gone. Her lips quivered, her eyes filled, she thrust forward the faded likeness of John Graham and repeated her question again and again with the insistence of an eager child, clamoring to be satisfied.

Alexander Guthrie would have given years of his life to have been able to tell in words sufficiently scathing just what it was, to shame Amy so that she would never venture to hold up her head again before this great lady. He dared not trust his halting tongue.

"What is this?"

Jean did not know what it was.

Amy was the one on whom it fell to stammer out the truth:

"It's the photograph of a young man I—we know.

It was taken years ago, when he was sixteen. He's much older now. He is in Paris—painting. He is a great artist."

"His name?"

"John Graham."

The photograph dropped to Lady Denslow's lap. For a moment she stared at them blankly. Then her shaking fingers began to fumble the lace at her throat, drawing out a thin locket that hung about her neck on a slender chain. She opened the locket, holding the miniature for Alexander Guthrie, for Jean, for Amy to see.

"Is it John Graham?"

Jean had never been "good" at puzzles.

Lady Denslow met the question with a shivering intake of the breath:

"Yes, it is John Graham—*my* John Graham—my son—at sixteen."

A change had come over Alexander Guthrie. His eyes caught Amy's and held them. If he had spoken for years, he could not have made his meaning clearer. She knew precisely what it was he exacted of her—absolute silence until—he should have proved what his keen, crafty sense divined, at once, as a strong possibility.

"We will look into this, your ladyship. It is very interesting. We will look into it at once."

It remained forever after a problem unsolved by Craigen Street, which of the quickly succeeding bolts that broke upon it out of a blue sky surprised it most.

To have "demonstrated" a Neighborhood House so perfect in its construction and equipment that expert skill, backed by "old Guthrie's" limitless purse, could suggest no improvement, was a matter for wonderment, to say nothing of self-congratulation. Craigen Street fairly strutted with pride.

The Neighborhood House bolt having been recovered from, Sally Leonard's quick return from a fruitless pilgrimage to London for the purpose of putting herself in training with the coach of the most famous of Russian violin masters gave the ward its second shock.

In the absence of a witness, it is hard to say how the interview between her and Krapotkin could have been reported, but there was a persistent rumor to the effect that she had been dismissed with a curt epigrammatic admonition:

"Go home and teach, my young friend. It would

be a cruel kindness to encourage you to aim at loftier flights. Temper is not temperament, and the bowing you do with your head is much better than the bowing you do with your wrist. Adieu!"

The third bolt was the war, in which so many "relations on the other side" were involved.

The fourth, that John Graham, having been discovered to be the grandson of a great English *milady*, had promptly enlisted, gone to the front, rendered distinguished service, and been granted a furlough.

The ward discussed going down *en masse* to the wharf to greet him on his arrival home. There was talk of a brass band, of presentation floral emblems, a barouche in waiting, possibly banners.

It was Harleigh who turned the current into a safer channel:

"Let's not plan anything public until we see if he is able to bear any excitement (after all he's been through), beyond the homecoming and seeing old friends again. Then we can have an ovation, if you like. A concert in the Neighborhood House Auditorium. Sally will play for us, I know, and I'm sure my wife will sing, if the Opera people will consent. That's the sort of thing that would please Lord Denslow more than . . ."

"Please Lord How-Much?"

The ward had not realized that John's altered position involved a change of title. And though titles were not much to the liking of Craigen Street, it felt that in some way it was responsible for John Graham's, having, as it were, "saved him up" until he could "demonstrate," wherefore it would put on as brave a front as possible to save its face, acting collectively very much after the same fashion as it would individually if "something had happened in the family" that, since it could not be cured, must be endured.

So, when at the close of the concert John, pale and visibly moved, rose to thank his friends for their royal welcome and, tongue-tied as he was, could not do it, and they saw that neither splendid achievements, title, or wealth had changed him from the modest, simple-hearted John Graham they had always known, they raised a shout of "Lord Denslow! Lord Denslow!" just to show there was nothing mean about *them*.

For a second Lord Denslow was taken aback, not knowing what to say, even if he had known how to say it. Then a sort of inspiration led him to beckon Amy to his side. It was his inarticulate way of

taking the ward into his confidence, telling it what would prove forever that he considered himself part and parcel of it, its brother as well as its friend.

And Amy, understanding, came.

There was an instant's silence as the crowd took in the situation.

Then—

“Lady Denslow! Lady Denslow!” went up with a whoop. The house fairly rocked and thundered with it. But Amy shook her head, so that, wondering, the audience was still to listen to what she had to say.

“If you call me that, you dear people, I shall think you don't care for me any more. I like much better the little name you gave me years ago, when I first came down here to live and you took me in and gave me a place in your hearts. I want to be to you just what I've always been, and I'm sure that's how John feels, too, though he can't tell you so. Once I wanted to be great and grand—I don't any longer. I'm content just to be John's wife—and your . . .”

“‘Burkeses Amy!’ ‘Burkeses Amy!’” roared the crowd.

THE END

