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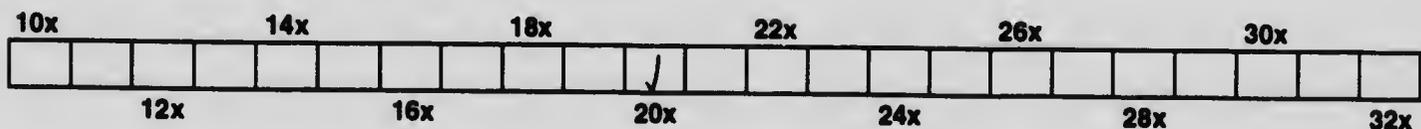
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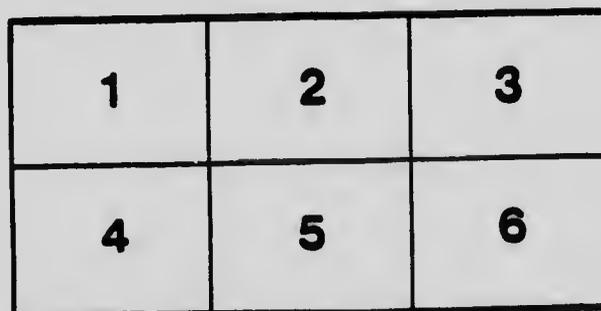
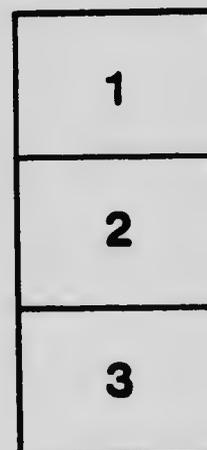
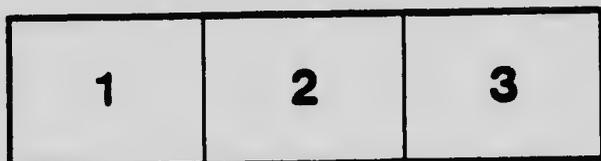
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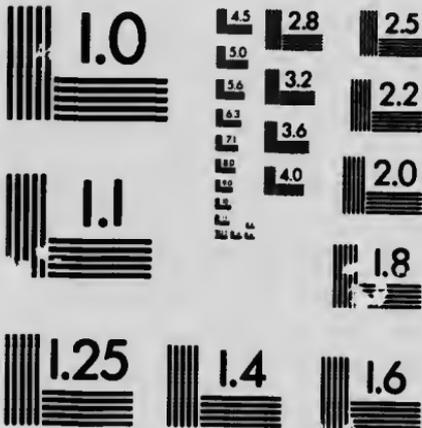
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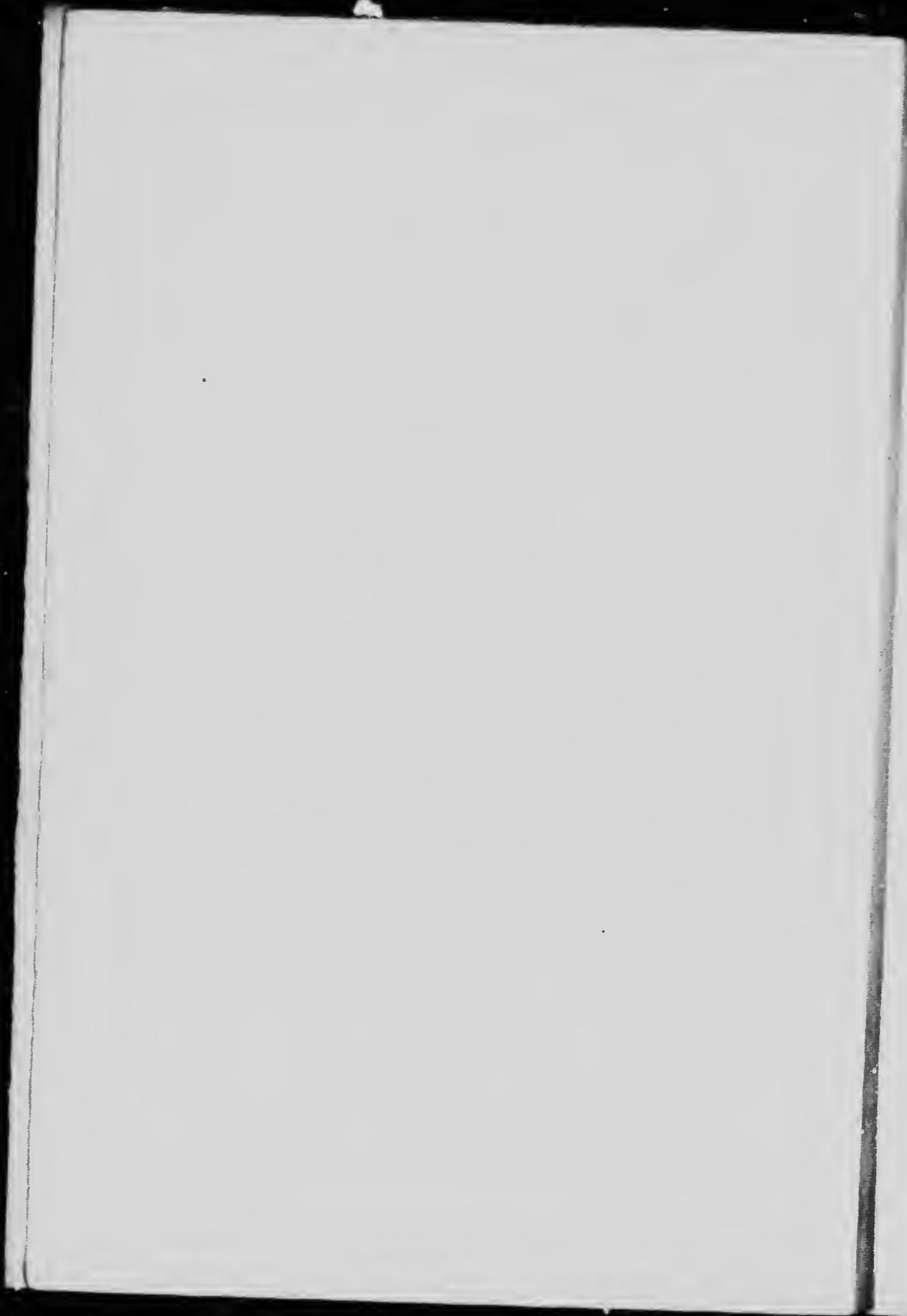
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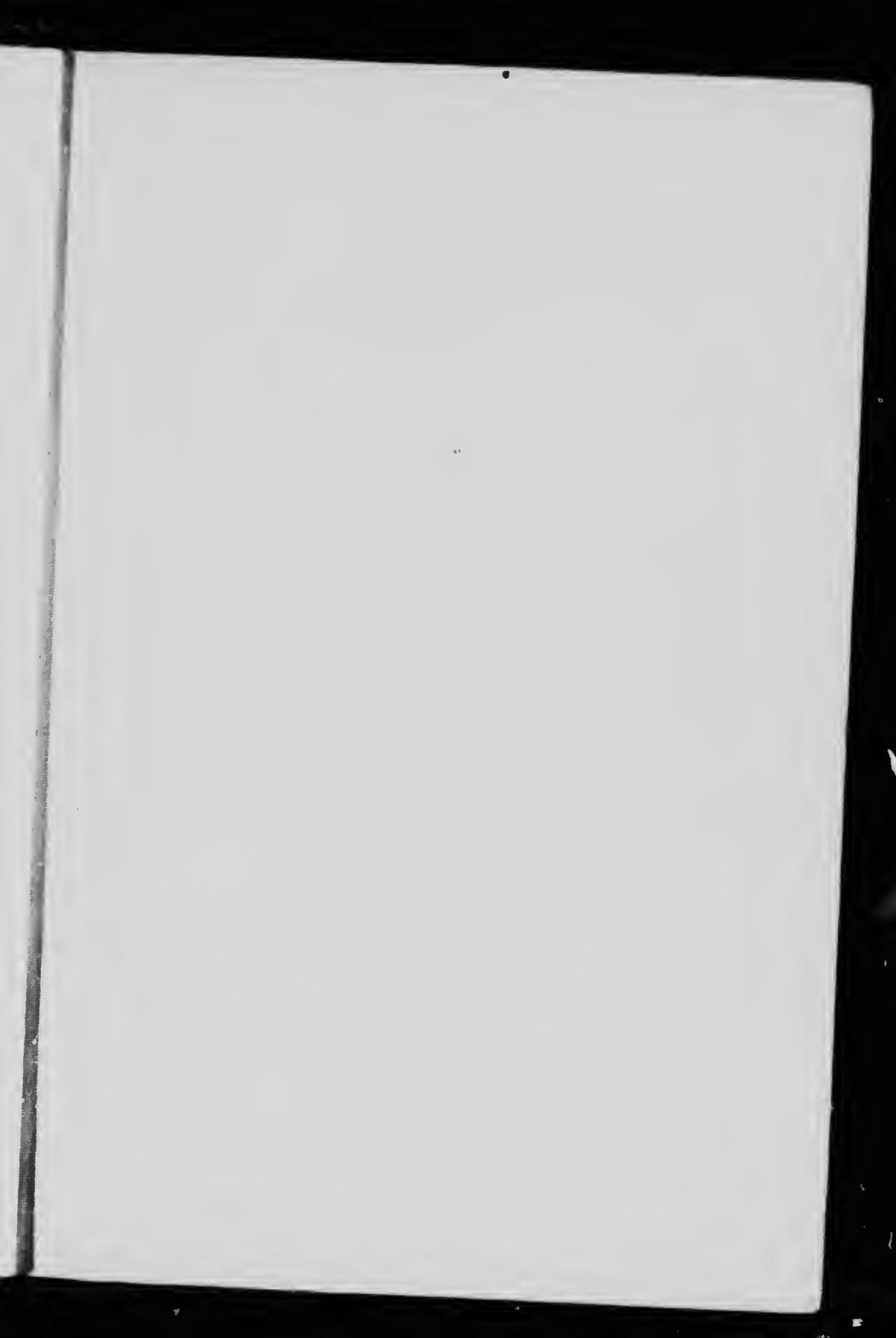
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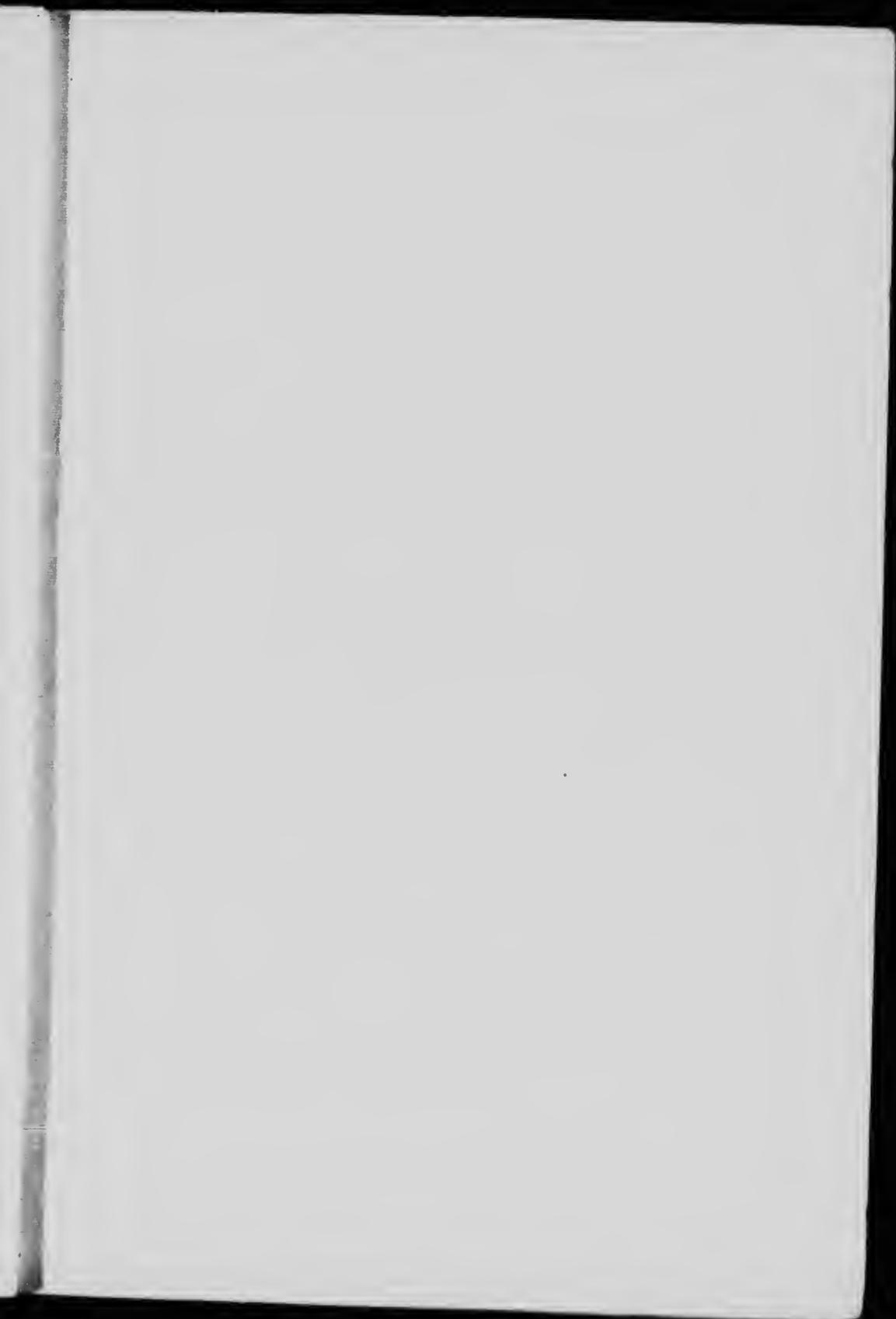
BETTINA

CONCERNING BELINDA

THE MISDEMEANORS OF NANCY

NANCY'S COUNTRY CHRISTMAS

THE PERSONAL CONDUCT OF BELINDA





ONE MOMENT'S PAUSE

Most of all he liked watching the butter maker

How Could You, Jean?

BY
ELEANOR HOYT BRAINERD



ILLUSTRATED BY
JAMES MONTGOMER. FLAGG

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Most of all he liked watching the butter maker
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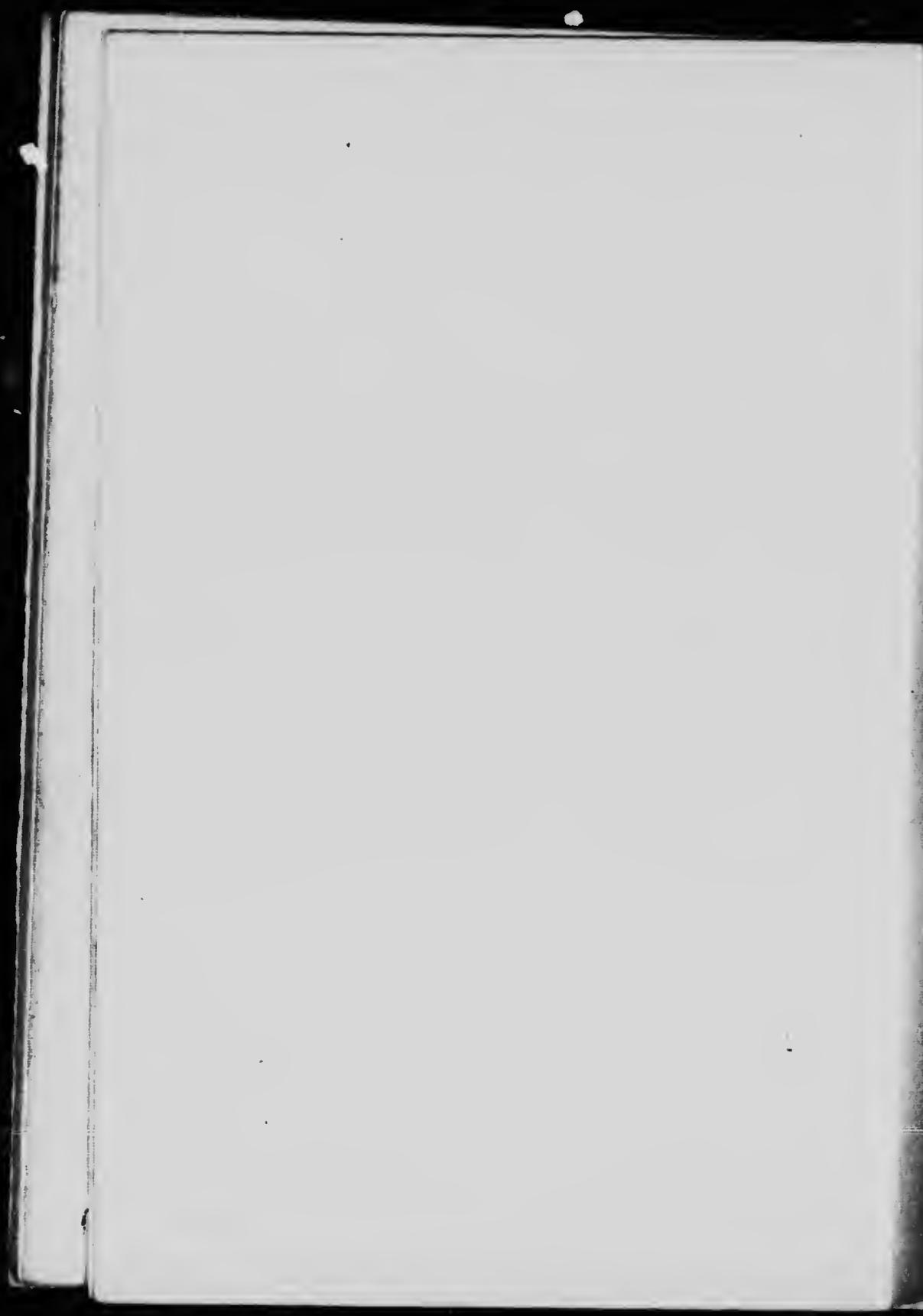
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HOW COULD YOU, JEAN ?



HOW COULD YOU JEAN?

CHAPTER I

BABS, dear, do I *look* like a parasite?"

Barbara Herrick looked at the girl on the window seat and laughed.

"Jean, dear," she mimicked, "you do *not*!"

"Well, there you are!"

Jean Mackaye threw out her hands in a swift little gesture of finality.

"It's angelic of you to want me to live with you, Babs, and it's superangelic of Tom to back you up in it. I suspect you of using thumbscrews on him."

"He was perfectly delighted with the idea," vowed Tom's wife; and her eyes met her friend's eyes steadily, though a tell-tale colour crept into her cheeks.

Jean leaned forward and kissed one of the flushed cheeks.

"You'd make a magnificent liar, Babs, if you could control your circulation, but isn't it enough that Tom has been made to see the light at all? No other man

could have been coaxed or bullied into agreeing to such a plan. Some day I'll try to tell you how I feel about your wanting me, but I'd howl like a dervish if I tried to talk about it now, and this isn't my crying day. To-day I'm a cool, hard-headed, businesslike young person, looking for a job."

"A job?" echoed little Mrs. Herrick. "What kind of a job?"

"Exactly. That's what I've been asking myself for three days and four nights. I've gone over and over all the nice genteel things that perfectly useless, incompetent ladies in reduced circumstances are willing to do—teaching, you know, and library work and being social secretary or companion, and all that sort of thing, but—I don't know enough to teach anybody anything except spending money, and a librarian, nowadays, has to have a library school training, and there are 999 social secretaries to every woman who needs one or can afford one, and as for tying up to the decrepit or peevish—well, I decided I'd rather do something that wasn't in the least genteel; but, do you know, Babs, even when I flung gentility to the winds, I couldn't see my way. It wasn't until this morning that I decided what I would do."

She rose to her feet, rammed her hands in the pockets of her silk sweater, squared her shoulders and

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looked down at the girl in the big chair with an expression half humorous, half defiant.

"Hold fast, Honey," she urged. "Don't scream or faint. I'm going to be a cook lady!"

Barbara Herrick gave a startled gasp, then laughed uncertainly.

"You're joking, Jean."

"Never was more serious in my life!"

"But, Jean——"

"But me no buts, child. I'm adamant. There's just one thing I know how to do. That's cooking. Thank Heaven father had an old-fashioned theory that every girl must learn how to cook, and clean an ice box, and save drippings, even if she didn't know anything else. So I had all that rubbed into me when I was sixteen, and I've fooled with it more or less ever since. I like it."

"But, dear, you couldn't possibly——"

"Oh, yes, I could."

She was flushed, determined, eager, lovely, and her friend's eyes adored, while her lips protested.

"You don't realize what domestic service is, dear. It would cut you off from everything and everybody."

"And that's a crime, Barbara Herrick—but it's what I want—for a while."

"But you'd have to put up with all sorts of horrid things. You'd be a perfect slave."

"Not at all." The potential cook lady dropped her defiant air and laughed at the distressed face upturned to her. "The domestic servant is the only surviving autocrat, Babs. I've picked out the profession because I've always had my own way and I want to go on having it. Now honestly, is your Sarah a slave?"

Sarah's mistress made an ineffectual effort to retain her gravity and giggled weakly.

"There! You see! Sarah rules you and Tom with a rod of iron. You simple grovel before her. You wouldn't dare contradict her."

"She's such a gorgeous cook," explained Barbara.

"So am I."

"And she does make us so comfy."

"I'm going to make some deserving family comfy-- I'm going to look around and select a pleasant, rather helpless elderly couple, and then I'm going to run that couple according to my own method. I'll be gentle with them. I'll humour them, I'll make them more comfortable than they've ever been before, but I shan't allow them to have wills of their own. The poor dears will be wax in my hands. I can hardly wait to get at them."

She was smiling gayly, but there was resolution in her brown eyes, in the firm chin, in every line of the well-poised, vigorous young body.

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"Oh, Jean; you—it's awful!"

"Don't cry, Babs, don't. I'm not bluffing. I'm cheerful inside. Truly I am. I *was* perfectly miserable at first, but since I thought of this way out, I've been tremendously interested and excited. I know I can make it go. I feel it in my bones; and it will be such a lark to put it through.

"Do you remember that quiet Mr. Hollister—at Mary Pratt's? Mining and railroad man with the big jaw and the nice eyes and the bad manners? Well, he asked me what I did with myself, and when I tried to tell him it sounded so silly that I laughed and so did he, but he said it was too bad I was wasting myself—that he rather thought I had the makings and that there was no fun like tackling a real job and putting it through. Maybe he was right!"

"But you've always been awfully happy," Barbara protested.

Jean nodded.

"Oh, I suppose so. While father lived, everything seemed all right. He didn't have much time for me, but he let me do about as I pleased, and I couldn't remember mother; so I didn't miss her. Then when father died and I went to live with Uncle John, I was at the age when a girl can't help being happy. Sorrow simply won't stick.

"I didn't like Uncle John but he didn't interfere

with me, and I suppose I'd have gone rocking along indefinitely if he hadn't lost all my money along with his own and then died and escaped the mess.

"There wasn't much of anything left, you know—just enough to pay my debts—and there wasn't anybody that belonged. There was just me and I wasn't much of a comfort to myself. Fact is, I'm ashamed, Babs. I don't amount to a row of pins, but I do know how to cook. That's the only thing Dad ever insisted upon my learning and it's my one valuable asset. I am going to use it. Of course I realize it means cutting loose from the people I know. You and I will write and keep in touch, but we won't see each other and no one except you is to know—you and Tom. I'll just drop out. I can say I'm going out to friends in the West or in New Zealand, or Timbuctoo. Then I'll lose myself right here in New York, and everybody will soon stop asking questions and forget.

"After I've proved to myself that I'm not a helpless Persian cat sort of person—that I'm a real human, and can make my way among humans, and after I've saved enough money to carry me through a year or so, I'll bob up from the social depths and train myself for something dressier than housework."

"Tom and I would love——" Mrs. Tom began breathlessly.

"Of course I know you'd love to lend me the money

for the training. Bless you both for a pair of cherubs! But how would I know that I could ever pay you back? No, I'm going to earn that money. Some unsuspecting and incapable housewife is going to have a pearl of great price wished on her—at once; no, to-morrow. To-day I'm going to buy work clothes and a black mohair for dress up, and my own caps and aprons. There isn't the mistress living that I'd trust to buy caps for me. I've always longed to wear them.

"Barbara Herrick, stop wailing like a banshee over me. I'm not unhappy. I've a sneaking conviction that the best of my life is just beginning." The prospective cook lady turned toward a mirror that hung against the wall, studied her reflection critically, and nodded approval. "I'll be rather nice in a cap, Babs," she said contentedly, "one of the crisp, perky kind, and a waitress's apron, the round, frilled sort with a bib. Heaven help the elderly gentleman unless he's blind or very absent-minded as well as elderly. Maybe I'd better select a widow and take no chances. I'd hate to break up my employer's family, but as to butchers' boys and icemen and janitors——"

"That's just it!" sobbed Barbara. "You could marry anybody!"

Jean leaned over, took her friend's shoulders in

her two strong hands, and gave the mournful little figure a gentle shake.

"You're flattering but inaccurate, my dear," she said. "I could marry Wilson Burky, or Dick Carter, or Seymour Everall. Maybe by steady application and unfailing energy I could marry Charlie Wetherby. They're all rich, but don't you honestly think thirty-five dollars a month and no followers beats married life with any one of the four? You talk about slavery—well, at least I shan't sell myself into it. I'm going where I can give a week's warning and quit! Babs—Babs, *dear!* Do turn up the corners of your mouth and be a sport!"

The small woman blew her nose violently and achieved a watery smile.

"All right," she said, with a pathetic little wobble in her voice. "If you will you will, and I'm with you. So's Tom—or anyway he will be; but if anything happens, if you're sick or unhappy or need anything, you'll come straight home to us, won't you?"

"It's a promise." Jean spoke lightly, but there was a wobble in her own voice. Friends who stand by when one's world crumbles away are wonderful things.

"It's a promise, Babchen," she repeated, more steadily. "Now we'll dress, and you'll take me out in

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your car to buy clothes for a respectable cook lady."

Late that evening when Sarah, the tyrant, was safely in bed, Tom Herrick shamelessly kissed a radiant Young Person wearing black mohair and a frilled apron and the sauciest of caps.

"Isn't she too darling, Tom?" his wife asked rapturously.

He looked at the Young Person and laughed. "My dear," he said, "she *is*. She is altogether *too* darling. No sensible married woman would consider hiring her. It's a widow for yours, Jean, and if she has a bachelor friend, he's a dead duck."

CHAPTER II

HANNAH JOHNSON looked up from an unsatisfactory reference that had come in her morning mail, and saw a vision.

A girl in a plain dark blue suit and a demure but highly becoming black hat was standing quietly before her.

Girls in dark blue suits and black hats were not uncommon in the employment office but this girl would have been uncommon anywhere, and the Swedish woman with the broad, cheerful face and the shrewd, appraising eyes recognized the fact at first glance.

The Spirit of Youth had strayed into the bare, unlovely office on Fourth Avenue. Sweetness of youth, eagerness of youth, pride of youth, confidence of youth—they were all there and, curiously enough, the woman behind the desk found herself remembering a northern fjord and a summer day and a boy's face and a girl's will.

Then she came back to the little office with its dull gray paint and its stiff, hard chairs, and its morning

smell of wet dirt and soap, and to the girl who seemed so out of place in the setting.

If she had ever heard of the young Diana, she might have been reminded of her. As it was, she made a mental note to the effect that this stranger looked strong and healthy in spite of being slender and that she had a wonderful complexion. That was her first general impression. When she came to details, the interest deepened in her eyes and she settled her spectacles more firmly on the sketchy nose that intervened between her florid cheeks.

"You want a position?" she asked doubtfully.

It was possible, though improbable, that an employer, by some chance, had wandered in through the employees' waiting room and a mistake would be embarrassing.

"I'm looking for general housework in a small family," said the girl.

She was very clear and decisive about it. Her chin was up, her hazel eyes met Mrs. Johnson's frankly, but a faint tint of amusement lurked in the depths of those eyes and about her mouth. The agent smiled involuntarily. It *was* absurd that this extraordinarily pretty and distinguished looking young girl should be asking for a general housework position.

If she had wanted to be a lady's maid, or a parlour

maid, or a waitress—but general housework! Still, business was business.

“Your name?”

“Jean Mackaye.”

“You have references of course?”

“Mrs. Thomas Herrick, 28 East Sixty-first Street.”

“How about wages?”

“Thirty-five dollars.”

“You must be competent.”

“I am.” The hint of amusement still lingered but the girl was serenely self-confident, and, after all, youth did not mean inefficiency. Moreover, good general housework girls were few and far between and the demand for them was large.

“You sit down in the waiting room,” said Mrs. Johnson. “I’ll telephone Mrs. Herrick and see if this reference is all right. If any one comes in that you’d be likely to suit I’ll send for you.”

“Thank you,” said the girl. Mrs. Johnson wondered why the hazel eyes were dancing as she turned away.

It did not seem amusing to *her* that Mrs. Thomas Herrick should be asked whether she knew one Jean Mackaye to be sober, honest, and competent to handle general housework.

For an hour Jean sat in the inner room with a varied assortment of Scandinavians punctuated by

occasional Irish and semi-occasional Germans. She had never thought much about house servants. One had them. They did the work well and stayed, or they failed to do the work well and went. Griggsby, the butler, had attended to all that. There had been a pretty Irish chambermaid called Kitty. Jean had missed her when she disappeared, and had felt unhappy when the girl's successor had said that Kitty was in trouble. She had even sent some money, but it hadn't occurred to her to look the girl up and give her anything more than money. Then there was Barbara's Sarah. Sarah was different—a personality. Perhaps general housework servants were all personalities, but the Herricks were the only people Jean knew intimately who got along with one servant so she couldn't generalize.

She intended to be a personality herself; but, looking at the women around her, the rose-coloured side of domestic service dulled a little and she felt a twinge of apprehension.

Was it the life that had made the women or had the women made the life? There were a few women neatly dressed, quiet-mannered, intelligent looking; but the rest—who was responsible? Perhaps if the women who were served took a warm human interest in the women who served them, perhaps if the place where one worked were a home; but what could

one do with a cook like the blear-eyed derelict in the corner, or the silly-faced, flashily dressed girl whose willow plume waved in the breeze by the row, or the stolid, dull-eyed woman on the front row of chairs, or the loud-voiced, hard-faced, coarse-mouthed girl who was telling a friend what she "up and told" her last employer? If only one could catch them young, very young. There must be some way. The system must be wrong and if one could find out what was wrong——

"Jean Mackaye," said Mrs. Johnson at the door.

Jean's sociological fumbblings ended abruptly. She felt a sudden panicky impulse to bolt through the outer door and escape, but she gripped her courage hard, rose, and walked into the other room.

"This is the girl, madam," said Mrs. Johnson. She hurried away and Jean was left confronting a portly woman with an eagle eye, a double chin, a coquettish toque, and an enormous sunburst.

She wouldn't do at all. Jean realized that immediately and her spirits rose. It was uncertainty that she had dreaded.

"You look very young," said the toque-crowned lady disapprovingly.

"It's because I *am* young," Jean explained sweetly.

"You wouldn't want to be gadding about all the time?"

"No."

"And I can't have young men hanging around."

The inference was flattering but the announcement did not seem to call for a reply.

"You make good bread?"

"Yes, madam."

"My husband likes home-made bread. Pies?"

"Yes, madam."

"Cake?"

"Yes, madam."

"I hope you aren't wasteful. I won't stand waste."

"You're quite right, madam." Jean was having a beautiful time, a better time than she had expected. She hoped there would be a great many impossible ones before the right one came.

"I might try you," said the ponderous one condescendingly. "What wages do you get?"

"Thirty-five dollars, madam."

The plumes of the toque shook violently, the double chin quivered.

"Well, I never— Of all the—at your age!"

"Are there many in family?" Jean inquired.

"Four—but you can't really expect—thirty-five dollars!"

"And the washing goes out?"

"Washing out! And thirty-five dollars! You'd

expect to use the parlour, I suppose." Sarcasm seethed in the tone.

"No, madam, not if I have a large sunny room of my own; but I couldn't take on more than two in family. I'm sorry. Good morning, madam."

Civil, serene, ignoring the snorts of rage that followed her, Jean left the room in her best drawing-room manner.

Life was good. Life was gay. She was finding going out to service tremendously entertaining.

To her in a few moments came Mrs. Johnson, a worried look on her face.

"I don't know what you said to Mrs. Blaine, Jean, but we can't have impertinence, you know," she said firmly.

Jean smiled at her, and Jean's smile was a very engaging performance. It began in her eyes, breaking up the surfaces into glinting lights. Then it curled up her lips and overflowed to her cheeks, bringing unsuspected dimples into play and wrinkled up her nose in an absurd, lovable way; even her hair seemed to wave merrily and to take on a brighter gold in its high lights.

Hannah Johnson relished the exhibit and relaxed into an answering smile.

"I wasn't impertinent," Jean assured her. "I was very polite. She doesn't want to pay thirty-five dollars or put the washing out."

"Most of them don't," said the agent dryly.

"I'm worth it."

Mrs. Johnson looked at the girl keenly and smiled again.

"I don't know but what you are—to the right person," she admitted.

"That's it." agreed Jean.

"Some one with no grown sons," supplemented the agent as she went back to her office.

Jean inspected five employers and found them unsatisfactory. They were not susceptible of training. She was sure she could never feel an honest pride in them, and the conditions offered were not what they should be, though several of the women were pathetically eager to pay thirty-five dollars and send out the washing.

The afternoon was almost gone when Mrs. Bonner drifted into the office. Drifted is the word.

There was nothing purposeful about her. She came in with a look of vague uncertainty on her gentle face, smiled at Mrs. Johnson, sat down by the window, took a letter out of her bag and read it, then lapsed into placid and apparently cheerful meditation.

After a time Mrs. Johnson, having sped her other clients on their way, crossed over to the little figure in gray.

HOW COULD YOU, JEAN?

"You want a servant, madam?" she asked.

The woman came back from a far country, and looked at her with a mild surprise in her soft, near-sighted eyes.

"Oh, yes. This is the intelligence office. I beg your pardon. I was thinking of something else. I do want a maid. I want one very badly. I've had one a great many years. She had to go away, suddenly, to California. We seem to be completely upset—completely. It's very trying. If you have a maid—a nice person—cheerful, you know, and nice looking. Hannah wasn't very nice looking. I've often thought I'd have the next one quite pretty. Have you a pretty one?"

Hannah Johnson eyed the inconsequential little woman with amazement touched with pity.

"You want a general houseworker?"

"Oh, yes, I couldn't stand two. They interrupt so. Yes, a general houseworker and quite pretty."

"You'd like a good cook I suppose." Mrs. Johnson strove hard to keep the sarcasm out of her voice.

"Yes—yes, indeed. She'd have to cook—and clean, you know—and things like that; but the telephone and dumb waiter are the worst. I can't get along at all with the dumb waiter. If it isn't the garbage it's the ice and if it isn't the ice it's the

butcher—and all that. She mustn't let me be bothered by the dumb waiter."

"What wages do you pay, madam?"

"Oh, I don't know. What wages do they want—that kind?"

"Would you be willing to pay thirty-five dollars?"

"Why, yes; we paid Hannah only thirty but then as I told you, she wasn't pretty and she didn't cook very well. I rather think she wasn't clean, either, but she stayed and she didn't fuss about anything."

Mrs. Johnson went to the waiting-room door and called Jean Mackaye.

"There's an elderly infant out here who wants something to look at," she said as Jean passed her. "I thought you'd fill that bill."

The little woman in gray looked up as Jean stopped before her, looked again, and smiled.

"Oh, you're a very pretty one," she said happily. "She's quite an intelligent woman, isn't she? I didn't suppose she'd understand so well. When could you come, my dear?"

It was only through heroic self-restraint that Jean refrained from hugging her, so friendly, so gentle, so sweet voiced, so utterly inconsequent; but it would not do to be swept away by impulse.

"How many are there in family, madam?"

"Two—just my husband and I. He's very busy, too. Moths you know."

"Would you pay thirty-five dollars and send out the washing?"

"Yes, yes, indeed. That's quite settled."

"And I could have a comfortable, sunny room?"

The gentle face clouded over. A furrow of distress appeared between the near-sighted eyes.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. It's dreadful, but you know how it is about small apartments. Architects don't seem to understand. Of course you ought to have a comfortable, sunny room, but it's quite small—and on the court."

"I'm sorry, too," Jean's voice was honestly regretful. She was beginning to feel discouraged about that comfortable sunny room, and yet how could she bear the life without it?

"We might move," the little woman in gray suggested hopefully, then relapsed into distress. "But I don't see how we could—so many papers—and things."

"I'm sorry," Jean repeated. She *was* sorry. Here was the helpless, lovable mistress of her dreams.

Suddenly the distressed face cleared.

"The guest room, my dear! We have a guest room. I'd quite forgotten it. We've never used it, you see, so I couldn't remember. It's very nice, I

think, and sunny. You'll be comfortable in it, I'm sure. So that's all settled. You can't think how relieved and pleased I am. Could you come right home with me?

"I'd have to get my box and see about my trunk. If to-morrow morning would do?"

"It would be so pleasant to think you were there to-night. Not for dinner, you know. I get very good sandwiches at a shop around the corner and I think there are apples. That will do nicely, but if you could come in later, and be there when I wake up. It upsets me not to have anybody there when I wake up—anybody to make coffee, I mean. Of course Mr. Bonner is there but he's very helpless—except about moths."

"I'll be there by eight o'clock this evening," promised Jean.

Mrs. Bonner beamed upon her gratefully.

"That's sweet of you, and you *are* pretty. It's going to be very pleasant to see you around and I dare say everything else will go nicely. We live at 38 West Twelfth Street. You won't forget the address, will you? Rufus Bonner, 38 West Twelfth Street. You wouldn't fail to come?"

"I'll be there at eight."

"Yes, of course, only I've heard they do sometimes—but I'm sure you aren't like that. At eight then.

Good-bye, child. You *are* only a child, aren't you? I like young people about."

She drifted away toward the hall door, stopping at the desk to pay her fee.

"I'm so much obliged to you," she said gratefully to Mrs. Johnson. "I believe she'll be quite perfect. So pretty, don't you think?"

Hannah Johnson watched her until the door closed behind her, then turned to Jean.

"Well, ain't she the limit?" she commented.

"She's a precious lamb," Jean declared with fervour.

Twenty minutes later she burst into Barbara Herrick's living room, hugged the mistress and master of the house impartially and perched upon the arm of Barbara's chair.

She was flushed, excited, triumphant.

"I've done it," she announced. "I'm a working woman. At eight o'clock to-night I begin playing Providence to an absent-minded cherub with a moth-eaten husband."

"Oh, Jean! Not to-night!" wailed Babs.

"To-night, at eight! It upsets her to wake up and find nobody there except the husband, and she mustn't be upset. I gathered that it didn't make much difference whether I could cook or clean, but that I positively must prevent either her or the

moth-eaten one being upset. What do you suppose is the matter with that poor man? She said he was very helpless except about moths, and that he was always busy with them. It must be an obsession. What do you do for moths, Babs?"

"Tar paper isn't worth a cent—nor those nasty-smelling moth-balls either." Babs was desperately interested, eager to help. "My furrier says there's nothing for it but just to put the things in the air and brush them well every week or two. If the place is full of them, it will be an awful job, dear."

"Children," said Tom, with the loftiness of the logical masculine, "you're dippy. That man can't spend all his time fighting moths. If he's that far gone, he'd be in the psychopathic ward. You must have misunderstood the absent-minded cherub, Jean."

"No, that's what she said—'helpless about everything but moths.'"

Barbara's expressive face took on a look of alarm. "Way, Jean, that's dreadful. You ought to have asked her what was wrong with him. And anyway she doesn't sound quite all there herself. You can't go off alone with people like that. You must stay here until Tom inquires. Moths! Why it may be *D.T's*. Employers ought to give references anyway, but Tom can find out. I believe they're mad, Jean—absolutely mad. You shan't go a step."

"I'm going to be there at eight." Jean was firm. "You didn't see her, Honey. She's a darling, and if her husband wants first aid from the handiest little moth fighter in New York he's going to have it. You couldn't keep me away with a twenty-mule team, Babs, but if dinner is ready, please feed me. After this I'll have to eat my own cooking, and I want one last square meal."

CHAPTER III

AT FIVE minutes to eight on the evening of the great adventure, a taxi-cab stopped before the door of 38 West Twelfth Street, and Jean Mackaye, her dressing case and her small trunk were deposited upon the sidewalk.

Out of deference as much to his fare's face as to her tip, the driver carried her bag to the door, gave it to the hall boy, and offered to wait and help the janitor with the trunk.

Jean thanked him in a small, uncertain voice and fought against a wild inclination to cling to him and beg him not to go away. He was the connecting link with the old life and, standing on the brink of a world altogether strange, she suddenly felt young and lonely and a little bit afraid.

Her sense of humour came to her rescue as it so often did. What if she *should* throw herself into the arms of the unsuspecting and amiable young man, and entreat him not to leave her?

She laughed, and the bad moment passed.

"I'll help the janitor take the trunk upstairs," said

the coloured hall boy haughtily. He objected to alien labour. If tips were in the air, it was right and proper that they should fall upon him.

"All right. Good-night, Miss."

Jean reached out and deposited a second quarter in the hand of the departing chauffeur. He stared at it in surprise, lifted his cap again, and hurried away. If an absent-minded young woman forgot she had already tipped him and did it again, he was not the man to protest. How could he know that he was a bridge across a great gulf and that the young woman who had tipped him twice felt that the bridge was long enough to justify two tolls?

The apartment house was an old-fashioned one. Jean was glad there were no mirrors or onyx pillars in the hall. She had always hated apartment houses and coloured hall boys and rooms strung on a string—had always insisted that nothing could persuade her to live in one. She remembered that as the elevator shot her up to the ninth floor, and smiled a little, not quite happily, but her pulse quickened and her heart beat high as the elevator boy stopped the car and rang the bell of the apartment on the left.

The door was opened by the little woman in gray.

"I was sure you would come!" she said joyously, as she held out a welcoming hand. "Put the bag into

the back room, John. If you don't mind, my dear, I'll take you right in and show you to Mr. Bonner. He doesn't believe in you at all. You see he has an idea I'm not very practical and that I dream a good many of the things I see, but I told him I was sure you were real, and just as I described you—face and voice and all. If I'd been dreaming of some one to take Hannah's place I'd never have dreamed anything half so nice.

"Rufus, this is my pretty girl. I didn't ask your name. Jean? Well, Rufus, this is Jean. Didn't I tell you?"

The little old gentleman laid down his paper, rose, wiped his spectacles, and examined the confused and blushing girl with careful though respectful attention.

"You were right, my dear," he said gravely. "A very choice specimen."

He was thin and stooped and bald, save for a fringe of graying hair across the back and sides of his head. Aside from his scanty locks he showed no sign of being moth-eaten, and if he was mad, as Babs had prophesied, there was no hint of it in his gentle, scholarly face.

"Mrs. Bonner is delighted to have found you, Jean," he said and, though his tone marked the distance between servant and social equal, he spoke

with a kindly old-fashioned courtesy. "I hope you will be happy here. I'm very busy. I may not notice, but if anything is wrong you must come to me. Speaking to me once about anything won't answer, I fear. You'll have to keep at me till I really understand that the matter is important. So few matters seem important."

"I'll try not to bother you, sir."

He looked at her hopefully.

"That will be very nice," he said. "Hannah interrupted me sometimes—but being interrupted by you would be less distressing than being interrupted by Hannah. My wife said it would be pleasant to have some one pretty in the family. It *is* pleasant.

"Now, Maria, if you will excuse me, I'll go back to my work. I had reached a very interesting point. You've been most successful, my dear—extraordinarily successful. I could regret that you hadn't given your attention to the matter before. But of course we didn't realize that it wasn't necessary to have one like Hannah. Good-night."

As he passed Jean, he smiled at her; but the smile and the tone were both oddly detached. His work had apparently come to meet him and he was already absorbed in it.

"You'd like to go to your room I'm sure," Mrs.

Bonner said. "I went in to see it when I came home. It's quite large and I am sure it will be sunny. I'm so glad we happened to have a guest room. If we ever move I must remember to take a place with a guest room, but I don't think we'll move. The packing would be too difficult. Mr. Bonner's room is so cluttered, and he wouldn't let anybody touch anything. By the way, you mustn't dust in there or disturb things—not on any account. I believe Hannah used to insist on cleaning twice a winter, but it inconvenienced him dreadfully. He didn't like Hannah, but he seems to have taken a great fancy to you. Perhaps he'll be willing for you to clean oftener."

She was going down the long, narrow hall as she talked, and reaching the end, she opened a door, stepped through it and turned on an electric light.

"This is your room. I hope you'll like it. I doubt whether Hannah left it clean, but it looks neat on the outside, doesn't it? If you haven't everything you need to make you comfortable, just tell me. We want you to be comfortable."

"I want very much to make *you* comfortable," the new maid said earnestly.

"Oh, I'm sure you will. There's something about your eyes—or maybe it's your mouth—anyway, there's something. It makes me feel cheerful."

She turned toward the door, hesitated, came back to where Jean was standing. The near-sighted eyes with their curious, vague softness, looked up into the girl's face, and she laid a thin white hand on the girl's arm.

"You're so self-reliant—and used to things," she said diffidently; "I don't suppose— Still you *are* very young— It seems hard—you wouldn't be homesick or lonesome, would you?"

For one awful moment the new cook lady wavered on the verge of falling upon her mistress's neck and weeping floods of tears. Then she pulled herself together and smiled into the concerned, friendly face—one of her extra-special smiles.

"How could I be homesick at home?" she asked gayly.

Mrs. Bonner looked relieved.

"If you can feel that way, of course——"

She left the sentence hanging in the air. Most of her sentences were left hanging in the air.

"What do you have for breakfast?" Jean asked, in her most businesslike manner.

Mrs. Bonner's face expressed a vast indifference. "I think Hannah used to have coffee. Yes, coffee and toast I think, and a cereal. It really doesn't matter. Whatever you think best. At eight, you know. I hope you don't mind getting up early. Mr.

Bonner and I both like to begin work early, but if you'd rather——”

“Eight suits me perfectly.”

Remembrance of her ten-o'clock breakfasts in bed smote Jean as she spoke, but she wouldn't be dancing all night every night now. After all, there must be better things to do with daytime than sleep in it.

Mrs. Bonner lingered a moment longer.

“There was something I wanted to say. Oh, yes, I was going to say good-night. You must be tired. Good-night.”

Jean closed the door behind her, and stood for a moment looking around the unfamiliar room.

It was pleasant as apartment rooms go, but it gave her no welcome—was as characterless, as blankly non-committal as the ordinary guest room. Perhaps one could make a home of it. A few books and pictures and one's own little things—and at least there was a bed. She undressed hastily and just before she turned off the light, she took a nickel clock out of her bag, set the alarm for seven, put the clock on the table beside the bed, and regarded it with honest pride. There was something tremendously impressive about an alarm clock. She wondered if the sun would be up at seven, but it really didn't matter whether the sun got up early; the Bonners did. Seven o'clock! That would give her an

hour. She would make muffins for breakfast—and an omelette. Those two babes in the wood were going to be pampered, and the process might as well begin at once.

She was planning luncheon when sleep overtook her. The way to keep from missing things—and people—was to fill one's thoughts and time full of other things and other people. Menus would do as well as anything for filling.

The sun was up when the alarm rang, but it had not climbed far enough through the soot and haze to make its presence felt.

Jean sprang from bed, stumbled across the room in the murky half light, drew the curtains and turned on the light. Getting up at seven was not a joyous thing in mid-winter and she never *had* been keen about getting up at *any* hour. There were people who leaped lightly from bed and sang or whistled as they dressed. Blanche Morrow had told the girls that her husband was like that. She had seemed to think that it was rather splendid of him, but Jean had felt at the time that there was really nothing to do with a husband who sang before breakfast but divorce him. Living with him would inevitably wreck any one's disposition.

At seven fifteen Mrs. Bonner's cook was in the small dark kitchen hunting for things that the de-

parted Hannah had broken or lost or thrown away. Her temper was frayed about the edges but her sporting blood was up. Presumably every cook who went to a new place was turned loose in a strange kitchen without map or chart, and expected to work miracles. Remembering the assortment of cooks in the intelligence office, Jean set her teeth hard. If all those women could work miracles, she ought to be able to work them with one hand tied behind her. So she used what she could find instead of what she wanted, and promptly at eight she served a well-cooked meal to two indifferent persons whose minds were evidently upon other things.

"There is no fruit in the house, madam," she said apologetically. Mrs. Bonner looked up from her paper.

"No? Oh—well, never mind." She went back to the paper and Jean made a mental note of the fact that it would be well to withhold papers until after breakfast. That, however, would come later. Reforms must not be too drastic at first. When she had her family firmly in hand she could arrange all those matters.

The unsuspecting victims ate their cereal docilely. Midway through his dish, Mr. Bonner poised his spoon in midair. "My dear," he said, with a puzzled frown, "the oatmeal is different in some way."

Jean's heart stood still. Perhaps she had forgotten the salt, but Mrs. Bonner's reply relieved her mind. That lady with an obvious effort wrenched her attention from the newspaper and tasted her next mouthful critically.

"I think the difference is that it isn't scorched, Rufus," she suggested, and the subject was dropped there.

When Jean came in with the omelette, she found Mr. Bonner disappearing through one door and Mrs. Bonner through another.

"Oh, please!" she pleaded. "You aren't through."

They turned around and came back to the table.

"I beg your pardon," said the old gentleman. "I supposed——"

His glance fell upon the omelette—a delicately browned, inviting omelette. "Well, really!" he murmured, as he sank into his chair. "Really——"

Mrs. Bonner laid her newspaper aside.

"I always liked an omelette," she admitted, "but I didn't know they were made now."

Jean brought in the muffins and passed them with an ill-concealed air of triumph. Mr. Bonner ate three, thought of taking a fourth, and refrained.

"I believe, Maria" (his tone held a childlike surprise), "I really believe my appetite is improving."

When she had sent the two to their workrooms, the

new cook ragtimed to the kitchen with an empty omelette plate in one hand and an empty muffin dish in the other.

"Poor innocents!" She took the gas stove into her confidence. "They've been half starved, and they were too absent-minded to notice it."

The sun was high now. It even looked into the gloomy little kitchen and played impertinent tricks with the cook's hair, though the dirty window panes did their best to shut it out and preserve the proprieties.

"Hannah!" the girl exclaimed, as she pulled out a dish pan and saw the ring of grease around its sides, "Hannah indeed!"

Close upon the heels of her snort of scorn came a wave of ambition. That kitchen should be cleaned—cleaned thoroughly—at once. Everything should be cleaned except Mr. Bonner's room. It might take her a week to persuade him that she could clean him painlessly, but she looked forward to that forbidden room. Mrs. Bonner had said that it was cluttered. She would put the clutter to rights even if it did interrupt the poor dear's work. She wondered what his work was—what Mrs. Bonner's work was.

Well, at least her own work was clearly laid out for her. She was going to be gloriously busy, was going to play Providence, was going to try her hand at

creating a new heaven and a new earth and training a man and a woman to live happily in it. It was sacrilegiously like something out of Genesis.

"Jean, my child," she said to a young person in blue chambray, white-capped, white-aproned, who looked at her from the mirror in Mrs. Bonner's bureau, "you are a useful member of society for the first time in your silly old life. Hurrah for you!"

The kitchen *was* cleaned thoroughly, and at once.

So soul-satisfying an experience Jean had never even imagined. She dug, she soaked, she scoured. She began mildly with washing soda and worked up to lye and chloride of lime. Working within limited space, the departed Hannah had accomplished prodigies, and as each grease-encrusted cooking utensil was dragged from its hiding-place, each dark corner disclosed its secret, each bit of *débris* was added to the scrap heap, the cook lady's spirits soared. Never in all her life before had she known the sacred frenzy of housecleaning, but now, from the primal depths of her being welled up the world-old feminine instinct, and she gave herself up to it with a whole-hearted abandon that her tennis and her dancing had never known.

She grudged the time devoted to preparing and serving luncheon. She hurried her two through din-

ner; she worked until far into the night and when—tired, hot, dirty—she went toward bath and bed, she closed the door upon a kitchen of which any housekeeper might have been proud, a kitchen whose shining pots and pans hung primly upon neat brass hooks, whose cupboards revealed a neatness almost painful to the unaccustomed eye, whose gas stove was an ornament, whose windows were crystalline pure, whose table oilcloth was as the driven snow, whose linoleum had developed a clear but previously unsuspected pattern in blue and white.

To be sure there were yawning gaps in the equipment. Clothes-basketful after clothes-basketful of battered and broken and unreclaimable kitchen derelicts had gone down upon the dumb waiter, but the gaps could be filled, and it was better that things should be killed than that they should be merely crippled.

After she had removed the signs of the fray and was ready for bed, Jean went back down the hall, opened the kitchen door, turned on the electric light, and looked around. Her tired face glowed with satisfaction and pride, and as she trailed away toward her room, she cast an appraising glance through the open door of the dining-room.

“To-morrow,” she said happily, “will be another day.”

CHAPTER IV

THE first week of the new cook's régime saw a revolution in the Bonner apartment—a revolution on the South American order—much fervour, an expenditure of cash, a change of rulers, but few actual casualties.

A man came in to rub up the furniture. Another man polished floors. A third man cleaned windows. There was a man to repair the gas stove and a man to put the electric lights in order and a man to see to the plumbing.

The place swarmed with men; and among them moved a young woman with fire in her eyes, authority in her voice, and honey in her smile. If a shirker proved impervious to the fire and the authority, the honey won him to unaccustomed effort. As for the coloured hall boys, they promptly, unhesitatingly, reverted to a condition of slavery.

"It ain't that I has to do it," the day boy explained to the night boy, "but when she calls me up there an' turns them lamps of hers on me—say, *man!*"

The dirt and decrepitude of years were routed

from the Bonner apartment. Things were put in order—in whole, clean, smooth-running order.

Jean planned, toiled, commanded, cajoled, while behind closed doors her employers worked on peacefully ignorant of the turmoil. When, called to meals, they came out of seclusion, they found a quiet dining-room, a tranquil presiding genius and an irreproachable meal. They were entirely comfortable and as entirely undisturbed, and they asked nothing more of fate. Some day they were to be disturbed. Jean was working up to that. She had discovered what they did when they shut themselves away. Writing was their particular branch of crime. Mrs. Bonner was absorbed in the fauna, flora, and folk-lore of the Faroe Islands. Mr. Bonner was in the throes of making an important contribution to the scientific literature concerning the moths of North America.

Each wrote at an untidy desk with books and letters and papers piled high on every side; but Mr. Bonner's room was by far the more untidy of the two. Specimen boxes, nets, paraphernalia of many kinds were added to the books and papers in his room and, over all, the dust had settled thickly, steadily, save where a volume or specimen or paper had been in recent use.

Jean, standing for the first time in the doorway

and eyeing the chaos, felt the berserker rage for battle sweeping over her and fled incontinently, but the vision lingered. Some day she would have, in that room, such an orgy of cleaning as even the kitchen had not afforded; but not yet—not yet.

When the last workman had laggingly departed and the apartment, aside from the rooms in which genius burned, had been swept and garnished, Jean made a triumphal tour, stopping in each room to gloat over the fruit of her efforts, then retreated to her own room and sat down to write to Barbara Herrick. She wrote:

BABS DEAR:

Did you ever clean anything that was horribly dirty? If not, don't begin. Once started, you can't stop. The momentum you've worked up to get you past the first disgust carries you on indefinitely. The thing becomes a mania, an obsession. The cocaine habit isn't a circumstance to it—I could easily refrain from dusting. It's puttering, futile work; but cleaning!

I've cleaned this apartment until more cleaning would be painting the lily, and heaven knows the place needed it. My contempt for the Hannah who allowed the dirt to accumulate is tempered by gratitude. If I had come into an approximately clean apartment I might never have known my own possibilities, but now I am self-reliant to the point of insolence. As for generalship—Napoleon was a mere piker compared to me.

Do you remember Walt Whitman's "I myself could stop here and do miracles"? No; I remember you never thought Whitman quite nice. Well, it makes no difference. I was only going to say that I know exactly how he felt.

And I've not only cleaned; I've cooked. I've cooked delicious things, Babs—so delicious that my Heavenly Twins are coming out of their trances and remembering to enjoy their meals.

And I've marketed. It's not at all hard to market if you find an obliging young man who knows his business and is polite enough to pretend that you can tell a broiler from an old hen without his assistance. Our diplomatic service ought to be recruited from among market men. They'd raise its tone tremendously and there's a certain red-headed young Mr. Parsons whom I could recommend for ambassador to any troublous country. He almost makes me believe that I am picking out my own food and that he is gathering up crumbs of wisdom as they fall from my lips, in a hope of one day knowing half as much about vegetables and meat and poultry and fish as I do.

And, Babs, I've kept accounts! Miracles? Well, rather. Of course the accounts don't always come out right. I'm weak in addition and subtraction, and fractions leave me limp; but at heart I'm honest, and I keep those accounts very, very carefully. Somebody *has* to be careful in this family.

The first time I needed money for household expenses I interrupted Mrs. Bonner at her work—the unpardonable sin. She waved me off.

"My purse is on the bureau or the piano or somewhere," she said. "I don't know whether there's any money in it but I think perhaps there's some in a vase on the dining-

room mantel—or maybe it's in the match safe. When you think you are going to need some more, speak to me about it at meal time, please."

There were eighteen dollars in the purse and two one-hundred dollar bills and a ten in the match safe. How's that for a system of household finance? I wonder whether Hannah was honest.

Apropos of honesty, I'll have to admit that I haven't worked all my miracles single-handed and alone. No woman need do that. There are always men willing to help. There's Mr. Flavin, the janitor, for instance. I'm afraid he drinks; and the smell of his pipe as it floats up the dumb waiter indicates low tastes in the matter of tobacco; but, as for heart—he's *all* heart, is Mr. Flavin. He tells me that has been his fatal weakness but Mrs. Flavin insists that drink is the real enemy.

I do love the Irish, Babs.

There was Barney Flynn. Of all the men who have ever courted me I could have come the nearest marrying Barney. Yes, dear. I know he made love to every pretty face, and he had a fiend of a temper, and money wouldn't stick to his fingers. He'd probably have beaten me and he might not have supported me, but oh, *how* he would have entertained me!

And by the way, while the talk is of courting, let me tell you, Mrs. Thomas Herrick, that you were entirely wrong when you prophesied that by going into domestic service I would shut the door upon eligible suitors. I—*moi qui vous parle*—have softened the heart of a plumber! I had imagined that plumbers were stony-hearted, inaccessible Olympian beings who were to be called upon like Baal of old and might possibly bend ear to the call but were more

likely to sleep on. They're nothing of the sort. At any rate, my plumber isn't. He's quite human. I sent for him; he didn't come. I went for him; he came with alacrity. More astonishing still, he stayed until he had finished the job. Mr. Flavin had given me to understand that he would probably disjoint everything so that none of the pipes could be used, and all the water from our apartment would drain into the ceilings below, and then would go away for a week; so I'll admit I took special pains to keep him interested in the work.

When he went away he told me he'd like to keep steady company with me. I declined gently but firmly and I'm afraid I've lost a perfectly good plumber, but the glow of self-satisfaction lingers. For Babs, that sturdy young man in overalls was worth six of any gilded youth you ever begged me to marry—and I knew it. That's a sign that my gray matter hasn't altogether ossified from disuse. I've a sneaking idea that I'm worth more myself than any one (except the plumber) ever suspected. I'm beginning to believe that everybody's worth more than his face value. I wonder if it's true.

When I went into this general housework game I had an idea that I'd hold myself toploftically aloof from everything concerned with it except my work and my pay and my employers but, do you know, I'm beginning to be tremendously curious about the other general houseworkers. This place of mine is *opéra bouffe*. I know that. It isn't—aside from the cooking and cleaning, etc.—any more like the ordinary general housework position than an aeroplane is like an ox. I've had the luck of the world; but those other employers and kitchens and cooks—I wonder—

There's such a pretty young Irish girl working in the apartment across the hall. Mrs. Flavin says she's a "traipsin', 'stravagin' piece" and that the "gurul" who works in the apartment below us is a "steady, knowledgeable body" and that the Collins's maid, over my head, "had ought by rights to be in the 'orspital." Now I wonder what the sick girl's room is like, and I wonder what the "traipsin', 'stravagin' piece's" mother was like, and I wonder how the "knowledgeable body" came by her knowledge. People are frightfully interesting when you find out they're there, but they do upset all one's theories. None of the rules I learned, fit. I don't suppose any set of rules would fit. People don't seem to have been made by rule. They're all exceptions.

Don't worry about me, Babs. I'm getting along famously. My finger-nails aren't what they were, and I scalded my nose with spattered grease to-day, which mars my beauty, and my feet get so tired that I've taken to large, soft, square-toed, low-heeled, old-ladies' slippers, but I've a hopeful feeling that all my pains are growing pains. Some day—*D. V.*—I'm going to be a WOMAN!

Devotedly

JEAN

There were things that Jean did not put into her letters to Barbara Herrick—things that she did not admit even to herself, save once in a while when leisure hung heavily upon her hands.

Even the most energetic and scrupulous of general houseworkers cannot spend all her waking moments

making two elderly, unexacting cherubs comfortable, and keeping a nine-room apartment clean; and, in the idle hours, loneliness lurked.

Mrs. Bonner, on a day when the Faroes had temporarily sunk below the horizon, had made a vague inquiry about her new servant's ideas on the subject of "days out."

"Days out!" They were the last thing the servant in question coveted. She wanted to keep busy, desperately busy; but, after the first few weeks, her work ran so smoothly that she could not make it fill her days. In the afternoons she could walk if she wasn't too tired and the weather was good, and there were plenty of districts where she was safe from meeting folk who knew her. Fascinating districts they were, more foreign to her than anything in London or Paris or Rome or Berlin. She had done conscientious sightseeing in the capitals of Europe, but in New York she had bounded her world on the south by Washington Square, on the west by Broadway and Riverside Drive, on the east by Park Avenue. On the north there had been a place called Harlem through which one motored as quickly as possible on the way to country houses along the Hudson or the Sound.

Now she explored new country, followed every winding cow-pathway of old Greenwich Village,

wandered down into the Italian quarter and over to the lower East Side, idled along the smelly truck-crowded river fronts. When she was too tired to go farther afield she sat in Washington Square and watched the queer, heterogeneous crowd of humanity drifting along its paths, sprawled over its benches, playing in the open spaces. There were old friends of hers in some of the big, brick houses whose fronts glowed so softly mellow in afternoon sunshine along the north side of the square; but the people who had been her people were not likely to go below the dead line that stretched for them along Washington Square North. Some of them did not suspect that there was anything below, save perhaps the studios of a few artists whose talent offset their strange willingness to live quite out of the world.

Sitting on her iron bench beyond the pale, Jean smiled indulgently at the geographical limitations of the world that had been hers, yet there were times when she wished that she had not discovered the flaw in her own geography. Life farther south teased her with problems, upset her smug philosophy. Something ought to be done about a lot of things. That was evident, but she did not feel equal to anything more strenuous than general housework and it was depressing to glimpse the fact that her great adven-

ture wasn't much of an adventure after all—that she was still safe in harbour, still shirking, still a futile atom in humanity's great bulk.

Just at first that bulk staggered her. She saw only the crowd—the strange, seething, impersonal, unintelligible crowd; but, little by little, she became conscious of individuals—always against the background of the crowd, but reassuringly human—just persons, male, female, child, grown-up, each standing out distinctly in the welter of humanity, good and bad, sick and well, cheerful and sad, surly and friendly—just persons.

There was the pale, stooped, cheerful old man in the second-hand book shop on Houston Street. Jean liked him. He was so glad to talk about books even to a girl who didn't know a first edition when she saw it. At first she had worried about him and the stock that crowded his shelves. How could a man sell Herbert Spencer and Nietzsche to Houston Street, when even on Upper Fifth Avenue only the high-brow contingent browsed on such upland pasturage? But after she had watched and listened for a while, perched on a stool in the dark little shop, she laid aside her theory that the East Side confined itself to literature of the Laura Jean Libby type. The sallow, thin, eager-eyed Jewish lads who patronized the shop and wrestled mightily over prices carried off amazing

volumes as the fruits of their bargaining, books whose very titles made Jean's brain ache with weariness.

"Do they read them?" she asked incredulously of the bookseller.

"Eat them up," he assured her. "But as for digesting—I can't say."

Then there was Mrs. Pacioli, the mother of ten. Jean liked her, too. Mr. Pacioli was doing his bit up the river—some little matter of disagreement about the number of red peppers strung on a neighbour's line, and a knife and a judge with absurd ideas about the inability of gentlemen to settle quarrels among themselves. Mrs. Pacioli was inclined to think that there would be doings when Giuseppe got out. Meanwhile, the Lord be praised, business was good and Luigi was able to keep the boys from raiding the fruit and vegetable stand. Luigi was a good boy and quick with the fists. There were three older, but they worked on the railroads far away to the west.

The other six were too young to be relied upon though Maria could help much if the law did not foolishly insist upon her going to school. Judges, courts, law—Mrs. Pacioli had a poor opinion of them all, but she was very friendly to the signorina with the smile, and Jean once spent two whole hours buying three sweet peppers from her.

Rachael also was a Person. She worked in a shirt-

waist factory on West Fourth Street and lived on Bleecker. On holidays she often sat on the same bench with Jean in the Square. Sometimes her young man was with her. His name was Immanuel—Immanuel Liebwitz and he was usually on strike. Sometimes Rachael, too, was on strike and then the two spent week-days as well as holidays on the park bench, unless they happened to be picketing or attending union meetings.

It was with Rachael and Immanuel that Jean went to her first Cooper Union meeting. After that she often went alone. It filled her evenings and her thoughts and no one in the Cooper Union crowd would know her or would pay the slightest attention to her. On Broadway she might have been annoyed, but the Cooper Union men were too much absorbed in their own burning interests to notice that a girl was pretty and alone.

The meetings stirred Jean's brain and soul but she got little from them beyond the stirring. No two of the impassioned speakers saw things from the same angle, advanced the same theories, proposed the same remedies—and the girl herself had not felt deeply enough, studied earnestly enough, lived fully enough, to separate wheat from chaff by any mental or spiritual process of her own.

It was interesting to listen—stimulating. Jean's

receptive mind ran lightly from single tax to socialism, from socialism to anarchy. She frothed with enthusiasm over *sabotage* and split her gloves applauding I. W. W. incitement to riot. She sickened under descriptions of conditions in restaurant kitchens and sweat shops and bakeries and political caucuses.

She lost her appetite for most kinds of food through the disclosures of pure food specialists, acquired a disrespect for the courts that rivalled Mrs. Pacioli's own, and was temporarily convinced that capitalists were monstrous oppressors, though she could not help making a few mental reservations in favour of certain plutocratic, fatherly old gentlemen with whose families she had been intimate.

Altogether she accumulated a mass of raw thought and more-or-less distorted fact which her brain struggled vainly to digest and, having finally reached such a point of pessimism that she would not have been surprised to have the whole world give a loud scream and go to hell, she forsook the haunts of free speech. Something was wrong with the world, but down under the muddle of new ideas and convictions which she had been accumulating stirred a suspicion that something was wrong with her and that, when it came to reformation, it might be the part of wisdom to try her 'prentice hand on herself rather than on the world at large.

The old bookseller in the dingy Houston Street shop put the thing into words the next day.

"Some of them read and some of them think and some of them only feel," he said, "but they all ferment. It's healthier than dry rot. Change comes that way; but it's easier to shriek protest against wrong than to do right. When every man does his duty toward himself and his neighbour there won't be any need of dynamiting the man on the next block—but that's a long way off and the dynamite may help. It wasn't invented in Christ's time, but crucifixes were popular then. I don't know. Nobody knows. Some try dynamite and some try brotherly love and some just howl and beat the air and try nothing. I'd like to be here in five hundred years and see how things have worked out—only I'm afraid human nature'd be pretty much the same at it is now, and if it was, there'd still be brotherly lovers and dynamiters and howlers. I'm hoping though that I'd have grown a little myself in the five hundred years. Even a sprout or two'd be a start. There's lots of growing time in eternity."

Jean was mulling over what he had said as she hurried home through the early dusk. She was too young to think in 500-year cycles. She wanted to sprout at once—to grow like Jonah's gourd, and to pull this whole world up with her, "brotherly lovers,

dynamiters, howlers" and all; but one phrase of the old man's stuck fast in her memory: "When each man does his duty toward himself and his neighbour there won't be any need of dynamiting the man in the next block."

The idea was old enough. It went back to the Ten ° Commandments and Buddha and Confucius and the beginning of thought. It had been preached at her from the most fashionable pulpits in the land; but some way or other, the little old man with the thin, thoughtful face and the shabby clothes and the quiet voice had made the thing sound different. Perhaps the howling and dynamiting had opened her eyes to the possibilities of brotherly love. Perhaps, after all, that was their part in the scheme of things. At any rate, here was a starting point. She would take herself in hand—and her neighbour; but who was her neighbour?

The girl who "by rights had ought to be in the 'orspital" answered the question. Not in words. She wasn't up to words. She was sitting on the steps of a house on East Twelfth Street and just at first Jean thought she was drunk, and turned away from her. Then she turned back impulsively. Even if the woman was drunk—and she might be ill. She *was* ill. One look into her white face told that. Her breath fluttered painfully. Her lips moved without

sound. Her big sombre eyes stared miserably into those of the girl who leaned over her, then closed. Jean looked around in utter helplessness. There must be something one could do—but what? It was criminal not to know—to be of no use in emergencies. That was the way she had lived. There had always been some one else to meet the emergencies. She thought of policemen and ambulances and doctors, but some one must telephone for them, and who would telephone, and where?

She slipped an arm under the head that lay against the stone step and rubbed the cold, gloveless hands. Whisky—but where, how? The world was so full of whys and hows. Funny she had never noticed that in the old days.

Out of the dusk came a familiar face, a girlish pretty face under an outrageous plumed hat. Two blue eyes glanced indifferently toward the group on the step and widened in surprise.

“Lord! It’s her High-and-Mightiness,” said “the traipsin’ ’stravagin’ piece” impertinently. “What’s up? Drunk and disorderly, eh? Well, you’re a soft un.”

Then as she bent to look at the face that lay against Jean’s shoulder, the careless mockery died out of the blue eyes.

“Why, it’s Susan,” she said. “Here’s a go; I told

her she'd croak on the street some day if she didn't look out."

"If you'd go for a policeman," Jean suggested.

The "traipsin' piece" shook her head scornfully.

"Not me! She'd thank me for calling a cop—*not*. Rather go to the morgue than to Bellevue, Susan would. I bin tellin' her she'd land there if she didn't let up; but there's a kid somewheres and the money'd stop if she let her job go, so she felt as if she had to keep peggin' at it. She ain't as bad as this, only in spells, and the woman she works for don't notice nothin' as long as the work's done. You hold her and I'll get some brandy. That'll do it."

She was off like a flash for the nearest ladies' entrance, and Jean sat in the gathering dark with her strong young arms holding the limp body of the girl who had been fighting a losing fight so near her all through the winter days and nights.

A kid somewhere, and a mistress who didn't notice so long as the work was done, and only the hospital when worst came to worst. This was the sort of thing that made Cooper Union orators. Wrong, wrong—the whole world was wrong. She could understand social hate, social revolution, anarchy. Even the fatherly old plutocrats who had been her friends must go. They were part of the system. And after the old social order should be swept away,

what? Her thoughts came back with a jerk to the girl in her arms who stirred and moaned.

Would the new order be built on only one's duty to oneself and one's neighbour? Or would the old selfish circle round itself out again?

Here was a girl who had been working just above her head—working against awful odds—sick, unhappy, afraid, forlorn, and she herself had been dodging loneliness, trying to amuse herself during leisure hours, working herself up to hysterical sympathy with abstract wrongs and smugly ignorant of her neighbour's need.

She hadn't known—that was just it. She ought to have known. Katy had known—and helped. What was it Katy had called her? "Her High-and-Mightiness."

That was how she had impressed other working girls.

Neighbour—a selfish snob; a selfish snob playing at work, making a game of what was life and death to other women.

"Here you are. Lift her head a little." Katy was back and had taken charge of the situation with the air of one used to casualties.

"That's it! Strangled you a bit, eh, Susan? Just a little more. That'll fix you. Easy does it. You keep still. Everything's all right. We'll get you home. Lot's of time."

Susan's face lost its deadly pallor. Her lips turned from blue to wan red; her eyes opened, but the shadows under them looked like bruises on the white, sunken cheeks. She tried to rise, tried to speak. Katy pushed her gently back upon Jean's shoulder and leaned over to catch the words.

"Late for dinner is it?" she said, straightening up with flushed cheeks and reckless eyes. "To hell with dinner. Let 'em wait! But then I ain't got a kid," she added. "I don't *have* to take things."

CHAPTER V

IT WAS seven o'clock when Jean slipped her latch key into the lock and turned it. Dinner would be late but probably neither of her Two would notice it. If they did, probably they wouldn't care; and, if they did care—well, in Katy's vigorous phrase, "to hell with 'em!"

She had taken Susan home, lighted her fire, put on the dinner for her, seen her gradually gain strength enough to drag herself to her feet and move about her work.

Later she was going up to wash the girl's dishes and make her comfortable for the night—as comfortable as she could be made in the Black Hole of Calcutta that she called her room. The next day Susan should see a doctor, things should be done. Suddenly life seemed very full of things to be done, things of vital moment.

She opened the door, entered quietly, and was confronted by Mrs. Bonner—an agitated, pale-faced Mrs. Bonner who gave a little cry of relief.

"You're all right?" she said. "You're quite all

right? I was afraid. I missed you; somehow or other I didn't feel like working and everything was dark and you weren't here. It made me think. I hadn't thought before. I'd just been comfortable. You've made me so comfortable. But all of a sudden—well, dinner never is late—and you're so young—and so pretty—and there are such dreadful things in the papers. I called Mr. Bonner. He's gone out but I don't think he quite understands. Probably by this time he's forgotten what he went for. Oh, my dear, I'm so glad nothing had happened to you."

The soft voice fluttered on and on breathlessly. The little gray lady's cheeks were flushed and her eyes looked suspiciously moist.

Jean's sore heart warmed to her. It was good to be missed, to have some one care. She had fancied that nothing nearer than the Faroës was important to this absent-minded mistress.

"I'm very sorry to be late," she apologized gently. "There was a girl who works upstairs. She was taken ill on the street and I helped her home, and then I started dinner for her. She was afraid her lady would discharge her if dinner wasn't ready."

"Oh!" There was protest, indignation in Mrs. Bonner's voice. She straightened herself and her face lost some of its gentleness. "I didn't think people really did; you go right back up to her, my dear.

It doesn't make any difference about dinner here. Rufus won't remember about it anyway, and I'll find some crackers. I really didn't suppose—— Still we don't any of us—— I'm going to look after you better, child. You *are* very young, you know—and pretty. I don't believe it's quite right to—— If you'd been ill, of course—but it's only a matter of degree. Some people are cruel and some are just absent-minded, and the results are a good deal the same. You go up to that girl, my dear. Has she had a doctor? No? Rufus shall get one—if he isn't lost—Rufus, I mean. No, here he is.”

Mr. Bonner came in, looking profoundly disturbed, but his face cleared at sight of Jean.

“There, Maria. I assured you. She's perfectly safe.”

“But there's a girl who's ill, Rufus. You're to go for the doctor.”

Distress enveloped the bewildered man once more. He was not used to having the world's tide roll in upon him.

“Who—what——” he stammered.

Jean came to the rescue. “We might telephone,” she suggested, “and if the doctor could see her down here, in my room—she doesn't want Mrs. Collins to know she's ill.”

“Of course. It's Fordyke. Dr. William Fordyke.

Perhaps you'd better do the telephoning. We don't have him often, but he'll know. I'll see him when he comes. It really is all a matter of degree. I can see that quite plainly, but when one's interested in work and so very comfortable——"

Mr. Bonner was already in his study. Mrs. Bonner headed toward hers, turned and came back.

"It isn't that I haven't appreciated," she said, patting one of Jean's hands softly. "I do appreciate everything, between whiles. Truly I do; but the Faroese customs are so very interesting. Did you know that they still dance and sing the old sagas? It's the only place. So you see I forget—but I'm going to try to remember. People have no right to forget."

The doctor came at nine o'clock in spite of Susan's protests.

"He'll tell me to stop work and worryin'," she said drearily. "They always do. As if you could do the two things together. If I stop work there'll be enough to worry about. I tell you that."

And Dr. Fordyke did tell her to stop work—to stop work at once, and not to worry. She listened respectfully, but there was a queer expression in the great sunken eyes fixed so gravely upon his face.

"With entire rest and freedom from anxiety," he explained to Mrs. Bonner and Jean in his bland, pro-

fessional manner, "the condition of the heart can be overcome. I'll leave some medicine and she might report to me from time to time. Plenty of fresh air and the diet I've indicated in this list, and no exertion of any kind. I should advise at least half of each day in bed. Glad to have seen you again, Mrs. Bonner. You don't look as if there were danger of your needing me professionally. Mr. Bonner well, too? That's good—not for me, of course. You'll excuse my hurrying off. I've a long round of visits to make.

"Complete rest, remember, and no responsibilities or worries."

The door closed behind him and the three women sat looking at each other.

Mrs. Bonner was the first to speak. "That man's a fool," she said indignantly; "and yet I don't know. Probably he's right about what she needs, and he's only paid to prescribe. Somebody else must see to filling the prescription. Are you married, Susan?"

A dull red steeped the girl's white cheeks.

"No, ma'am."

"Father or mother?"

"No, ma'am."

"Nobody at all?"

Susan looked down at the rough, red hands that fingered her apron, and her lips twitched nervously.

At last, with a sudden defiant movement, she lifted her head.

"My little girl," she said. Her voice rang hard, but there was a light in her eyes. She made a movement as though to go. The thing was finished now. The lady was through with her.

But Mrs. Bonner was not through. She had only just begun.

"Oh that *is* nice." She beamed benignly upon the young mother whose sullen defiance melted into blank surprise.

"One can't be very lonely with a little girl of one's own. I've often thought—but the Faroes are extremely interesting and of course one can't drag children about. I've travelled a great deal. Do you know I went to one of the outer islands once—with the pastor. He hadn't been there before. It's a bird island, just high cliffs and most of the time boats can't land there at all. The old pastor hadn't been strong enough for the trip and the climb—not for years and years; but the new pastor *would* go. He waited two months before there came weather when the boatmen would attempt to make the landing—a very dangerous landing in any weather—but finally they agreed to chance it, so the pastor and I went. A very rough trip. They threw us out; waited until a big wave lifted the boat high, and then



THE COURTESY TALE

Jean turned back to the picture of the white house . . . "You couldn't keep me away by anything short of murder . . . I can see it—and smell it—and hear the wind in the leaves"

threw us to a little ledge where there was a foothold and the island men caught us. It was quite exciting; and then the climb—just narrow footpaths along the face of the cliff. The pastor was dizzy I remember, but he said he was sure the devil could climb the cliff and a servant of the Lord ought to be able to do it. They were so glad to see us—the people; just a few people perched up on that high bare place with the sea raging to get at them. The birds gave them their living.

“Now how did I come to be talking about the bird island? Oh, yes; there was a girl—such a pretty young girl, and she had a lovely little baby girl. There hadn’t been a pastor there since the little mother was born. The pastor christened her and baptized her and married her and christened and baptized her baby, all in the one morning. He was a very solemn man and he couldn’t see a gleam of humour in the thing. When he put the record in his book, he wrote: “A very momentous day for this young woman.”

“It really was, wasn’t it? I wanted very much to stay there but the boatmen would only wait a few hours and I might not have gotten away for months. They broke my arm getting me into the boat. What’s your baby’s name, Susan?”

“Mary, ma’am.”

“The sweetest name in the world—and I’m sure the

baby matches it, but I'm wondering whether you're strong enough to take care of her. Of course I'll send her with you. That's the best way to mend your heart, I think, but perhaps we could find some one — What do you think, Jean?"

"I think," said her maid disrespectfully but adorably, "that you are a darling. That's what I think."

That evening mistress and maid sat in Jean's room and held high converse. A barrier had been broken down.

"One thinks about things in the Faroës and such places," the little gray lady explained; "but some way or other, when I'm here at home—it's different, you know. People don't seem so interesting when they live right around you. You take them for granted. It doesn't occur to you that things are happening to them every day—that all the really big things do happen to them. Do you suppose things happened to Hannah? I can't quite imagine things happening to Hannah. Still she was born, and she'll die. They're big. And probably there'll be things in between.

"Now this Susan. She's not more than twenty-seven or eight, is she? And she's loved and sorrowed and borne a child and worked and suffered and—just that common girl! Is the man dead?"

"No." Jean's voice was bitter. This was her first close contact with sex tragedy. "He's married—out in Iowa. He left Susan before the baby came."

Mrs. Bonner gave a soft little cluck of pity.

"Poor giri. Still she's better off without him. I never could see the comfort of keeping a worthless man around just because he happened to be the father of one's baby. Of course if he'd been a decent sort—but he wasn't. And she has her baby. Funny that a baby can be a disgrace to a woman. I never could feel that way about it—disgrace for the man that goes away perhaps.

"Well, anyway, there's Susan and there's the baby. I'm so glad you found them, child. We'll send them up to Mrs. Morley in the country. It will be a nice place for them—milk, you know, and eggs and fresh air, and Mrs. Morley's a good woman. She hasn't any sense at all about some things, but she has a kind heart and she loves children.

"Then when we go to the farm in April we can see how things are going. Maybe Susan will be strong enough to do our mending and darning and little things like that. I hope it's a pretty little girl."

She coloured guiltily. "It's all wrong, I know. One ought to be above such things, but I do find it so much easier to love my neighbour if she's good to look at."

Jean laughed.

"Susan would be nice looking herself if she weren't so pale and thin. I'll bet Mary's a duck."

Her thoughts swung round to her own affairs. There was a farm, and the Bonners went to it in April. Would they want to take her—and would she want to go?

"Where is your farm?" she asked, by way of leading up to the main issue. April! This was the first of March. It was disconcerting to find that within a month she was to be torn up by the roots.

Mrs. Bonner's gentle face kindled with enthusiasm.

"Haven't I told you about it? I usually tell people about it as soon as I meet them. It's in Connecticut, on the river. There's no river sweeter than the Connecticut. I'm sure of it. I've gone about quite a bit hunting up rivers just to see. Some have falls, of course, but falls never seem real to me. They're so spectacular. I always feel as though Burton Holmes or some of those travelogue people were showing them to me—on a screen. The Connecticut's a perfectly real river, all the way from the beginning to the Sound. You'll love it. I'm sure you will. It's the comfortable kind of river that plays around at first like any child but quiets down as it grows up and goes flowing along through farmlands and past houses, and between hills that aren't too high for grain fields to

climb. Wooded hills, too. Of course there are wooded hills. Our own hill's wooded, but it's a friendly bit of woodland—all full of cowpaths and laurel; and then there's a place at the end of our lane where the hilltop is bare—a great big shoulder of rock above the treetops—with huckleberry bushes and sumach and lichens rolling up against it.

"I've never been able to decide what kind of a day I love most on that hilltop—or what time in the day.

"It's splendid to watch a gathering storm from there, but on a perfect summer day—yes, I believe that's best. Sometimes I go down there in the very early morning. It's wonderful then—when the houses are asleep but the birds are all awake and the valley's stirring just a little and stretching itself. You must see it then, Jean. Down where you know the river is you can only see heaped-up mist; like fallen clouds it looks, and some of them come floating up and up until they get tangled in the cedars just below one's feet, but they never reach the level top. One's always in the clear of the morning up there. Oh, yes, it's wonderful then; but at noon—on a mid-summer day—a path of liquid gold and blue as far as you can see, and the hills drowsing in the sunshine, and the fields spread out like checker boards in squares of different-coloured grains, and the tower of the white church in the little town across the river

pointing up into the blue. Don't you think churches should always have white pointing fingers, child?"

She was silent for a few minutes but her eyes were seeing visions.

"And the sunsets——"

Evidently she felt unable to deal with the sunsets for she fell into silence again.

"The sunsets?" Jean prompted.

The little gray lady shook her head helplessly and took up the story.

"We have supper either early or late so that we can always go down to see the sunsets. The sun drops right down into the river, over at the rim of the world, and there's a path of glory to it; and the sky's a miracle of gorgeousness in the west and of tenderness in the east; and the ridges that run down to the river grow bluer and darker and the ravines are purple, and you hear little wings fluttering. It's—why it's like Revelations, Jean! The cattle coming up from the pastures might be the Beasts of the Apocalypse. That hilltop's the greatest preacher I've ever known. I don't believe any one could be bitter or cynical or discouraged or weary of heart on my hilltop.

"I'm a fool about the farm. I'm downright fey about it, I can't even seem to care about the Faroes when I'm up there. That's why I try to work so

steadily all winter. One might as well shut oneself up and work in the city. There's nothing calling one outside."

Suddenly her face clouded. She leaned back in her chair and looked at Jean with a little furrow between her kindly eyes.

"That's just it," she said. "That's where I've made my mistake. There's enough calling, always. I don't hear, that's all. Susan's been calling—and the others. It isn't pleasant to hear, but—well, the city ought to be the worst place in the world for shutting oneself away behind closed doors."

The girl who was listening looked wonderingly at the little woman in gray.

Here was a new Mrs. Bonner—and even the old Mrs. Bonner was new. A gentle, near-sighted, absent-minded, futile little woman Jean had thought her—sweet and lovable in her way, but as neutral as the grays in which she clothed herself; but now—with her careless talk of adventure in far lands, of sea daring and cliff climbing, and broken arms, her quick sympathy and indifference to conventional standards, her eager love of river and hills and her sudden sense of responsibility for her city neighbour—there was no doubt about it. She *was* a darling and Jean mentally apologized to her as she led her thoughts back to the Connecticut Valley.

"It's a real farm?"

Mrs. Bonner laughed her chuckling, delightful little laugh that was like the sound of water running over and among mossy stones.

"We call it a farm, my dear. It *was* a farm in Mr. Bonner's great-great-great-grandfather's time. Four hundred acres, I believe—mostly of rocks. Land has been sold from time to time. I think we have seventy-five acres now, but that's enough. Rough pasture a good deal of it, and a few good cleared fields, and some woodland and an orchard, and gardens and the old house. Wait a minute. I'll show you."

She rose and went away down the hall. When she came back she carried a book bound in black leather.

"These are my farm pictures." She was smiling happily. Her white hands handled the book as though they loved it.

Jean slipped from her chair to the floor beside the gray-clad knees, and looked at the first picture. It showed a white farmhouse among great maple trees, the sort of a farmhouse exiles from New England see in their dreams. A white picket fence shut the trim front yard away from the big triangle of green sward around which the road ran, doubling back upon itself.

"We're at the end of the road," Mrs. Bonner explained. "I like that. No motor cars roaring

by. We're quite out of the world. I wonder if you'll be lonely."

Jean was turning the pages, eagerly, hastily. River and woods, fields and gardens, orchards and far blue hills! Such a homely, friendly, lovable bit of New England! So utterly unlike those Italian-terraced, and Gothic-towered, and English-timbered country places where she had golfed and motored, and played tennis and ridden and swam and flirted through her previous summers. One could love a farm like that. Some day she would own one.

"I think I'll give you the pink room," Mrs. Bonner was saying. "You can't see the river from it, but it has such a wonderful view of the hills and you'll like the paper. It's a very foolish paper with bridges and boats and summer houses and ducks on it; but there isn't a bath. Oh, my dear, I forgot to tell you that—and no hot and cold water in the kitchen. Jane put up with it, but she said nobody else would. I suppose you won't go."

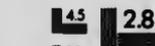
She was overwhelmed. Calamity had come upon her suddenly, unexpectedly. Life had been so comfortable, so pleasant. She had quite forgotten about the hot and cold water.

"I can't blame you," she said woefully. "It does make the work hard. I couldn't expect a girl like you to put up with it."



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Jean turned back to the picture of the white house among the maples and gloated over it.

"You couldn't keep me away by anything short of murder." Her voice was dreaming. "I can see it—and smell it—and hear the wind in the leaves."

Mrs. Bonner slipped her arm around the girl's shoulders and gave her a quick little squeeze.

"My dear," she said. "My dear! You will hear the orioles!"

CHAPTER VI

MRS. BONNER'S guest room for the first time fulfilled its original mission. For six days Susan was in harbour there and on the second of the six days Mary joined her mother. Jean's prophetic spirit had not fooled her. Mary was a duck—a round, dimpled, yellow-haired, five-year-old scrap of humanity with wheedling on the tip of her tongue and mischief in the tail of her twinkling blue eye.

"She's not meek and mild enough for a Mary," Jean protested when she stopped hugging the small woman and held her off for a second look at her.

"I call her Molly," Susan said shyly. She was no longer sullen and dull-eyed, but shyness had fallen upon her like a mantle. One cannot make free with the Saints.

"Molly it is." Jean gave the child another hug. "Molly's a name that goes with dimples."

"She's had good food," Molly's mother said proudly; and, counting the cost of the dimples, Jean sighed.

Mrs. Bonner herself had broken to Mrs. Collins the news that she was about to lose a maid.

"It will be a pleasure to do it," she had insisted, "and if the woman is disagreeable—there are several things I'd like to say to her."

She was as serene as ever but there was a quality in her gentleness that made one think of the cliff path and the tossing boat. When the little gray lady was interested in a thing, her absentmindedness became concentration. For a long time she had not been interested in anything except the Faroës; but now that Susan's need had been forced upon her attention, she went about meeting it with a fixity of purpose that admitted no obstacle.

As it happened, Mrs. Collins was not actively disagreeable. She was a stout, impressive, drowsy woman who was greatly surprised to hear that her maid was ill.

"Susan hasn't said anything about feeling badly," she explained. "And the work went very well. I'm away a good deal. My club work takes so much of my time but everything was always in perfect order here. I'm not one of the club women who neglect their homes" [she was very emphatic on that last point. Women with public spirit and the larger vision were so often misjudged, maligned, and it hurt the cause].

"Our first duty is to the home"; she was addressing Mrs. Bonner in her best platform manner; "but an intelligently administered home need not consume all of a woman's time. Now that so much of woman's home work has been taken over by the factories, and she is left with idle hands, she cannot limit her sphere to the home. The world needs her. She has time, after her home duties are met, to give herself to the burning public questions, to the social uplift, the freeing of woman, the——"

"The doctor says that Susan must have absolute rest and freedom from care," Mrs. Bonner interrupted the fervid peroration quietly but ruthlessly. In her near-sighted way she saw only one burning question and that the stout lady in purple velvet had apparently overlooked.

"She's very sorry not to give you the usual week's notice but the doctor says she's reached her limit—passed it. I'm sending her to the country. My maid will come up and pack her things."

"You're very good, I'm sure," Mrs. Collins faintly resented the virtue in her visitor, but the resentment was tempered by relief that the matter was out of her hands. A sick servant was trying. There was the hospital, of course, but some women were so unreasonable about hospitals. One never knew quite what to do—and with the convention coming on. It

really was fortunate that the girl had friends who would look after her.

"Very good," she repeated. "I hope Susan appreciates. They so seldom do. You may tell her for me that it's quite all right about the week's notice. Of course it was inconsiderate. She might have thought; still one can't expect them to feel things as we do, and there's a woman who comes in sometimes, a very good woman. I can get along."

Mrs. Bonner had not sat down when invited to do so. She turned and moved hastily toward the door.

"It's pleasant to have met you," boomed the oratorical voice. "I wonder if you—but of course you are interested in——"

"I'm interested in Susan," the visitor said curtly as she closed the door behind her.

She arrived in her own apartment red cheeked, shining eyed, short of breath.

"No use saying things to that woman," she gasped, answering the question in Jean's eyes. "One might as well shoot peas at a rhinoceros. Go up and pack Susan's things, child; though I've an idea she's little to pack—except Molly."

The guest room was the centre of great activity that week. Mrs. Bonner went shopping and bundles of all sorts and sizes came piling in. Very few of them, when opened, proved to be things needed and

sent for, but they were all useful in a hit-and-miss way and some of them were exceedingly pretty. There was a quilted pink silk lounging robe, for instance, at which Susan looked with awe-struck, unbelieving eyes.

"Yes, it's for Susan," the little gray lady insisted when attacked about it. "No; I know pink silk isn't practical. I tried to buy a dark blue eiderdown but I couldn't. I really couldn't. The pink one was so soft and light and pretty. Susan's worn out her heart being practical. Maybe pink silk will be good for her. A pink silk dressing gown, and Molly, and spring in the country, ought to brace up the tireddest kind of a heart. The robins are hopping around Mrs. Morley's dooryard by now, Jean."

So Susan, still incredulous, kept the pink silk robe, but by way of reinforcement, her gray cotton flannel wrapper was washed and mended. All her old clothes and Molly's—a scanty all—were put in order for country visiting. Katy came over in the evenings and helped. She had a clever knack of trimming hats, if an effulgent fancy was properly restrained, and she could work wonders with an old waist or skirt, if nobody cared about the length of her stitches.

Her language was racy and her views on life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were somewhat

startling to the orthodox; but her heart was in the right place, and she worked like a beaver for Susan though she had the poorest sort of an opinion of the sick girl's intellect.

“Wurkin' yersilf to death, is it? More fool you. It's not necessary at all—and gurrils so scarce the madams are afraid to say their souls are their own, for fear their cook'll think different and lave! I do my wurrk afther me own way. They can take it or lave it. There's always them that'll take it. And I don't stand no back talk nor no pokin' around in my kitchen. 'Is the ice box clane? And was the cold beans saved, and how did the gravy bowl get bruk?' None av that for me. She kapes to her part of the house and I kape to mine. If she don't, I give notice. There's some as will let their madams drool on about followers and 'what time d'ye come in?' and all that. Not me! If I want to be dancin' the feet off me at the Palace all night wid Johnny, it's nobody's business but my own, so long as breakfast's on time. I'll go as I plase and I'll come as I plase. The lady I'm wurkin' for now does that same—it's none av my business, but if her husband 'ud come home off the road unexpected he might make it his business.”

She was young and pretty, reckless and slatternly and conscienceless—but she let Johnny dance with

some one else for six nights and she bought Molly a most absurdly expensive white coat in which the child looked more of a duck than ever; and when Susan and the small girl went to their train Molly was clutching a new doll that Katy had given her, and in Susan's bag was a five-dollar bill that Katy had tucked away there when no one was looking.

Thyra, the "knowledgeable body" had come to Susan's aid, too.

A very different story was Thyra—clean, tidy, wholesome-looking, clear-eyed, pleasant-voiced, and oozing efficiency at the pores.

She listened quietly to Katy's tirades while she sewed on buttons and darned stockings, and she accomplished a most astonishing amount of work, making pinafores for Molly, stirring up egg-nogs that were the only things Susan would swallow without protests, teaching Jean—on request—some amazingly simple and as amazingly helpful things about cleaning tubs, washing pots and pans, and keeping dishes white. She was kind, helpful. No one could have failed to respect her, but it would have been difficult to love her. She did not open the door to sentiment. Probably she would not have been so quietly efficient if emotions had ever had their way with her.

"I've always had good places," she told Jean, "and pleasant ladies. You mustn't expect too much of them but you're pretty likely to get as you give. Nobody's treated me bad. Katy's the kind that'll come to no good. She doesn't mean bad, but she's always wanting something that we can't have in our station of life. She can't give up that gay times ain't for everybody. She's going to have them, no matter what; and she can't have them and do her work right and keep well, so she don't stay in good places. She's all for dancing and dressing and gadding and loving, but they don't go good with general housework. There's lots that hold with her. Folks ain't got a right to be poking into their affairs, after work's done, they say. Most girls won't work out just on that account, but the kind of ladies that make good mistresses don't like girls staying out till morning. I never was one for running nights anyway."

So sensible, so calm, so unshaken by temperamental storms. Her theories were right, absolutely right. They would work out perfectly.

She had a young man—an electrician.

"I could have had a grocer but a trade's best," she said in her matter-of-fact way. "There's always work at a good trade if a fellow's steady. Five dollars a day and he don't drink or run with women. Next year we'll have money enough to put by for sickness

and things that might happen. Then we'll get married."

"It's hard to wait, isn't it?" Jean was warmly sympathetic, but Thyra shook her head.

"I don't know. A home's best when you're gettin' older and Olaf's steady; but I've my own way now and my own money and my lady's good. I get twenty-five dollars at Christmas. No—I'd just as soon wait."

A most sensible young person; but Jean's heart went out to poor, foolish, pretty Katy, clutching at youth and love and laughter, headed for "no good."

There were maids and maids as there were mistresses and mistresses. Rules would not fit here any more than they would fit elsewhere. It all came back to the old teasing problem.

Something ought to be done; but what?

One thing at least was done. Susan and Molly were sent to the country. Jean saw them off, Susan white and weak, and a little afraid to let go the hand that had been stretched out to her in her drowning hour, Molly ecstatically hugging her new doll and smiling confidently at all the travelling world.

In due time came a grateful letter from Susan to Jean. She was comfortable. Mrs. Morley was good, Molly was happy.

Mrs. Morley wrote to Mrs. Bonner later.

"The young woman's doing well," she said, "but she'll need a long rest and she doesn't relish her victuals as I'd like her to. The laby's hungry enough for two though, and she's got everybody on the place fair bewitched. Jim, the boy that's doing chores for me, isn't a blessed bit of good since she came. He's always off somewhere with her after something that can't wait. Old Mr. Masters that lives down the road let her bring home one of his pigs yesterday—pink little baby pig as clean as ice. I wouldn't have believed old Masters would do it for anybody. She tied a blue bow to its tail and fed it warm mi'k and teased until her mother made it a little apron, but she took it back to-day because she'd promised. She's real good at keeping promises but it's lucky Silver had kittens last night. It'd have gone right hard with the little thing to give up that pig if it hadn't been for the kittens. We drown them most always but we couldn't get one of them away from her long enough. I don't know that Jim would do it anyway. She's worried most to death about their eyes being shut."

"I rather thought Molly would liven things up at Mrs. Morley's," the little gray lady commented as she gave the letter to Jean who laughed as she read it but lapsed to seriousness as she thought it over.

"I'm sorry Susan won't eat," she said anxiously. "The doctor said she needed building up."

Mrs. Bonner chuckled.

"Don't you fret about her not eating. You don't know Mrs. Morley. Mrs. Morley, my dear, is a woman with an obsession for feeding people. It's her greatest joy in life. When she hasn't anybody to feed she feeds the animals on the place. Blossom, her horse, is so fat she can hardly move and has heaves into the bargain, and Dick, her collie, is a monstrosity. If you don't eat until you're gorged, she mourns over your not relishing your victuals. Susan's probably eating quite as much as is good for her and Molly's eating much more than is good for her. I'll say this for Mrs. Morley. Her cooking would tempt a wooden man to gluttony."

March went by, a month of snow flurries and raw winds, with now and then a mocking sunshiny day that hinted at spring's coming.

Mrs. Bonner refused to be depressed by the weather.

"After March comes April," she would say cheerfully, as she looked out into driving sleet. "There are bluebirds in my pasture!"

She was restless since she knew that the bluebirds had come. The door of her study stood open much of the time while she wandered about the apartment

from window to window or talked with Jean whenever the girl happened to be.

"I can't help it," she admitted with a rueful smile at her own idleness. "Spring's no time for work, and March is spring even if it doesn't look it. The calendar says so and there's something in my blood that says so, too. I always used to begin packing in March. Generally I didn't have the faintest idea where I would go but I knew that I was going and that I was pretty sure to head north like the other wild geese."

She looked so plump and placid and homekeeping, standing there by the kitchen window in her gray dress. One could not by any stretch of the imagination associate her with wild-goose flights.

Perhaps she saw the wonder in Jean's eyes.

"I was born in a Hudson Bay trading post," she explained. "That's how the North got into my blood, though my mother was an Alabama girl; timid, gentle little mouse of a woman they tell me. She died when I was a few months old, and father came back to the States with me but he couldn't stand it here. So he left me with mother's people and went back. I can't remember him but I know how he felt, and I'm glad he went. He'd have hated to die down here."

"Did he die there?" Jean asked softly.

“Yes, on the trail; that’s the way he wanted it I think.”

“And you——”

“Oh I grew up in Alabama. Everybody said I was like mother, and I was; but when I was old enough to go my own road, I couldn’t keep away from the North. I’m afraid of a mouse and I’d run miles from a cow, but I’ve enjoyed almost freezing to death in a lot of queer places. I had to have an excuse, so I went in for folk-lore and natural science—collected specimens and made millions of notes. That’s how I happened to go to the Faroes. I’d been to Iceland after some plants and somebody told me there were more of the same sort in the Faroes. So I stopped over a boat—and stayed six years. It’s a terribly hard life they live there—hard and bleak—just a fight from year’s end to year’s end; but I loved it, and it was a great place for riding my hobbies.

“When I came home, I lectured to some scientific people. That scared me, right enough. It’s the very worst form of freezing to death; but that’s where I met Mr. Bonner. He wasn’t so wrapped up in moths as he is now and we fell in love and married, and have been happy. We had our scientific interests and our writing, and after a while we got the farm. It isn’t very far north, but it’s a great comfort when spring comes along. I couldn’t go far, you

know. Rufus needs me. Most of the time we're too busy to speak to each other, but he'd know if I weren't here—and he'd miss me. He can't work unless he knows I'm around somewhere, and he's doing very important work. But when spring comes—

There are so many places I've never been." [She turned to the window and looked down into the grimy little back yard.] "Big, quiet, white places," she said dreamily.

Jean once more mentally readjusted her ideas about the little lady in gray. She had been doing a good deal of such readjusting. Snapshot classifications it seemed were unreliable things. She wouldn't be surprised now to see Mr. Bonner fox-trot out of his study in a pink waistcoat and gray spats, and announce that he was on his way to the Winter Garden. After all, why not? There were moths a-plenty up and down Broadway.

CHAPTER VII

APRIL was masquerading as May. A week of rain followed by sunshine and summer heat had dragged even the city into the mumming and—though all city folk, from English sparrow to Wall-Street money-kings, knew that snow and sleet might be lurking round the next weather corner—every one of them whose blood was still capable of swifter and warmer flow lent himself to the whimsey. The sparrow flirted his tail more audaciously, stole scattered grain even out of delivery trucks, and made swaggering love to his neighbour's wife. The Wall-Street man put on a fancy waistcoat, took a reckless flier in stocks, and sent large boxes of daffodils and narcissi to various young women who, under the influence of the weather, sentimentalized over them, though, as a usual thing, they preferred American Beauties or orchids.

Teddy Burton, standing in the doorway of his friend Kennedy Coles's Twelfth Street house, drew a long breath and smiled—for no particular reason, but just because he felt like smiling.

He had returned from a West Indies cruise only the day before and had cursed New York climate fluently as he came up the Bay in a raw, north wind under a leaden sky; but, this morning——

“After all, give me a northern spring,” he said to the man beside him, while his smile broadened. “You’re never sure what it will do to you, but it’s so blamed nice, when it is nice. I’ll take my weather and my girls that way, thank you.”

“Easy to find your weather and your girl to fit those specifications.” Coles was a bit crusty, even on a day when the stunted trees along the asphalt street were groping up toward an azure sky and easing their swelling hearts in leaf and bud. If he had been susceptible to glamour, he would never have been, at forty, a successful architect with a big, old house and two Japanese servants, and a liberal income of his own, but yet a bachelor.

Teddy tipped his hat farther back on his head and looked down at his necktie with disapproval in his eyes. For half a cent he would have gone back upstairs and changed that dark blue tie for a certain light and cheerful red one, more in harmony with his spirits and the day.

“I didn’t say anything about my ‘girl.’” His mind was still on his tie, but something in his friend’s tone jarred on his May-time mood. Hang it all, Coles

couldn't forget that it was April. Probably he was still frozen in, back in March.

"No. I didn't say anything about my 'girl,'" he repeated. "I said 'girls'; that's different. A fellow takes girls and weather as they come, and I merely remarked that I'd take them capricious. That's how I'd jolly well have to take them anyway, I suppose. But as for the girl—she may be capricious; but, Coles——"

"Go over and quote your poetry to the sparrows in the churchyard," urged the older man. "Be merciful to your friends."

Teddy looked at him pityingly. "Coles, if you'd quit building houses and build air castles for a while it might not improve your front elevation but it'd brighten up your interior a whole lot. I'd quote poetry to you if I knew any. You need it more than the sparrows. The Lord's looking out for them—we've got the Bible for that—but I'm afraid He's taken his eye off you. Now, as I was saying, when *the Girl* comes along——"

And just then she came along.

He knew it the moment he saw her, though he did not know that he knew it. He only knew that the glad spring world was past budding—was in flower.

She was like—— What was she like? For a moment he suspected that he was going to quote poetry,

after all. Little fragmentary phrases came swarming out of his memory, subconscious salvage from reading he had considered a bore in college days, things about eyes and stars and faces and flowers and foolish stuff like that. The poets weren't such a rotten lot; they knew a thing or two. Even her back, as she went away down the street, had a look—— Well, there was something about Artemis, or maybe it was Atalanta. Anyway it was some young heathen, and she was a corker when it came to getting over the ground.

"By Jove!" he gasped, with a hasty look at his watch, "I'm ten minutes late for my engagement now. See you at the club at two, old man."

He was off, down the street, on the old spring trail.

Kennedy Coles looked after him with a grin. He was not so crusty that he did not know a pretty girl when he saw one, or had not noticed the ways of men and maids.

"Young idiot," he said laughingly; but there was affection in his voice. He was fond of the young idiot. People usually *were* fond of Teddy Burton.

The Girl walked rapidly. She was slender and straight, and not too tall.

"Just about up to my ears," Teddy reflected with satisfaction. That was a cosy height. Only a little droop of the girl's head and there you were! It

occurred to him, however, that this girl's head did not look as though it would droop readily. It was too proudly poised. Well, who wanted a girl's head to droop whenever it came near a shoulder? He liked them proud, himself, chin up and a neck that didn't poke forward from between the shoulders. Probably that was what the poets meant by a throat like a tower of ivory. Maybe it wasn't the poets. Perhaps it was Solomon or David. Anyway some of those knowing old geezers had put it that way. The girl's back was wonderful, but her face! He wished he were coming toward her instead of following her. No, if he were coming toward her he'd soon have passed her. As things were, he could at least keep within sight of her.

But he could not. She suddenly turned in at an apartment-house door. A loose-jointed, sandy-haired Irishman, who was sunning himself in the doorway, stepped aside and jerked off his cap. She stopped to speak to him, smiled at him—lucky dog! Her profile was more wonderful than her back.

Just before the gloomy hall swallowed her she turned to say something more to the man in the doorway.

Her full face! Really the English language was a poor anæmic affair. There was not an adjective in it that could do justice to her full face.

The sandy-haired man followed the Girl into the darkness. The doorway yawned emptily. The tall, ugly, brownstone building looked very much like any other apartment house of the mid-Victorian period. Teddy marvelled at its reticence. He had passed it the day before and felt no thrill, no presentment. How was one to suspect that a sullen brownstone front and two particularly painful caryatids sheltered a girl like that? Any apartment house in which she made her home should have forgotten its gloomy past, should have broken out into buff brick and white stone and window boxes and carvings of fruit and flowers—should have been cheerful from basement to roof—but no apartment house could be a fit shrine for Her. His fancy installed her in a big country house—a white country house among lawns and gardens and trees. Sunshine everywhere and colour and the blue of water and the blue of hills and the Girl in a white frock.

The sandy-haired man reappeared in the doorway and looked curiously at the stranger who stood apparently rapt in admiration of the brownstone façade.

“Were ye huntin’ for somebuddy?” he asked.

Teddy came back from a garden overlooking the sea.

“N-no,” he stammered. “I’ve found somebody, thank you.”

Dennis Flavin watched him as he went away down the street.

"He's a good-lukkin' lad," he said to the hall boy who had joined him, "but I misdoubt he has too many in the early mornin'. 'Tis a bad system that, Fred. Ye should work up aisy to the evenin', if ye drink at all. Ye'll be the betther for lavin' the stuff alone, me boy, and the surer av kapin' yer job—and, by the same token, I'm moinded av an errand I have on Sixt' Av'noo. Ye can tell anybuddy that asks fer me I'll be back in the wink av an eye."

He went his thirsty way and the hall boy dozed on the elevator seat, and, up in the Bonner apartment Jean Mackaye busied herself about her morning work. Nobody had been jarred out of the usual routine except Edward Burton, Jr.; but that young man, abandoning all prearranged plans, swung aboard a Fifth Avenue 'bus and rode up to Central Park. There, through the long morning hours, while angry friends telephoned vainly to all his accustomed haunts, he sat on a sunny bench with spring yearning round about him, and wondered who She was.

The next morning, when Icho, Kennedy Coles's houseman, climbed to the parlour floor in the progress of his early morning work, he was surprised to find his master's guest up, dressed, and seated in the big bay window of the library from which could be enjoyed

an uninterrupted view both up and down the street. The hour was seven-thirty, and early rising had never been this guest's specialty. Ichō took the problem to Tokichi, the cook, who was older and more used to American ways.

"He has, maybe so, lost much money at poker," said Tokichi sagely. Then, happening to be standing by an open window, he sniffed the spring air and had a vision of iris fields and cherry bloom. "Or, maybe so, he has seen dam fine girl," he added, and he smiled as he prepared a grape-fruit for the early riser. America, Japan—the country made little difference when a young man met a "dam fine girl" in the springtime.

Teddy had not slept well. In the first place, he had gone to bed late after an evening's celebration of his return to town. Then, just as he was lapsing into drowsiness, a horrible thought had leaped at him out of the dark.

What if she were married!

That had kept him awake for a long while; but in the end he persuaded himself that the thing was unthinkable, impossible. Fate could not play him so scurvy a trick.

For the second time he had dozed; but, just beside the gates of the Castle of Sleep, another good idea assailed him.

He had taken it for granted that she lived in the



"Probably she did the marketing for her mother or for a sick friend—but it wasn't necessary to be so nice to a red-headed little market man. What was the use of smiling like that at a market man when there were men who would give—but of course market men must be propitiated"

apartment. Perhaps she didn't. She might have been calling on a friend. She might have gone away later in the morning, while he was mooning in the Park. He sat up in bed to wrestle with the waking nightmare. Why hadn't he stayed at home and watched the apartment house? How could he find her if she had gone? Drivelling, chuckle-headed ass that he was. He had lost her!

Sudden recollection of a red-headed Irishman's doffed cap and the Girl's smiling greeting pulled him out of the Slough of Despond. The Irishman looked like a janitor, and janitors were open to diplomatic overtures. If the man did not know where she lived, he could probably find out. But how to meet her?

Of course he might happen to know some one who knew her, but that was a chance shot; and if he did not know any friend of hers, what could he do, short of having a fit at her feet or wrecking his car as she passed by? Even in case of such a casualty, she would probably call a policeman and go her way.

He might rent an apartment in the building; but she wasn't the sort of a girl a fellow could speak to in the elevator. She'd have gone away for the summer long before he would dare make a break like that.

For hours he lay puzzling over the problem, inventing imaginary meetings in which he played heroic rôles, while the Girl turned to him and clung. He had

just pulled her from under a touring car at Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue and was himself lying crushed and bleeding on the pavement when sleep overtook him and saved an already-overburdened traffic policeman from maddening complications.

Why, after all this, he wakened two hours earlier than usual, let the love-smitten tell. Waken he did, and instead of yawning and turning over luxuriously for another nap as was his habit, he sprang from bed the moment his eyes opened, and rushed his bath and toilet as though important business were waiting. Important business *was* waiting. The Girl might be taking an early train, might make a practice of early morning walks, might throw open a front window and lean out into the sunshine. With the daylight, confidence in his luck had returned. He felt sure that she was hidden away behind the ugly brownstone wall—sure that somewhere, somehow, he and she would come together. Cupid would never knock a fellow all in a heap and let it go at that.

But he must not lose any tricks. Luck was one thing and good management was another. So he sat in the bay window and watched the caryatides until his own neck and shoulders ached in sympathy with theirs.

When Icho announced breakfast, the guest upset tradition again by asking to have his coffee brought to

him where he was. No, he didn't care for a grapefruit or for eggs. Only the coffee, served right there. His host, strolling downstairs at nine o'clock, found him ostensibly reading a morning paper, but keeping a watchful eye on the apartment-house door.

"Had your breakfast?" Coles asked in surprise.

"Yes, old man. Felt a bit headachey. Thought some coffee would fix me up. You see I've an important engagement."

"Another?" Coles's face was profoundly serious but his guest reddened guiltily and retired into the folds of his newspaper.

Five minutes later he sprang from his chair, rushed into the hall, grabbed his hat, and slammed the front door behind him.

He was standing on the steps as she passed. She was even lovelier than he had thought. Her lips curled up at the corners and her brown eyes smiled out at the world from under their long lashes. She was young and glad. The spring was in her blood and she went liting by like a gay tune set to joyous words.

Teddy followed her down the street to Sixth Avenue and along the Avenue southward. Overhead the L trains rattled and roared; on the street, clattering, clanging, trolley cars ground shrieks from the helpless rails—trucks and market wagons wound heavily in and out among L pillars and street cars and

hurrying crowds; stale smells came stealing out from dark shops to defile the soft, warm air, and soot floated grimly down the sunbeam slopes; across the street a police wagon dumped a load of drunks and disorderlies on the sidewalk before the steps of Jefferson police court; man-made horrors blurred the smile of spring, but Teddy Burton found lower Sixth Avenue a primrose path.

When the Girl stopped at a market, the doubts of the night once more elbowed their way into his sunshine.

If she were married!—but she wasn't married. She couldn't be married. She didn't look married. Just because a girl bought beefsteak and *escarole*, she wasn't necessarily married. Probably she did the marketing for her mother or for a sick friend—but it wasn't necessary to be so nice to a red-headed little market man. What was the use of smiling like that at a market man when there were men who would give—but of course market men must be propitiated. Nobody liked tough steak. Teddy didn't himself, and he always tried to be reasonable; he prided himself upon it. Still he was glad when she had finished her marketing. He did not follow her home. Being a gentleman was a habit with him. Being a lover was only an obsession.

So he stood in the cigar-store door and watched her go

up the Avenue and turned into Twelfth Street before he, too, strolled that way. When he reached the Twelfth Street corner she was just disappearing through the door of the apartment house, but his heart was light. She lived there—or at least she was staying there—and she probably went to market every morning. Perhaps she went somewhere in the afternoons, too. It was something to see her even if he did not know her, and the janitor was Irish. One could always get on with the Irish.

She did not go out that afternoon. Teddy was disappointed; but sitting in a sunny bay window, watching the house where the Only Girl lives and thinking long thoughts, was not such a bad way of spending a spring afternoon.

The next morning she went to market—in a different hat, a distractingly becoming hat with a white wing tilting it to leeward. Teddy did not follow her this time. He only stood on the steps and watched her go by, then waited for her to come home. Her hair waved up from the nape of her neck. So few girls had back hair like that. Usually it was stringy.

On the third day she did not go to market. As a matter of fact, she decided to use the cold steak for hash and there were salad and string beans in the house; so she telephoned to the blond Mr. Parsons for some onions and turned her attention to silver

cleaning. But the young man on Kennedy Coles's front steps could not know all these unromantic facts. He only knew that spring was a fake and that, in spite of a blue and cloudless sky, the sun refused to shine.

Something had happened. The Girl was ill—or perhaps she had gone away in the night. He waited until one o'clock, did scant justice to Tokichi's excellent luncheon, and then began walking around the block. It was impossible to sit still any longer yet he could not go far away.

On the third lap he passed Mr. Flavin, tacking carefully home from one of his frequent excursions to Sixth Avenue. Teddy did not recognize the back, but the profile prodded his memory and, turning, he saw the genial rubicund face with its thatch of carrot hair. The Irishman was smiling. An aura of satisfaction and good will toward men folded him round. The moment was auspicious and, recognizing the fact, Teddy stopped and waited for the man.

Mr. Flavin remembered him. "Huntin' agin, is it?" he asked cheerfully.

"Well—in a way," the young man admitted. "Fact is, I'm hunting for information and I rather think you can give it to me."

Mr. Flavin swelled his chest and leaned against a neighbour's iron fence—not that he actually needed

the support, but because he felt that he could give his entire attention to the subject in hand if he did not have to devote any of it to dominating his legs.

"I'm the grand one for that same," he said encouragingly. "There's no man knows the neighbourhood better. And what sort of information would it be now?"

Teddy hesitated, cleared his throat. A wave of crimson spread from his collar to his hair.

"And is it so?" Mr. Flavin's tone was indulgent. However unreliable his legs might be, his eyes and his wits were still working. "Now what would she be loike?" he prompted.

Teddy made the plunge. He did not like finding out about Her in this way, but there seemed to be no other.

"I wanted to ask you about a young lady who lives in your house," he said. His gravity approached solemnity, and Mr. Flavin's face became correspondingly serious, though his eyes twinkled.

"There's some eight or nine av thim about the place."

Teddy's heart protested. There was only One.

"She has brown eyes and hair," he explained.

It was horribly inadequate but if he tried to describe how she really looked to him, the man would think him mad.

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"Some do," assented Mr. Flavin.

"And pink cheeks," supplemented Teddy.

"It's a way with the young things."

"She's—well, she's quite different."

Mr. Flavin laughed.

"Ye've no flow av language atall, atall. It's aisy seein' ye're not Irish, man. Now if ye're manin' a colleen wid the two eyes av her like runnin' wather with the sun on it, and lips as red as rowan berries, and a smile that'd coax a mavis off the branch, and a way wid her altogither that makes a man think the sun's shining whin she does go by, and the sun, moon, and stars are drowned entirely whin she's out av his sight; if ye're manin' her——"

"That's her!" Teddy's grammar was weak, but his conviction was strong.

Mr. Flavin leaned more comfortably against the iron fence.

"'Tis a great thing to have the gift av spache, me boy; an' 'tis the Irish that make the fine lovers. As for husbands, that's as may be."

"But the Girl?" urged Teddy.

"Well, now, the gurril's name is Scotch. 'Tis her only fault. Her name's Jean Mackaye, and she's maid to thim daft Bonners on the eighth floor."

For a moment the world reeled round Edward Burton, Jr. He put out a groping hand to steady it

and found the iron fence. It was good to hold fast to something that seemed stationary.

From some remote place Mr. Flavin's voice drifted to him.

"She's the wonder av the wurrd fer wurrk, is that gurrl. Not a speck av durrt will she have on the primises. 'Tis not healthy to be so clane, I do think. And she cooks that fine, the little ould lady and gintleman are plumpin' up like partridges. She's cook and nurrs and guardeen and hiven knows what ilse to thim two. They had the ggrand luck whin they got her."

Teddy relinquished his grip of the fence, squared his shoulders, pulled himself together. What a fool he was! Of course the man wasn't talking about *the* Girl.

"That's not the young lady I mean," he said. "The one I'm talking about wears a dark blue suit and a hat with a white wing."

"'Tis the same," declared Mr. Flavin. "Man, there's no two av thim like that in one house or in a hundred houses for that matther. Ye cud take her fer the daughter av the Prisident, and she just a wurrking-out gurrl. Bridget, me wife, says she'd look ggrand on a throne, that gurrl—and it's the Lord's truth. If ye can trust the pictures in the paper, she'd make the other quanes look like two shpots, the whole bunch av thim."

"Does she go to market in the mornings?" Teddy was clinging desperately to straws of hope.

"She does that, but she didn't go this mornin'. I was up to fix the drain in the ice box and it was all done by now. She'll be havin' for dinner the-day she said, so there was no need av goin' out and wastin' time. There's nothin' wasted in that flat—not aven the maid's time. She'd make a grrand wife for some poor man, that gurrl."

The eagerness had all died out of Teddy Burton's face. He looked white and hurt and bewildered; but he managed a rather sickly smile as he pressed a dollar bill into Mr. Flavin's willing hand.

"Thanks awfully," he said. "Of course you won't mention my inquiring."

"Divil a wurrd. I was a great lad for the gurrls mesilf."

Teddy turned on his heel and went away.

Icho opened the door for him.

"Honourable Sir wants something?" the little man asked solicitously, after one look at the Honourable Sir's unhappy face.

"Wants to be let alone," Teddy answered ungraciously as he shot toward the stairs.

Arrived in his own room, he bolted the door, dropped into a chair, and tried to look the truth in the face unflinchingly.

A servant girl!

All the traditions and prejudices of his class quivered under the blow. It had never even occurred to him that she did not belong in his own little world. He had not given a thought to money, had not cared whether she was rich or poor; but birth and breeding—he had taken these as a matter of course. She looked so unmistakably a gentlewoman, thoroughly bred every inch of her. He had gloried in that look of hers. The Burton women had always been like that—not beautiful like the Girl, but with an air. He could remember his own mother though she had been dead so long—a frail, blonde woman with the sweetest eyes in the world and the proudest mouth. And his grandmother—she had been a Carter of Virginia and never had allowed any one to forget it. Ugly little woman but *grande dame* always. There were five generations of that sort of thing behind him. That was a long record for America and before that—back in England—well, the family tree branched out most imposingly in England. A snob was a loathsome beast but there *was* something about family. He had always been brought up to feel that he owed a good deal to his; and if he had not, so far, added to its glory, he had, at least, been negatively loyal. He had come through college with no honours, but without any dishonours and that was fairly good for a

millionaire's son. Perhaps being the most popular man in his class and making the football team had even been honours.

Since college he had played around and spent a good deal of money; but he hadn't done anything very bad. The old gentleman had told him to take two years and get the foolishness out of his system, and he had been doing it. There might be a bit of foolishness left, here and there in a corner; but, on the whole, he was about ready to settle down to business. He had always intended to go home to Buffalo, tackle a job in the factory, marry the right girl, and be a credit to the Burtons.

"The right girl!"

A glad young face smiled at him from under a white-winged hat set saucily atilt, and his heart leaped for joy in the vision, but fell back, a leaden weight.

The right girl was the wrong girl.

He had found her. Even now he had no doubt of that. Servant or princess, there was the one girl in the world for him.

But if he should say to his father:

"I'm going to marry a girl who is a servant in a flat down on Twelfth Street——" Imagination failed him. It was not that he was afraid of his father, It was that he thought such a lot of him. It would be

beastly rough on the old gentleman to have all his plans and hopes and ambitions knocked from under him like that. He'd been such a corking good sort, and when a chap was an only son—— Perhaps if he could just see the Girl—— No. Dad was broad minded but he'd always been down on a fellow's marrying out of his own class, or a girl's doing it either. Teddy had agreed with him about that. A man and his wife ought to have the same background, same traditions, same point of view, same tastes. Even at that, marriage was a long shot. One ought to play for safety. Then there was the other family—the girl's family. She might be lovely enough and adaptable enough to fit in after a while, but if her family was impossible? Thanksgivings! Christmases! Grandfathers and grandmothers and uncles and aunts for a fellow's children!

Oh, hell!

He sprang from his chair, jammed his hat on his head, and went out into the late afternoon sunshine. His problem was too big for four walls.

Fifth Avenue, even between Twelfth Street and Twenty-sixth Street was spring kissed. A strayed flower seller at the corner of Fourteenth Street offered his tray of daffodils, fresh enough still to make the whole neighbourhood seem aglow. A little Jewish factory girl, scurrying out of one of the tall

buildings, had a bunch of arbutus pinned to her coat collar. The driver of an express wagon, lolling on his seat before the office, wore a red rose in his button-hole. But the tall young man who went striding up the street with his soft hat pulled low over a scowling face noticed none of these things—was hopelessly out of tune with a world that smiled.

Farther up town the sidewalks were crowded from shop door to curb, solid battalions of motor cars filled the streets. Not one flower seller here but dozens of them, pushing their way through the crowd, thrusting masses of violets, roses, arbutus, daffodils, narcissi under the eyes of the passer-by, leaving trails of fragrance behind them. Florists' windows shouted of spring. Jewellers' windows were Arabian Nights' dreams, gay finery flaunted in the windows of the shops that catered to fashion's whims.

Everywhere colour and light and luxury and laughter. Everywhere women's faces, young and old, pretty and homely, but all with smiles on their lips and lights in their eyes.

Teddy had always loved Fifth Avenue on a spring afternoon, but now he went ploughing his way along it, blind and deaf to its lure.

Women's faces? There was only one woman's face, and it belonged to a girl who was cooking another woman's dinner in a kitchen on Twelfth Street.

The sun was setting when he reached the upper end of the Park, but he went on, through the soft twilight and the clinging dusk, into the starlit spring night. When he found himself in a little park far up on the bank of the Hudson he knew that he had, unconsciously, been heading for there ever since leaving home.

He had discovered the place years before and had always remembered it as curiously out of the life current eddying round about it. Now it was as lonely as his memory of it, and he dropped down on a bench with a sudden realization that he was tired.

Far below he could see the river, dark but liquidly mirroring the stars. Beyond, an irregular line of darkness—less black, and jewel-set here and there with clustering lights—marked the Jersey shore. Above was the wide starry sky—dark, too, but with an infinite capacity for light.

The noises of the city had died away to a murmur, rising and falling on a night wind that was chill, though it had moments of relenting—was warmed, now and then, by odd, sudden little breaths from the lips of spring.

The man on the bench turned his coat collar up about his throat, rammed his hands down into his pockets, and stared at the river.

He had come to this quiet place to think things

out; but, now that he was there, his thoughts did not seem as important as they had seemed in his room down on Twelfth Street. He did not feel so important himself.

His eyes wandered from the stars that quivered in the river to the stars that glowed serenely in the sky above. Funny thing how many stars there were. He had never realized it before, had never thought much about the stars. They didn't jump out at a fellow the way the moon did. One took them for granted; but, seen from a hilltop, on a night of spring, they made a chap feel—he couldn't quite tell how they did make a chap feel, only they took the fever out of him. A man could make all sorts of a fool of himself under the moon, but if he once let the stars get at him, he was as likely as not to go down on his marrow bones and pray.

That was it! That was the way the stars made a chap feel—like praying. No wonder he couldn't recognize the feeling right at first. They were so far away and quiet and steadfast. Who was the blamed fool that started the "twinkle, twinkle" business about the stars? Nice sort of a brain he must have had. Anybody who'd make the stars twinkle, would call Mt. Blanc "nice."

Worlds, all of them! Worlds swinging along through space, to some tune of their own, since the

beginning of time—and here was a silly ass of an atom on one ha'penny world raving about grandfathers!

Suddenly he pushed his hat back on his head and laughed.

Five generations of Burtons! Good Lord!

The Burtons weren't so important after all, if you put it to the stars.

Who wanted to marry a girl's grandmother? And who cared a tinker's damn whether a girl worked in a kitchen or loafed in a drawing-room, so long as she was the Girl of Girls? As a matter of fact, the odds ought to be in favour of the cook. Any fool could loaf.

When it came down to star values, what had he, Edward Burton, Jr., to offer to a girl? Family—piffle! Money—rot!

The Girl could cook. What could *he* do? She had been making her own way in the world, making an honest living, fighting, with her chin up and a smile in her eyes, while he had been pottering around on yachts and polo ponies, spending the money his father had been man enough to make.

Servant? Well, what was life for but for service? Jolly lot of serving he'd ever done! He wasn't fit to live on the same street with the Girl. He wasn't fit to live on the same earth with her.

Here he'd been wondering whether he could con-

descend to marry a servant. It hadn't occurred to him that she might insist upon marrying a Man.

Marry him? Why, she probably wouldn't even let him black her kitchen stove for her.

Alone, under the stars, Teddy Burton humbled himself—and prayed, after a fashion, though he did not know that he was praying. Honest humility and a desperate longing to be worthy of great happiness come very close to prayer.

At nine o'clock that night a tired but cheerful young man opened the door of Kennedy Coles's house and turned to look up at the sky. Only a narrow river of blue-black showed between the rooftops; but there were stars in it.

"Right you are, boys!" the young man said irreverently. "The Burton family isn't such a much!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE decision made under the stars was all very well in its way, and its way was a good one; but when Teddy Burton wakened the next morning, perplexity and doubt once more claimed him for their own. One hurdle was taken. Looking back, he wondered that he had ever for a moment balked at it. He hated to worry his father, but a man could not marry simply to please his father, and as soon as Edward Burton, Sr., recovered from the first shock, as soon as he saw Jean—— Oh, it would be too easy. There wasn't a man living who could resist her.

As for her doing housework, that ought to count one for her. Why on earth there should be a prejudice against domestic service he couldn't understand. If a girl had to earn her living, the natural thing was for her to turn to woman's work. A nice girl was a lot better off in a home than in a shop, or a factory or an office.

If for the smallest fraction of a moment he felt a misgiving, he shook it off. Suppose she shouldn't match her face; suppose she should be illiterate, com-

mon. He laughed; the thing simply wasn't possible. There were pretty girls without brains or refinement or morals. He'd met a lot of them, and some of the lot were in his own class, that precious superior class he had been doddering around about the day before; but you could always tell whether when you got by a pretty face you were going to find anybody home. Now Jean—[he liked that name. It sounded sensible, characterful, and yet it was such a cozy, dear little name]—well, Jean wasn't pretty. She was beautiful—and the beauty wasn't just a matter of complexion and colour and the shape of her chin and her nose and all that sort of thing. It was the soul of her that made the difference between pretty and beautiful. A girl with that face couldn't help being good and sweet and dear—oh, unspeakably dear. Dad would realize that, too. He was an understanding sort of a man, Dad was.

But it was one thing to adore a girl and quite another thing to find a chance to tell her so. How in the name of Cupid was he to meet her, to know her, to persuade her that he wasn't a bad risk—as husbands go? He puzzled over the problem while he dressed, while he ate his breakfast, but then forgot it in the excitement of the absorbing, vital question of the moment. Would she go to market? Wouldn't she go to market? Would he see her in a few minutes or

would he be obliged to drag through another interminable day without a glimpse of her?

She went to market.

He saw the white wing leave the darkness of the apartment-house doorway. Then he saw her face. It came nearer, nearer; was beside him; passed him; left him limp.

Shades of departed lovers, what a girl! He must meet her now—at once. Waiting was out of the question. And in his impatient fumbling for ways and means he remembered the Irish janitor. A good-natured fellow—and every Irishman loved a lover. Yes; the janitor was his one best bet. Perhaps the man could think of a way, do something, suggest something.

“There’s a man wants you,” the hall boy announced to Mr. Flavin an hour later.

“What sort of a man?” the janitor asked. He was not owing anything to speak of at the moment, but he had the habit of caution.

“A young fellow in a gray suit and a hurry.”

“Well, now, I wonder——” mused Mr. Flavin, laying aside his paper.

“I was thinkin’ it was you,” he said to his visitor a moment later. “Wud ye come in, or wud ye stay out, or wud ye walk a ways with me. I’ve an irrاند to Sixt’ Av’noo.”

They attended to the errand and Teddy laid his case frankly before the deeply sympathetic Celt—frankly but with reservations. He did not mention his name or his social standing or his father's money. He was simply a young man up to the ears in love with a girl he did not know. What could Mr. Flavin, with proper encouragement and compensation, do about it?"

The janitor took off his hat and ran his fingers through his red hair.

"Faith an' it's not mesilf that wud blame ye, lad." His voice oozed sympathy. "She's the rose av the wurld. Did ye iver see my Bridget? She was rosy hersilf, Bridget was. I mind me there was a path up out av Ballyshannon, along the sea—but that's neither here nor there and Bridget's some changed. Still I know. Lad, I know. Ain't it the ggrand, chokin', hurrtful feelin'? Ye wudn't give a pint av small beer half drunk up fer yersilf. Ye know ye're a sinful, worthless young divil, but ye feel ye have it in ye to change, and ye're thinkin' maybe an angel 'ud stoop down from hivin and take a hand at improvin' ye, because 'tis angels are built on the lovin' and savin' plan. Oh, well, I know—but the trouble's here, mon. Yer angel's the kind that holds her head so high she wudn't be afther seein' sinful but well-manin' young men unless they was called to her

attention special. She has no eye out fer the lads. There's been no call fer it. 'Tis the lads that have had the eyes."

"I thought maybe you—— She seemed very jolly and friendly with you——" Teddy was incoherent but hopeful.

Mr. Flavin looked at him pityingly.

"I, is it? Me bhoy, d'ye think I'd dare lead a lad av my acquaintance up to her and introjuce him? 'Tis plain ye haven't her measure atall, atall. Frindly with me? She is that; but do I call her by her first name as I do the other maids in the house? Not John Flavin. It's 'Miss Mackaye' to her if ye please, and yet she's that swate and smilin' and nivr a wurrd that isn't frindly. Ye can't tell what it is, but ye'd no more take a liberty with her than ye'd kick a keg of dynamite. Not that she'd go off with a bang and clutter up the place. She'd luk at ye. That's all—and that'd be enough. 'Twould be only in hell ye'd get thawed out and I'm hopin' I'll stop short av thim same tropics. No, sorr. I'm wishful to help ye. Ivery man with a heart in him is willing to help on a courtin'—and 'tis queer 'tis so whin the consequences av courtin' and marryin' is known to be as they are—but I cudn't introjuce ye to her or put ye in the way av spakin' with her—or give her a note ye'd be afther writin'. Many's the time I'ved one

it for others but the gurrles was different. Whin ye git to know this wan, mind ye, it'll have to be regular."

So that chance was done for.

Teddy was disappointed, but down in his heart, he rejoiced. He was glad she was not a girl Mr. Flavin could make free with. He had not really imagined the janitor could do anything to help him. He had only hoped; he did not know just what he had hoped. He intended to know her. That was settled; but how? How? How?

For a week he went about with that "how?" beating at his brain. For a week he fed his hungry heart on glimpses of Her. The days when she went out twice were feast days. A Friday when she kept within doors was fast day indeed.

Then came Sunday. She did not go out until afternoon on Sundays. At least she had not gone out until afternoon on the Sunday before this one. Teddy settled himself for a long and wearisome morning with the Sunday papers; but just in order to take no risks, he sat in the bay window and made note of every flutter of petticoats in the doorway of the house where She was hidden.

By twelve o'clock he had read everything the papers had to offer except the advertisements. He yawned, looked at his watch, glanced down the

street, and idly turned his attention to the advertising pages of the *Herald*. The "Position Wanted" columns were the first to catch his eye. A wealth of competent female stenographers and travelling companions and of young men ably fitted to take charge of large business interests or superintend estates! It was sad to know that such talents were being allowed to languish.

"Domestic service." The reader's interest quickened. He studied the columns carefully and his astonishment grew as he read. Here were cooks of superlative ability, laundresses whose merits were bounded only by the cost of advertising rates, general houseworkers who could make life for any family one round of happiness and content; it ought to be a perfectly simple matter to pick up satisfactory servants. Teddy wondered why women made such rough going of it. Women were not naturally executive—that was it. A household should be run like a business. Now, if a man were keeping house—— If he had had a wife he would have explained the thing to her; and, if she had been married to him a short time, she would have argued the question with him; but, if she had been married long enough to acquire wisdom, she would have said: "Yes, dear," and have gone on thinking of something else. There are certain fundamental characteristics

in the Eternal Masculine. When one runs up against them, one goes around, not through; but it takes a wife some time to learn this interesting fact.

Not having a wife, Teddy Burton kept his theories and deductions to himself, and they were slightly shaken by perusal of the next department in the paper. Here on the very same page with the offers of irreproachable service were columns of appeals for help. Nobody wanted a stenographer or a travelling companion, but small families without children, pledged to stay in the city, willing to pay high wages, wanted general houseworkers. Families moving to the country clamoured for cooks, laundresses, waitresses. Queer that the admirable servants and the tempting positions could not get nearer together than adjoining columns in the paper.

Here were men wanted; no one seemed to need a superintendent for an estate, but farm hands and ordinary all-around men for country places were in tremendous demand.

Teddy's eyes travelled down the column. Suddenly he sat up as though he had had an electric shock, clutched the paper in both hands, stared incredulously at something in the middle of the column headed "Help Wanted—Male."

"Handy man or boy on small farm, used only as summer home. Must run small car and care for

garden. No heavy farming." The advertisement was like many others but it was the address that had caught his eye: "Apply 38 West Twelfth Street. Bonner."

Thirty-eight West Twelfth Street! She lived there. Bonner—the janitor had said that she worked for "Thim daft Bonners."

They were going to the country. Perhaps they were going soon. She would go with them of course, and he—— His world was a barren, illimitable wilderness. Summer stretched out before him—empty, forlorn, interminable.

She was going to the country, to a farm. He could not hang around a farm without being regarded as a suspicious character; could not even enjoy the tantalizing privilege of sitting somewhere and, once a day, seeing her pass by.

It occurred to him that he might find a place near her farm where he could board. There would be more chance for informal meeting in the country. Snakes, for instance; all women were afraid of snakes. If there were no snakes there would surely be cows, and most city women were afraid of cows. She didn't look as though she would be afraid of cows, but—you never could tell. For a moment or two he felt hopeful; but a wave of impatience swept through him. Suppose the snakes and the cows should fail him?

Suppose she could qualify for snake-charmer and milkmaid? He was tired of leaving things on the knees of the gods. He wanted to *do* something. Hang it all, he envied the fellow who was going to be the Bonners' handy man.

The paper fell from his hands, the light of inspiration dawned in his eyes.

The Bonners' handy man!

"Teddy, my boy," the young man in the armchair said gaily, "that's *you*."

It was a snapshot decision but the more he thought it over, the better he liked it. He had been tired of leaving the things on the knees of the gods. Well, the gods, in merry mood, had tossed the responsibility into his own hands. If he fumbled it, the fault was his; but he did not intend to fumble it.

His ideas of a handy man's duties on a small farm were vague, but he could run the car—that was a cinch. As for the garden, he had never really dugged and delved but he knew something about a garden. Macdonald, the old Scotch gardener at home, was a great friend of his. He had fussed around the gardens quite a lot and Mac had taught him a good many things. He rather thought he could get away with the gardening.

Being handy did not sound difficult. It probably meant a little of everything and a good deal of helping

the cook. He grinned joyously as that phase of the job presented itself. Would he be a handy man for the Bonners?

He would.

If things should go wrong, he could leave; but he did not intend to leave. He intended to stay and help the cook. When he did leave he would take the cook with him and keep right on helping her.

His spirits rose, effervesced.

He went up to his room, looked his clothes over carefully, picked out a well-worn suit of tweeds he had intended giving away, and dug a battered cap out of his steamer roll. As he worked, he whistled, and Icho, polishing furniture in a room across the hall, smiled happily.

"Some better now," he said to himself with cheerful satisfaction.

Edward Burton Jr. *was* "some better." He was much better. His uncertainty and discouragement were gone. His path stretched straight before him—a bit thorny perhaps, but what of that? The only sort of trail he hated was a lost trail.

The next morning he put on his old tweeds, laid the old cap on the hall table and went to breakfast with a look on his face that distracted Icho's attention from the unaccustomed shabbiness of his coat. Kennedy Coles noticed both the look and the clothes and

pondered over them; but he made no comment. The boy was up to something. From the glint of his eye Coles suspected devilment and—following on the heels of two weeks' restlessness, moodiness, alternating excitement and despondency—the projected devilment very likely had to do with a woman. The older man felt slightly uneasy. Teddy Burton had always flirted with any pretty girl he met, but he had invariably kept his head. There was a certain wholesome common sense back of his reckless gaiety, and he was such a decent young chap, clean through and through, in spite of all his racketing around. Still, many a decent fellow had come an awful cropper on a designing woman's account, and Teddy was a rich man's only son.

Coles looked across the table at the young man with the laughing, reckless gray eyes, opened his mouth for speech, and promptly shut it again. When had youth ever listened to age—or to middle age? And, after all, probably there was nothing serious in the air.

After breakfast he went to his office, leaving his guest smoking and reading the paper in the bay window of the library. If he had stayed at home until ten o'clock he would have seen the aforesaid guest lean forward suddenly, look intently out of the window for a few moments, then fling his paper and

cigar aside and hurry out of the house, picking up a disreputable cap as he went.

Jean Mackaye went to mark at ten o'clock that morning and the beauty of the day tempted her to idleness, so she walked on down to Washington Square and sat on her favourite bench for a while. The fountain was playing for the first time of the season, and little half-awake leaves were throwing soft, mottled shadows over the cement walks, while here and there a tree in full leafage bulked densely green against the quivering mistiness of its neighbours.

Jean sighed softly, for no reason save that spring is sighing time. She was not unhappy. She was not even lonely. Her work kept her busy most of the time and she had found friends. Mrs. Bonner had been a little less absorbed in her work since spring had wandered up from the South, and when she did not work, she followed Jean around the apartment or sat with her in the sunny room that had been intended for a guest room. She was amusing, inconsequent, dear, the little gray lady; and her wandering talk, with its dashes and parentheses and sudden absolute abandoning of nominatives, was vastly entertaining.

Then there was Katy. Katy had acquired a way of dropping into the Bonner apartment a dozen times

a day with admiration in her eyes and slang on her tongue. She had given up the outrageous, plumed hat and was wearing a demurely saucy one with a white wing for trimming. Her new spring suit was modelled as nearly as possible upon the old blue suit Jean wore for street, and she had brushed her tangle of curly hair into recognizable imitation of Jean's simple coiffure. Even her talk was toned down a trifle; but she would have resented any suggestion that she had been influenced by the girl she so plainly adored.

Thyra came, too, and the other maids in the house—curious to see whether it was true, as Katy reported, that the Bonners' cook was not 'such a "black frost" as she seemed—came in shyly or boldly, according to their temperaments, but all came again.

Jean found them more interesting than her casual visitors of the old days.

"Someway or other they're more human," she had written to Barbara Herrick. "Probably everybody's human, but most of the girls you and I knew were so padded with artificiality that one couldn't get through to the humanity. Now these girls have their affectations and their reserves, but the big human part of them seems to be nearer the surface. You can get at them. I'm not saying that some of them don't offend my taste. That's a natural consequence of

my training; but Cabs, I'm awfully fond of some of them and I'm interested in most of them and I'm the better for knowing all of them. A lifetime of work in girls' clubs and settlements wouldn't have taught me what I've learned about working girls in a few months. The *de-haut-en-bas* business doesn't work, and with the best will in the world I don't believe anybody can weed it out of her relation to people of a lower social level. She's got to get down and work with them if she's going to understand what they do and think and feel. Probably her different training will keep her from altogether understanding even then. I don't want to do kitchen work all my life—I don't intend to; but if I ever have money and leisure again I won't use them as I did before. I want to help, Babs—and I'd know how to help, now. I don't want to be an uplifter person. I just want to be friends."

She was thinking about that letter as she sat on the bench with the leaf shadows flickering over her. Evidently she wasn't a deep or a serious-minded person. It was discouraging to plumb one's soul and find only shallows. All of the Cooper Union talk had filtered out of her brain. She hadn't any coherent ideas about economics or sociology. She couldn't feel angry or bitter or violent. She just wanted to be friends—wanted desperately, with a

lump in her throat and an ache in her heart, to be friends.

An Italian baby came toddling across the walk, clutched her knees to steady himself, and looked up questioningly into her face. He was not so very clean. He was not even pretty, but she caught him up, hugged him and kissed the place on his face that most nearly approximated cleanliness. She would have hugged and kissed the whole toddling, unsteady, not-very-clean, questioning world, if she could have drawn it into her arms.

The baby's mother—bareheaded, dark-skinned, tragic-eyed, dressed in a faded purple skirt and a bright green waist, with a knot of orange at her throat—looked up from her lace-working and flashed a smile at the young lady who had kissed her Carlo. She was pleased, but not surprised. A baby like her Carlo! Why shouldn't a pretty young lady kiss him?

Jean smiled back at her as she set the baby on his uncertain feet, and turned toward home.

She belonged to a class steeped in self-consciousness; but it occurred to her that she could enjoy wearing bright green and purple and orange, and sitting, bareheaded, in a public park and taking friendliness for granted.

When she reached home she found Mrs. Bonner

standing by one of the windows in the living room, looking idly out into the sunlit world.

"Thinking about the farm?" Jean called lightly.

Her mistress turned a happy face toward her.

"That's exactly what I *was* doing, child. You see, the young man interrupted my work. I'm so pleased with him. I'd have liked you to see him; but I'm sure you'll be pleased, too."

"Young man?" echoed the girl.

"Yes, for the farm, you know. Didn't I tell you? Rufus put the advertisement in yesterday. We always put it in on the twenty-fifth; but I didn't expect any one so soon—or so nice. They aren't so very nice usually. Most of the nice ones have steady work, I suppose, but we have to pick up a new one each year. It would be better if we could get some one up there in the neighbourhood, but we can't."

Surprise, alarm, distaste chased each other across the face of the listening girl. A young man! She might have known that a man would be needed on a farm, but she had never given the outdoor work a thought.

Now calamity was upon her. A young man hanging around her kitchen, eating at her table, thinking that he could be familiar with the cook! All her newly acquired democracy melted away. All her eager desire to be friends vanished. If it had been

a girl—— She would not mind working with another girl now. She had found out that “Judy O’Grady and the Colonel’s lady” really were “sisters under the skin” and she did not feel so fussy about the skin as she had before she learned to know Katy and Thyra and Susan and other Judys; but a young man was different. Her imagination pictured the worst. Hadn’t Mrs. Bonner said that the nice men all had steady work? Only the most ordinary sort of a man would be drifting around willing to take a summer’s job as handy man at small wages. She could see him—hulking, stupid, bad-mannered, not very clean.

“He was a little bit shabby,” Mrs. Bonner was saying, “but absolutely clean and neat, and such a likeable face—not handsome, but frank and smiling and boyish. He had good manners, too. I felt about him the way I felt about you when I first saw you, only not so much so. I believe we’re going to have a very cheerful summer. Everything is working out so well.”

She was satisfied, sure of sympathy, and Jean managed to smile, though protest was clamouring within her.

Not hulking and stupid but worse, what Katy called a “jollier”—a young man who fancied himself, and would be impertinent, fresh. Oh, why, why

did people go to the country? One could get along so nicely without a man, in town. To be sure there was Mr. Bonner, but he wasn't exactly a man. He was a scientist. When one needed anything done in town, a man came and did it and went away. Sometimes he even went away before he finished doing it.

A white house among green trees rose before her mental vision. Orioles sang to her from orchard boughs. Lilacs hung over stone walls to pour fragrance in her path. She sighed but shook her head. All her farm enthusiasm had oozed away.

She longed desperately to stay in town. Maples? Orioles? Lilacs? They were heavenly things, but Mrs. Bonner's nice young man would spoil them all.

She thought about him constantly during the busy, last days of packing and making the apartment ready for summer emptiness, and her efforts to meet Mrs. Bonner's eagerness with responsive gayety did not ring quite true; but the little gray lady was too excited to notice the failure.

She still sat at her desk a good deal of the time, but the Faroes were left to their island isolation while she busied herself with catalogues—catalogues of groceries, of fertilizers, of flowers, of vegetables. Every day she went out and bought prodigious quantities of things, coming home shamefaced but happy.

Jean, attempting to reason with her on the subject

of household supplies, found her conscious of her folly but joyously unrepentant.

"My dear I *know* we won't eat four dozen cans of sardines," she admitted. "I don't like sardines myself. I've never cared for fish of any kind since I lived on it in the Faroes; but the sardines were a 'special,' and they did seem very cheap—for 'large, boneless' ones you know. There's a young man I always go to at Macy's. He's very intelligent and helpful, and when I get comfortably fixed in a chair beside one of the little tables and he goes through the catalogue with me, it seems perfectly foolish to skip anything. He has a way of telling you how nice things are, and how they will help out when one is in the country and there isn't a grocery store within miles. After he's explained to you about anything you feel as though you'd be flying in the face of Providence if you didn't buy quantities of it. Anchovy paste for instance, and maraschino cherries, and chutney, and capers, and ripe olives, and preserved ginger, and all that sort of thing. Rufus and I never touch them, but I buy them every spring. We've got cupboards full.

"And prunes! I do hope you like prunes, Jean. My man always makes me believe that I'd be absolutely lost if my prune supply should give out, so I've a tremendous lot of them."

"You'd better let me buy the groceries," Jean suggested; but the proposition was promptly vetoed.

"Not for worlds," Mrs. Bonner said laughingly. "I love it. I never *could* enjoy buying a pound of anything at a corner store, but when there's a catalogue—and some one to explain how good things are—that's different. And then it's rather like outfitting for a long trip—only I never carried ginger and chutney on a northern trail. Once, when I went down the Mackenzie to the Arctic, we had nothing but salt fish for four weeks. I was dreadfully sick afterward—couldn't eat real food; but I was the first white woman to make that trip. There were only the Indians and a missionary, but I didn't miss other women. I wouldn't dare say it to most people, Jean, but other women are a frightful nuisance generally—on a hard trip, you know. Even when they don't cry, they clutter."

Then she told the story of the Mackenzie trip and at the end of it her audience hugged her. Jean always hugged her at the end of her northland stories. She looked so little and so gentle and so home-keeping, and her low voice flowed so softly through tales of grim dangers and hardships she had shared—of far beauties she had seen.

The garden catalogues needed no assistance from a suave and persuasive salesman. Eloquence had gone

to their making and imagination did the rest. Mrs. Bonner revelled in them.

"Jean," she called, one morning, and, going to her study, Jean found her shining eyed, rapt, a seed catalogue held close to her near-sighted eyes.

"Listen, child," she said, "I can't decide which muskmelons to try. Here's one that is 'blight-resisting, vigorous, highly coloured, fine-textured and of delicious flavour.' That sounds good, doesn't it? But I like the sound of this one, too. It's 'early' and has 'thick meat and thin rind,' and is 'firm' and 'melting' and 'very sweet.' And there's another that's 'wonderfully luscious and juicy and solid.' It's 'eatable clear through to the outside coating'—and it's 'enormously productive.' Which do you think we'd enjoy most?"

Jean yielded to the spell.

"I rather like the luscious one," she said doubtfully. "Luscious is such a fine melony word, isn't it? But they all sound delicious. I believe I'd say 'eeny, meeny'—and decide that way. Do you always have heaps of them?"

Mrs. Bonner's radiance dulled slightly, but *very* slightly.

"Well, we've never been very lucky with muskmelons," she confessed. "They seem difficult; but I think the seasons were unusual or the hills were

wrong, or something. I'm sure they'll do well this summer if we choose the right kind."

On another day the mistress of the house wandered into the kitchen, garden book in hand.

"I want a blue and white border, Jean," she said dreamily. "It seems very simple—delphiniums you know and platycodon and speedwell and white phlox and lilies and things like that—just a hundred feet of it somewhere along a path."

Or perhaps she came down with rose fever.

"I've always been afraid of roses," she admitted. "They sound so buggy and blighty; but this book says anybody can have them—the kind that bloom 'abundantly and uninterruptedly all summer.' That's the way the author puts it. They'd be lovely for the house, wouldn't they—great bowls full of them everywhere."

She bought seeds enough to plant a dozen gardens, and she ordered hundreds of plants; but she had her lucid intervals. In one of them she acknowledged that the orgy was a yearly event.

"I simply can't be sensible about it, Jean," she said. "I don't even try to be sensible. There's a part of my brain that remembers about mildew and cut worms and drought and flea beetles and all those nasty nuisances, and that knows our gardens have never amounted to anything; but the rest of my

brain goes fey when time for moving to the farm comes. It believes *anything*. Its fruit is all juicy and spicy and luscious, and its vegetables are all large and fine-flavoured, and its flowers bloom wonderfully and smell like Araby the Blest. I do hope that that part of my brain will never wake up—the part that believes and dreams.

“I can’t garden. I’m so near sighted I can’t get close enough to the ground to tell a weed from a seedling, and a cat would have to crawl up and sit on my shoulder before I’d see him; but I do so enjoy planning the gardens I don’t have.

“Maybe Edward really can garden. Did I tell you his name was Edward? I’m glad it isn’t Oscar. We had an Oscar last year. His references said he was sober and honest, and he was; but I did dislike him so. It was his mouth I think. He kept it open. Anyway, I’m prejudiced against Oscars—and Miltons, too. You’d think a Milton would be splendid, wouldn’t you—dignified and noble and all that? We got a Milton when Oscar left. He was American, too. I’d never tried an American—only Swedes and Norwegians and Germans and Poles and Italians and Irish. I had tremendous hopes of Milton but he wouldn’t do at all. He drank too much—hard cider, you know. And he made love to Hannah. After all that *was* rather splendid—making love to Hannah,

I mean. No coward could have done it. Men have been given medals for less. Probably it was the hard cider.

"What was it Lincoln said when somebody-complained to him about General Grant drinking too much? Said he'd like to know where Grant got his whisky so he could send some like it to his other generals; wasn't that it?"

"Well, hard cider must be a drink for heroes if it could give a man courage enough to make love to Hannah. Still, I'm prejudiced against Miltons.

"Edward's a pleasant name, I think, don't you? Half way between Algernon and John, you know—not too poetic and not too practical—just sensible and self-respecting. I knew an Edward once—when I was a girl—only he had brown eyes. He used to come very often. We called him Teddy."

The little gray lady fell silent all of a sudden, but there was a smile on her lips. Evidently her memories of the Teddy of long ago were pleasant ones.

Jean wondered at her. Personally she detested the name of Edward. She had never realized before that she did detest it; but she did—namby-pamby, pink-shirt and purple-tie sort of a name! As for calling a man Teddy—ridiculous! She hoped the handy man's last name was Jones. If it was, that was what she would call him—Jones.

As the day of departure came nearer the obnoxious Edward loomed larger and her spirits sank lower; but every one was too busy to notice her unaccustomed gloom. Mrs. Bonner was buying porch furniture and enjoying the proceeding enormously.

"So gay," she told Jean, "and so un-Victorian. Victoria was a good queen, but I'm glad we're living her down. I wonder what she'd have thought of yellow wicker and black-striped yellow linen with bunches of bright-coloured field flowers on it?"

Even Mr. Bonner felt the excitement in the air, forsook his study, and went about doing things not even remotely connected with the moths of North America. He blinked from under the brim of his old-fashioned soft black hat in mild surprise at the world's strenuousness and his own unwonted activities; but he was exceedingly useful, if one gave him a memorandum. Without a memorandum he was helpless; but as his wife pointed out to Jean, a great many men would have lost the memorandum.

"Rufus is so careful and methodical about his notes," she said admiringly. "It's a splendid habit. He never loses a paper with writing on it."

CHAPTER IX

WEDNESDAY, May third, was the date set for the exodus.

At eight o'clock in the morning Jean locked the last trunk and turned the luggage over to two burly expressmen. Boxes and barrels had gone the day before. The apartment was cheerless, shrouded, overshadowed by its coming desolation. Looking about her, Mrs. Bonner's maid of all work smiled with satisfaction. She was tired clear through to the immortal soul of her, but the place wore quite the proper look for a town house in summer. She had been over-conscientious about it perhaps. The apartment chandeliers hardly justified covering and the pictures might have gone unveiled but Griggsby—her useless butler—had always had the chandeliers and pictures covered. Where memory of Griggsby's methods had not served her, common sense had helped; and, in moments of utter doubt, she had written to Barbara Herrick who had promptly forwarded information extracted from the trusty and autocratic Sarah.

Jean had relaxed her stoicism before the Herricks left for their little country place in the Ramapo hills and had spent an hour of mixed emotions with Barbara in Abingdon Square. Barbara's emotions had been quite as mixed as her friend's.

"It's larky, Jean," she had said, "but I feel as if I were doing something dark and dreadful, don't you? Clandestine rendezvous and guilty secrets and hidden identity and all that sort of thing. Tom laughed at us all through breakfast; but I told him you wouldn't come to the house or to any place where you might meet people you knew, and you wouldn't let me go to your apartment, and I simply would see you; so we had to meet in some funny place like this, though Tom says we're as likely to meet business men who know us here as anywhere—going about to factories and wholesale places you know."

That idea of the wandering business man had shortened the visit, but it had been very jolly and comforting even if it was short.

"You're prettier than ever," Barbara had said judicially, "but you're different. I don't know just what it is, but it's there. You're just as nice and silly as you used to be; I'm awfully glad of that. I was afraid working might have made you serious or noble or something, but Tom said your sense of humour

would die hard. Still you *are* different. You look—well, you look as though you could get up and tackle 'most anything. If you aren't careful, you'll get to looking positively cocky, dear."

Sitting in Mrs. Bonner's stripped and cheerless living-room, Jean remembered the warning and laughed.

Babs was such an infant; but she hadn't been so far wrong. Jean felt that she *would* "tackle almost anything," if the occasion demanded; and, probably, she looked it.

She had tackled so many fearsome things in the past few months and none of them had proved too much for her—none of them but pie crust. She couldn't make good pie crust. The cook books had such a silly way of telling one to "cut the shortening in with a knife" and not to handle the stuff. How on earth you were going to mix it well and roll it and pinch it — — Still she intended to learn how to make good pies.

Moving her family was not the simplest of her experiments but, so far, everything had gone well. The apartment was in order, the packing was done, the woollens were put away for the summer, the bills were paid, the supplies were stopped, the post office had been notified of forwarding address; she checked items off on her fingers with a bland, self-satisfied smile.

The luggage had gone, and Mr. Bonner's hat and coat, bag and umbrella, and two suit cases—filled with papers from which he refused to be separated—were ready in the hall. So were Mrs. Bonner's hat and coat, veil and gloves, and bag. Their rubbers were in their bags and there was a little box of luncheon, and each elderly cherub was corralled in a study so that neither could absent-mindedly stray off out of the house and forget about the train. The cab was ordered.

Yes; she had managed beautifully. Now she would go in and dress and pack her own bag.

The actual trip would be easy enough, in spite of the pile of hand luggage, for Mr. Flavin would pack the bags into the cab and there would be porters at the station. Suddenly her comfortable satisfaction collapsed.

There would also be a handy man at the station! She had forgotten about the creature, but of course he would go up with them. Probably he would expect to sit with the cook and talk to her. She jumped up hastily and pulled the only raised shade down with a vicious jerk.

A young man was going to be taught his place—immediately, thoroughly, and for all time.

The teaching did not begin according to her schedule; for Edward was not at the station. No one ex-

cept Jean seemed to have expected him to be there and it was only after the family was comfortably settled on the train that Mrs. Bonner mentioned him.

"I had thought perhaps Edward might be useful about getting us off," she said casually, "but he suggested that it would be better for him to go up to the farm a day or two ahead of us and have the house open and put the car in order so that he could meet us with it. He was quite right, too. You've managed perfectly, Jean. I've never had such an easy time getting off to the country. Hannah always kept things so stirred up and yet she never was ready. We almost always made two or three starts before we got away and then we left most of the important things. I can outfit perfectly when I'm going away on a trip all by myself and don't have to bother about the things I'm leaving behind; but moving is different. I don't quite see how you do it but I'm sure nothing has been neglected and you haven't fussed at us at all or lost your temper or cried. Hannah always used to be tempy and she almost always cried before we got off. Just nerves, you know. I'm glad you aren't a nervous person. I'd much rather live with a woman who was stupid or dirty or wicked than with a nervous woman. Not that *you're* stupid or dirty or wicked. I'm beginning to think you're altogether perfect, child."

She leaned over to pat Jean's hand affectionately and the girl very nearly imitated the unlamented Hannah and cried, not so much because she was nervous as because she was very tired—and it was good to be praised and appreciated.

Being efficient as a matter of abstract principle might be all very well in its way but it was a lonesome way. One would rather be efficient *for* somebody—and be loved for it.

On second thought she laughed, instead of crying. Poor Hannah! If she could have laughed, perhaps she would not have cried, but in all the illuminating references to the departed one from which Jean had built up a mental image of her, there had been no mention of a sense of humour. Shepherding Mr. and Mrs. Bonner without a robust sense of humour to ease the strain, might, Jean reflected, make almost any woman nervous.

The train rolled along through the tunnel, across the Harlem and out into Surburbia—a Surburbia transfigured by spring, justifying itself, meeting all the comic supplement jokes gayly, triumphantly.

Across every little vegetable garden tender green things marched in straight or straggling lines. The tomato plants and potted geraniums, that thousands of weary commuters had carried out from town on late trains and planted before early trains, were thriv-

ing lustily. Hardy annuals were popping up out of garden beds and clumps of perennials looked down superciliously on the upstarts.

Here and there an old-fashioned garden was already abloom with iris and tulips and daffodils. Lilac buds were swelling. Dooryards were adrift with fruit blossom.

Farther out, gardens expanded, orchards ran merrily up over little hills to look at the blue water of the Sound. "Estates" shut themselves away from cottage Suburbia behind high walls and forbidding gates, but spring bloom and leafage peeped over the walls and through the grilles of the gateways.

Still farther away were little towns, close set, clustered round by summer homes but outside the commuters' paradise; and, at last, after a change of cars at New Haven, came the real country—the country of white farmhouse and broad fields and pasturing cattle, of brooks and woods and untidy stone walls along which already the weeds grew high.

Jean, looking from the car window, smiled friendly-wise at Suburbia, even in its most suburban mood. She had always hated it; but, some way or other, it appealed to her now. She understood it better. She could have enjoyed training yellow honeysuckle over a ready-made bungalow and planting round beds of foliage plants in its front yard.

The walls and gates of certain country places along the Sound brought gleams of recognition to her eyes. She knew well all that lay behind the barriers but she did not yearn for the familiar grandeur. What she wanted was the country—the green, smiling, blossom-strewn, unspoiled country; and, when, finally, the train slipped away into the quiet places, she curled herself up as comfortably as she could on the hard, red plush seat and forgot that she was tired. She did not think. She did not feel. She only sat there and watched spring flow past the car window.

Now and then the train stopped at a little station and there was a flurry of coming and going through the door that the burly brakeman threw open; but she did not turn to look.

After a while she began wondering about the homes that drifted by. She was not interested in the hurrying restless folk who were travelling with her; but the people who were living in those tree-shadowed farmhouses set beside the winding, luring white roads—she liked thinking about them.

A woman came out of an open door, crossed the yard, and called to a man who was ploughing in a field behind the house. Jean could not see her face but she stood under an apple tree in bloom and the breeze blew her apron out into fluttering white folds

that gleamed radiantly in the sunlight. Two small children knelt at a road's edge near the railway and watched the train go by. Their upturned faces were dimpling with smiles and the violets they had been gathering were bunched tightly in their small hot hands.

A young man with a puppy frolicking at his heels stopped on his way toward a long, low red barn, to lean across a fence and talk to a girl who was feeding a wobbly little calf.

Across the crest of an upland field a man walked, silhouetted against the sky and swaying rhythmically as he scattered seed broadcast over the brown waiting earth.

And everywhere, in and out and round about, was Maytime. Surely, surely, country folk in Maytime worked and played and loved and lived and were glad.

The girl at the car window began to play a game, a game of homes. She filled every farmhouse with a family of her own choosing, a family to fit the house. There were grandfathers and grandmothers, old men with wrinkled, rosy faces, and old women with quiet eyes, but all of the old folk had young hearts that remembered their own springtime.

And there were cheerful, contented, middle-aged folk, not too old yet to feel the beauty of the spring-

time though the thrill of it they missed. There were young husbands and wives with babies toddling beside them and fulfilment of promise in their faces and their hearts; and there were boys and girls—oh, swarms of boys and girls at courting age—girls who sighed and boys who longed and spring to teach them the meaning of the sighing and the longing. And then there were the children, children everywhere—children and puppies and kittens and calves and colts and lambs and fluffy yellow chickens and tiny pink pigs, all so foolish, so young, so at one with the spring. Extraordinarily nice families, all of them.

When she tired of sorting out families, Jean began choosing a home for herself. That was absorbing, fascinating business. One might so easily miss the perfect thing. The homes that were in full view were never quite satisfactory, but glimpses of white gables seen through gaps in leafy greenness tantalized; far-off dots of white on distant hilltops allured; vague outlines, at the far ends of crooked shady lanes, promised.

Somewhere, out in the spring world, was the Farm o' Dreams. Any curve of the road might bring it into view. All the world hinted at it, and Jean dreamed of it with a wistful droop of the lips and a mistful softness in her eyes.

She did not plan a family for that Farm o' Dreams

but one did not make a home alone. Perhaps some day, in the springtime——

"Jean, I think I am hungry." It was Mr. Bonner's voice and there was surprise in it, a tinge of injury. In Hannah's day being hungry would have been natural enough but Hannah's successor had always forestalled any such contingency. He had grown accustomed to having his needs supplied before he knew that they existed and now, after a trying morning, he was allowed to be hungry. Really, this moving business was most upsetting.

Jean was remorseful, apologetic. She soothed him with minced chicken and sandwiches and with coffee out of a thermos bottle and she ate six sandwiches herself by way of proving that she was a healthy young woman as well as a dreamer of dreams.

After luncheon, she allowed the pacified scientist to tell her the scientific names of all the moths common in the Connecticut valley and to describe each of them minutely. It amused him and it did not hurt her, and one cannot eat six chicken sandwiches and then take up the thread of a dream where it was broken off.

She had just been formally introduced to *Lepidoptera* and *Heterocera* when Mrs. Bonner, who had been dozing, opened her eyes, glanced out of the window, and reached for her travelling bag.

"Here we are," she said as the train stopped beside a shabby station. "Perhaps the brakeman will take the suit cases, Jean. He's always very kind—and Edward will be outside. I'm sure he will. He seemed the kind of young man who would think about hand luggage."

As she spoke, some one took the travelling bag from her, picked up the suit cases and handed them over to a sturdy boy and gathered the umbrellas together.

Edward was not outside, he was inside.

Jean had a momentary glimpse of a pleasant, sun-browned face whose eyes avoided hers. Then she was walking down the aisle in the wake of a tall, tweed-clad back that, for some reason she could not define, did not look like the back of a handy man.

And yet he *was* handy, extraordinarily handy. He transferred the party from the train to a waiting motor car, expeditiously and painlessly tucked the robes about them, slipped a leather cushion behind Mrs. Bonner's back, and went to see about the luggage all without hurry or fuss or confusion. Even Jean, who was hotly resenting his existence, had to admit that.

He did not act exactly like a trained servant. She noticed that he lifted his cap instead of touching it as he turned away. Possibly he was the black sheep of some decent family and had taken the place not be-

cause he was used to such work but because he was stranded. Something must be wrong with him or he would not take a general utility job in the country at low wages.

Probably he drank. That was usually the trouble. She would have to watch him. Mrs. Bonner was such an unsuspecting blessed, and a handy man could have *delirium tremens* in the front yard without Mr. Bonner's noticing it.

"Did he have references?" Jean asked suddenly.

Mrs. Bonner, who was peering benevolently after her handy man, looked half guilty, half triumphant. "I forgot to ask him; but you see it has all worked out beautifully. I can't seem to remember about references. They never interest me at all, and, anyway, nobody tells the truth in references, so what's the use? But Edward's eyes— Have you noticed what nice eyes he has?"

Jean had noticed. They were gray eyes, very dark gray eyes with a laughing light in them.

When he came back from attending to the luggage she studied them more carefully. The laugh in them was not reckless—only cheerful and boyish. He did not look like a hard drinker, but one never could tell; and if he wasn't a drinker he was probably something worse. Drinking was a good, positive, likeable vice compared with some reasons for failure.

She rather hoped he *did* drink, since he had to be explained in some way.

He seemed perfectly sober, as he started the car, whirled around a sharp corner, and shot down the steep hill. And he could drive a car—even in a Ford, one could tell that.

Mr. Bonner had chosen the front seat so Jean, sitting behind the driver, could study only the back, and occasionally the profile, of the creature.

The back was not objectionable. Neither was the profile. Nothing classic, of course, but, for a handy man—well, there was something rather good about the way the head was set upon the broad shoulders, and the chin had a clean-cut, determined look. A nondescript nose, if one could judge from a side view, and an over-large mouth with a trick of smiling.

His collar was clean and he had shaved carefully but he was anxious to make a good first impression. Probably when he settled down to work he would not be so particular. Still she had to admit to herself that he was not so bad as her fancy had painted him—not so bad to look at. The inside of the platter might be a fright and as for his manners—the very fact that they were good was against him. It testified to wasted opportunities and vital failings. The man must have had some education and training and he looked strong and intelligent

enough. Nothing but utter laziness or incorrigibly bad habits could account for his being willing to take such a position as the Bonners had offered.

With a rattling and squeaking, but with irrepressible enthusiasm, the little car scrambled up hill and down. The narrow country road apparently climbed steep hills only for the fun of rolling down from them, but the roll was always a little shorter than the climb, and each hilltop was higher than the last.

Along the way were farms—not the farms of Jean's dreams. Most of the houses were sadly in need of repair and paint, most of the yards needed cleaning up, most of the outbuildings were frankly tottering to a fall, most of the fields were poorly cultivated, most of the stone walls were gradually tumbling down; but on the right of the road the hills ran down to the river, and on the left they climbed to the sky—and over them, right and left, surged the spring. In such a world the general dilapidation seemed not so much shiftlessness as *abandon*. Why should a farm be tidy and self-respecting and profitable, when it had but to stretch itself out in the sunshine and let a tide of leaf and blossom flow over it and listen to the voices of running brooks and smell the fragrance of green growing things and feel cool cloud shadows drifting

across its face and harbour friendly furry and feathered folk? Why should a house be painted and shingled when flowering shrubs cuddled close to it, and fruit trees shook blossom petals against the broken window panes, and through those broken panes the dwellers in the house could look out into paradise?

The Agricultural Department might not be in sympathy with such farm philosophy but the vagabond in Jean's soul thrilled to it, and she straightway set about reconstructing the farm she was to own. In its finished state it would be much as she had pictured it; but when, on some lucky day, she would meet it on a hilltop, it would be cheerfully disreputable—a place of gray clapboards and overgrown shrubbery, untidy hedgerows and rough pastures. She would take it to her heart just so, and she would tidy it up gently, slowly, prayerfully, doing no violence to its finer feelings, stopping short of Philistinism.

Mrs. Bonner interrupted her planning by reaching out and squeezing her hand.

“Isn't it gloriously irresponsible?” the little gray lady said with a sigh of satisfaction. “Nothing has to stop on the rear side of the street or the far side, and you don't have to pay as you enter, and you can do as you please with the garbage, and you can sit

down anywhere and feel like the psalms, without being run over or run in. I hate rules and regulations. There are things no fellow can do. You have to accept that law anywhere, but living in a city—Jean, *why* do we live in cities?”

“We don’t—not in summer time.”

The answer was confident, final. Jean was settled in the shabby gray house on her Farm O’ Dreams.

There came a time when there were no more hills to climb and the road ran level but still inconsequent along a narrow neck of land set high between two rivers. Little, straggling farms fringed the road and here the farmhouses showed promise of forsaking their shiftless ways and becoming reformed characters. There were signs of industry and thrift grafted on the wreckage of what must have been a prosperous little farming community in the days of sturdy pioneering; but the cultivated fields were narrow and beyond them, the land on each side of the road fell away sharply—on the west plunging down steep cliffs to the Connecticut River, on the east sinking into a narrow, wooded valley where here and there a thread of silver water glinted through the treetops. Beyond the broad river and the narrow one, line upon line of blue hills mounted to meet the horizon, the farthest fading almost imperceptibly into the sky.

Two miles of this upland flight and then the end of the road. Jean saw the white house, the thick clustering maples, the lilac bushes leaning over the white picket fence.

The car stopped gently on the triangle of green-sward where the road turned back upon itself.

"This," said Mrs. Bonner, with a throb of content in her voice, "is home."

The handy man lifted the little gray lady from the car. She smiled into his face and gave his arm a friendly pat as he set her down, and said:

"I think you are going to take very good care of us, Edward," she said confidently. "You aren't at all like Oscar—or Milton."

He had turned to the assistance of the cook. All the way over from the station he had been thinking of the moment when he could look fairly into her face, touch her hand, perhaps even—for one brief moment—feel her lean upon him; but he had miscalculated. The cook climbed out of the car on the side opposite him, frostily took the umbrellas and the smallest bag from him, and went up the flagged walk to the house without so much as looking at him. So far as she was concerned he was a handy man pure and simple. Let him go ahead and be handy.

"Well, I'll be damned," said Teddy Burton—but it wasn't really so bad as that.

When he had disposed of the hand luggage he put the car away and then came back to the house but he was not needed. In his mistaken zeal he had made everything ready for the family. Fires were laid for lighting, on the hearths and in the kitchen stove. There was water in the pails, there was wood in the wood box, there was ice in the refrigerator.

Not the smallest shadow of an excuse did he have for lingering in the kitchen or following the maid about the house and, after futile offers of assistance, politely but convincingly declined, he wandered out to the barn, seated himself on an empty grain bin and stared scornfully at the humble but willing motor car that was his special charge. His first introduction to it had been a blow and only vivid remembrance of a girl's face had reconciled him to his fate. If Jacob had been used to a 60-horse-power F. I. A. T. and Rachel's father had pinned him down to seven years of driving a Ford, more tribes would probably have been lost to Israel than history records. But after the first shock, Teddy's heart warmed to the thing.

It reminded him of a mongrel pup he had once rescued from a tin can and a gang of small hoodlums, and taken home with him—such a plebeian, unbeautiful pup but so pathetically devoted, so eager

to make up for his lack of beauty by faithful service! Teddy had learned to love that pup.

Three days of following Connecticut back roads had almost persuaded him that he might learn to love a Ford car.

"Mabel," he said now, glad of a mute but loyal confidante, "my prophetic soul tells me that the going isn't likely to be good."

He drummed his heels against the bin for a while, looking thoughtful and slightly depressed. Then he slid to the floor, straightened his tie, squared his shoulders, and grinned cheerfully.

"The fair sex, Mabel," he said, giving the car a friendly slap as he passed it, "makes us burn a lot of gas, and I guess I'll have to go into low, but I'm going to keep chugging right along."

For the moment, his chugging carried him toward the vegetable garden and there he found Mrs. Bonner and her cook. Mrs. Bonner's face was flushed with excitement, her gray hair waving wildly in the breeze.

"Edward!" she cried. "Something's coming up! Quite a lot of things are coming up."

Teddy looked at the little green heads pushing up through the brown earth.

"Peas and beets and lettuce," he announced. His tone was tolerant but not enthusiastic. "All

in spots and bunches. What'd you expect in lumpy soil like that with good-sized boulders scattered through it?" he said critically.

"Tubbs always ploughs and starts the garden for me," Mrs. Bonner explained. "He's quite old and he isn't very scientific but it is something to have peas and beets and lettuce even in bunches."

"To-morrow," said her handy man impressively, "I'll take a fall out of that garden. I suppose you have bone meal and wood ashes and well-rotted stable manure and a compost heap stowed away somewhere." He spoke lightly, in a matter-of-fact, offhand way.

Mrs. Bonner's expression was compounded impartially of admiration and consternation. "You sound like a garden book," she said.

Of course he did. All of the gardens in the books he had bought before leaving town began with large quantities of bone meal and wood ashes and well-rotted stable manure and compost.

"But we haven't any of those things," his employer confessed guiltily. "Tubbs has no opinion at all of any fertilizer except stable manure and you might as well try to buy pigeon-blood rubies as stable manure around here, and a compost heap always sounded as if it would be so messy, even if one did plant nasturtiums or squashes or things over it. Some of the

garden books tell you to do that, but I can't seem to feel that I'd relish squashes raised on a compost heap, would you?"

"What's a compost heap?" Jean inquired.

"Rot," explained the handy man tersely.

She turned away from him in profound disgust. A very low person! There must be some polite way of explaining a compost heap, and a man might just as well say fertilizer as rotted stable manure. Of course one did talk about rotten luck and rotten tennis and all that sort of thing but that was different. Luck and tennis weren't actually decayed—though her tennis was in a fair way to decay; she probably would not have a game all summer.

A twinge of regret ran through her at the thought. She had a sudden vision of smooth courts under a blue sky, of white-flannelled players, of wide shady verandahs, of well-trained servants carrying trays on which ice tinkled merrily against glasses, of a world where luxury and ease and irresponsible gayety were the natural way of living, and she was homesick—miserably, unheroically homesick.

She wanted some one to lift all the responsibilities from her shoulders. She wanted to wear French frocks, and spend money with both hands, and lie abed mornings, and flirt and frivol, and be the most parasitical kind of a parasite known to biology.

"Jean," Mrs. Bonner had followed her and slipped a hand through her arm. "I think if you would make us some of those nice biscuits for supper—the people in the little house over there on the hill keep bees—Edward could run over, and Rufus loves biscuit and honey."

Mrs. Bonner's cook laughed helplessly. She was not a parasite. She was that thing for which feminism clamoured. She was economically independent.

"Now am I in Arcady," she quoted as she went kitchenward. "When I was at home, I was in a better place."

But she did not altogether mean it. There *was* a satisfaction in making good biscuits and seeing Mr. Bonner's seraphic smile as he ate six of them.

The handy man did not come to his supper until he was called—and he came perilously near not being called. The cook could not make up her mind how to call him.

If only she could have gone out on the back porch and called "Jones"! But his name was not Jones; it was Burton. Mrs. Bonner had told her that; and, for some reason whose psychology she did not attempt to unravel, while it would have been quite possible for her to have called him "Jones" it seemed out of the question to call him Burton. There re-

mained "Edward"; but, while Edward was a horrid name and it would be pleasant to call him a horrid name, Edward argued a certain degree of familiarity. "Mr. Burton" would be attaching undue importance to the person. To shout "hey, there!" would be undignified.

She allowed the biscuits to cool while she debated; and, finally, she settled the matter by going to the end of the back porch and shouting: "Sup-per!" into empty space. It sounded silly but Edward came, at once—alert, immaculately washed and brushed, smiling.

The ceiling of the old kitchen was so low that he had to stoop a little as he came through the door; and, when he straightened up, he looked so large and so hungry that Jean involuntarily counted her biscuits.

There was only one plate laid on the kitchen table. If the man noticed anything odd about the fact, he did not, even by the flicker of an eyelash, show it.

Jean waited upon him painstakingly but in frosty silence. If he had had the remotest idea of treating his fellow servant with undue familiarity, that idea must have been frozen at its source but the frigid temperature apparently affected neither his cheerfulness nor his appetite. He did not speak to the

cook except to thank her when she passed him something but he ate an astonishing amount and seemed quite content—thereby moving the aforesaid cook to hot and wholly inconsistent resentment. Naturally she rejoiced in the success of her system, but she had not been accustomed to seeing young men, under the ban of her disapproval, bear up so cheerfully and display such amazing appetites. Even the inferential tribute to her cooking could not soothe her vanity.

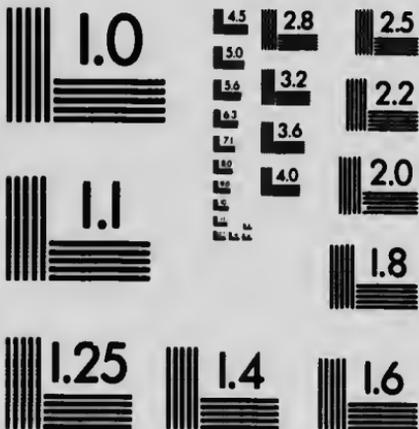
After supper Edward brought in wood for the night, filled the water pails. He whistled as he came from the well—not because he felt like whistling but just to show himself that his sporting blood was as good for a siege as for a skirmish—and as he whistled he wondered whether the Girl was prejudiced against his sex or his face. That he had not made a hit with her was, he admitted ruefully to himself, sufficiently obvious; but a poor start did not mean much where girls were concerned—it was the finish that counted. Hadn't some old duffer said that it was best to begin with a little aversion? Well, anyway, there was nothing for it but to keep a stiff upper lip and play the game. No girl cared about a man who would sit up on his hind legs and beg.

The whistling ended only at the kitchen door, and



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the handy man's cheerful face indicated that the tune was suppressed then merely out of courtesy.

"Is there anything else I can do for you?" he asked politely when he had set the brimming pails upon the table.

There was nothing.

Mrs. Bonner entered the kitchen just as he was leaving it and the light that flashed into his eyes, the smile on his lips as he stopped and looked down at her, gave Jean an uncomfortable feeling. He was such a big boy, and after all, he was not to blame for being a blot on her landscape. He had been hired and he couldn't know that his employer's cook would detest him. Probably the ordinary cook would have adored him. Evidently he had lost his heart to the little gray lady. Everybody loved her. She was so kindly and uncritical and ready to be friends.

Of course if Edward drank—— But even then—— sometimes they inherited it, and he was among strangers. And he must have been used to better things. His manners proved that, and the way he talked. Of course he was slangy—all the college men were slangy—but his grammar was all right. Yes, he had been used to better things, and whatever he had done to ruin his chances, he needed friends. Everybody needed friends.

"Edward," said the cook, when her mistress

started back toward the front of the house, "I wonder if you could set my alarm clock for me before you go out?"

Her voice registered "fair and warmer," and she smiled at him as she spoke.

Never was an alarm clock wound and set with more alacrity—with more fervour. That Jean had attended to the thing herself for three months did not affect the earnestness of her gratitude. She thanked him very prettily, took the clock from him, murmured a good-night and disappeared up the back stairs.

"Oh, my suffering Aunt Jemima!" exclaimed the astonished young man who was left standing in the middle of the kitchen.

CHAPTER X

“MAN!”

Teddy Burton looked up from the lima beans he was planting and saw a small boy and a smaller girl. The boy was thin and freckled. His cap was pushed back past a most refractory cowlick in a thick crop of stiff, brown hair. His shirt was not clean and one of his knees showed brown through a big hole in his stockings, but the small, bright brown eyes in the homely face held a most engaging twinkle and the boy's mouth was peculiarly sweet—a sensitive, characterful mouth, whose thin, well-modelled lips turned up slightly at the corners and, like the eyes, had a hint of amusement, even when, as now, the rest of the face was grave.

Involuntarily, Teddy smiled into the twinkling eyes. They kept on twinkling but declined to smile. Their owner was evidently not given to snap-shot judgments.

The small girl was different. She not only returned the smile that Teddy transferred to her. She added to it, gave it back with interest, dimpled

and beamed and fairly gurgled response. She was little and plump and great-eyed. A pink sunbonnet hung down her back by strings knotted hard under a chubby chin and left uncovered a mop of short, shining yellow curls. Sun and wind had warmed her skin to the clear brown that is almost amber and the red of a ripening peach. Her features were carelessly sketched. What she would be at twenty no one could prophesy, but at five she was adorable and the woman in her knew it.

"I'm Molly," she announced. Her voice had a funny, fat little chuckle in it that would have moved a more serious man than Teddy Burton to laughter and, when he laughed she joined in. She was always willing to join in a laugh; but when it was over, she went back to the matter in hand.

"Who's you, man?" she asked.

"Shut up, Molly. 'Tain't polite to ask questions," admonished the boy.

"Ve man wants me to know," she insisted. Molly was absolutely, unshakably sure of the world's good will.

"I'm Teddy Burton," said the man.

"Ted-dee—Ted-dee," she crooned and, coming close, she looked up into his face with her most ingratiating smile. "I fink you're nice, Ted-dee," she admitted shamelessly. "Can you mik?"

"'Milk' she means," the boy explained. "She's plumb dotty about milking just now. She's always plumb dotty about something."

"Jimmy lets me," she boasted. "Jimmy lets me do everyfing. Jimmy's awful good. He says, I could ride in a mobile if anybody asked would I."

"I never!" Jimmy's face was scandalized but Teddy rose to the bait.

"Well would you?" he asked.

She hopped up and down excitedly but pressed her advantage.

"An' Jimmy?"

"Yes, of course—Jimmy."

"Vere!" she said triumphantly. "*He* lets me too."

"Everybody lets you." Jimmy made an effort to be sternly disapproving. "That's what's the matter with you."

"Matter wiv me," she echoed cheerfully.

Having got what she wanted, the young woman, true to sex, lost interest and trotted up toward the house, but Jimmy lingered. He watched the little figure until the pink sunbonnet disappeared through the kitchen door then turned back to the man who was going on with his gardening.

"Can't take your eye off her," he explained. "You wouldn't think anything could happen to her between here and the house—but it could. All sorts

of things could happen. You never saw anything like that kid. She just sort of draws accidents—ain't a raid of anything, you know; and awful curious, and always goes right ahead gettin' acquainted and findin' out about things, and I tell you she keeps a fellow busy."

His tone was apologetic but pride shone bright in his face. For a few moments he stood watching the planting process with evident concern.

"Say," he remarked at last, his gaze fixed upon the distant hills, his voice elaborately casual, "up here we mostly plant lima beans eye-side down."

Teddy stopped work, studied the bean in his hand and shook his head.

"That isn't logic, son. The sprout must grow out of the eye and the sprout must grow upward. There'd be no sense in heading it down."

Jimmy stood firm.

"Maybe it ain't logic," he conceded, "but it's beans. They turn over." Mr. Bonner's gardener looked into the shrewd little face and sacrificed theory to experience.

"James, my boy," he said, as he went back along his line turning the beans eye downward, "many things that are not logic *are* beans."

The two were good friends before the planting ended. As Jimmy explained to Mrs. Morley later in

the day, "He ain't one of those conceited city folk that knows it all, and he ain't one of those grown-up men that thinks boys ain't got horse sense. He jollies you a lot but he don't exactly laugh *at* you; the way that makes a fellow hot. He just laughs as if both of you was in the joke an' when he ain't jollyin' he treats you sort of man to man. Shows you about the car and lets you oil things and asks you about roads."

"Well, my sakes, Jim"—Mrs. Morley was interested but apprehensive—"don't you get crazy over that new man and go trapping him around when Molly lets go of you for a minute. You don't have any too much time now."

"I get up lots earlier." The boy's face flushed hotly and the woman hastened to smooth his ruffled conscience.

"Oh, yes, you get the chores done all right and if you want the bother of Molly, why that's your business. Her mother helps me enough to offset your taking care of the mite even if you did neglect things—which you don't," she added quickly—"but it don't seem natural for a boy like you to get up at four so as to have his work done before the baby's ready to start in on her day. You just let her impose on you, Jim."

The boy did not meet her eyes. He was burrowing

in the ground with one toe and apparently absorbed in the hole he was making. Suddenly he looked up. His eyes were not twinkling. They were shining and the sweetness of his mouth made the freckled face forget to be homely.

"You see there ain't ever been anybody," he explained, "and she's so awful kind of little an' sweet—an' lovin'."

Mrs. Morley's own eyes grew misty behind her glasses.

"You come in and have some fresh cookies, Jim," she said hastily. Sympathy, with Mrs. Morley, always took the form of proffered food.

When a little later she came into the sitting-room where Molly's mother and Jean Mackaye—who had walked home with Jimmy and the baby—sat talking, she looked gratified.

"That boy can eat more cookies than any two people his size I ever knew," she announced happily. "I don't know as I ever saw a heartier appetite but he don't seem to put on flesh. I'm downright set on fattening him up. It's a slur on anybody's cooking to have folks around looking skinny. But, if I do say it, nobody stays skinny here. Look at Susan. You could just about see through her when she came but hasn't she plumped up? And Molly's fat as butter. I guess I'll go out and whip up a maple

custard for supper. Jim's crazy about maple custard."

She hurried back to the kitchen and Susan shook her head, laughing.

"It's no use. You simply can't keep her out of that kitchen. I help her do up the work and I think she can have all afternoon to sit down and rest or go visiting, and the first thing I know she's back in the kitchen stirring up something. If it isn't for us, it's a bowl of broth for Mrs. Meyers that's sick—down the hill there; she's got every kind of a disease you ever heard of. Or it's a tea cake for old Mr. Anderson, that says nobody can make the right kind of tea cake with raisins in it except her; or she just cuts up some fresh pork and mixes a few sausages to send to the Marellis because they like her sausage meat better than any they can buy. If she can't think of anything else, she cooks a mess of scraps for the dog or a warm mash for the cow. Honestly, the dog, the cow, the pig, and everything on the place except Jim, are so fat they'd roll one way as quick as another."

"She's thin enough herself," Jean said.

"That's just it. She worries so about feeding other people that she doesn't eat much of anything herself and what she does eat hurts her—nervous, you know, and tired and sick of fussing over food and smelling it and tasting it to see if it's

right. Since I've been feeling better I've done every blessed thing I could to make her take care of herself, but it isn't a bit of use, and now she'll have boarders coming. She always takes two or three of them in the summer. Goodness knows how she does it. I sort of dread the boarders. It's been so nice, just Molly and Jimmy and Mrs. Morley and me—and neighbours running in. I don't ever want to go back to town. I'd ought to be at work now only Mrs. Bonner and the doctor won't let me; but when I do, I'm going to get a place up here. Folks won't pay high but Molly'd be with me and where it's healthy and nobody that knows about—him."

"Miss Mackaye, couldn't you relish some fresh cookies and a cup of tea?" called Mrs. Morley from the kitchen.

Miss Mackaye could not, but she was not allowed to go home without a plate of the cookies for Mr. and Mrs. Bonner's tea—"and for the young man," Mrs. Morley added. "I haven't seen him, except just going by when you came yesterday. He's got an awful nice face and Jim's all taken up with him. It'll be real nice for you to have young company right in the house, won't it?"

"I wonder if he likes pie. Most men folks think so much of pie. The hired man I had before Jim came would sit down and eat a whole half before he'd

go up to bed—never hurt him a bit either. My pie crust wouldn't hurt a baby. You bring the young man up some evening and I'll let him try one of my custard pies. Most men folks are partial to custard pie. I'll give you my recipe, Miss Mackaye. It's just as well for girls to practise on what men like specially. Married life needs things like that to help over. Mr. Morley was tempery but I could usually manage him with custard pie—better than with 'most anything, unless it was chicken *fricassée*. You never saw such a man for chicken gravy—if it was made right."

Jean went away down the road pondering over men and their ways. There was something that appealed to her about managing a man with custard pie and chicken gravy; but Mr. Bonner was not a fair test. One could manage Mr. Bonner with sardines and crackers, though he liked good food if his attention was called to it.

She set the kitchen table for two that evening.

Since the handy man was not actually objectionable there was no point in allowing her own meals to spoil while he ate his and in delaying her work.

She would not encourage him too much but it would be idiotic to establish a feud just because the man had accepted a job that was offered to him, and so, though she hated the sight of him, she would

treat him civilly, giving her civility a little skim of ice around its edges.

Edward accepted the table for two as he had accepted the table for one—without comment and with unruffled serenity. He made no conversational overtures and silence hung heavily in the air until Jean could stand it no longer and asked a carefully indifferent question about the garden. He answered fully but with an indifference as careful as her own and the conversation would have dropped back into the gulf of silence whence it had sprung if Jean had not brought Molly to its rescue.

“Molly says you are going to take her 'mobiling,” she said; and, because it was impossible to think of Molly, much less to speak of her without smiling, she smiled as she spoke. The overture was encouraging, almost friendly, and she realized it; but one could not sit opposite a man for hours without interesting him at all.

Teddy laughed outright. The cook's smile might do Molly justice but his could not.

“Of course I'm going to take her 'mobiling. She says everybody 'lets' her and I'm willing to believe it. She'd wheedle a bird off a branch, and as to what she does with Jimmy——. By the way, is Jimmy her brother?”

She had brought it on herself. Never again could

she sit upon her mountain peak, remote, unapproachable, austere. She might of course retire to the cold heights on occasion but she had admitted that she could slide down and, in her heart she was glad to be treading lower levels. Climbing mountains was amusing; but living on them——!

“Oh no, he’s not her brother,” she explained. “He’s only her slave. Molly and her mother are boarding with Mrs. Morley, and Jimmy’s doing Mrs. Morley’s chores. She got him from the Orphans’ Home. He’s rather a dear, himself, I think.”

“He’s better than that,” amended Teddy. “He’s a man.”

“Well—if you call that better——” Her dimples had come out of long retreat. She looked up at him from under her sweeping lashes in the old way. It was so long since she had talked to a man—a young, good-looking man—and habit is a powerful thing; one slips back easily into the channels it has worn.

Something flamed up in the man’s eyes and was promptly snuffed out—so promptly that Jean was not at all sure it had been there.

“Of course, if one can be both man and dear——” He said it so lightly that while it recognized the opening it was coolly impersonal. “As Jimmy is,” he added.

If only she had not been Mrs. Bonner's cook!
If only he had not been Mr. Bonner's handy man!
If only the kitchen had been a conservatory or a
canoe or a rose arbour! Jean sighed a little. The
theme would have borne developing and, she had a
feeling that, granted all the ifs, this Edward might
have played the game nicely. He was not at all
stupid and he was better looking than she had
thought him right at first. She wondered whether
she really had seen that queer look in his eyes; and,
if she had, what did it mean? And she wondered,
as she had wondered times beyond number, what
could have brought him to a pass where he was
willing to be handy man on a New England farm.
There were so many better things a man could do—
things that were beginnings of bigger things. There
was no reason why a man should bury himself, cut
himself off from his friends, work hard at work that
held no future.

If he had been ill, of course, farm work, in the
open air and all that sort of thing; but no one could
accuse him of being ill. He was aggressively healthy.
There was no reason why a man— She began it
all over again; no reason except a disgraceful one.
He might be in hiding to escape the consequences of
something he had done.

She made an effort to fit the *rôle* to him but with

small success. He hadn't a hunted look. A more care-free and unapprehensive mortal she had never seen. No; he wasn't afraid of consequences but he was quite evidently meeting them.

Consequences of what? What was the fatal weakness that had kept him from making good? He did not look or act like a drug fiend. He did not look or act like a drunkard. Still, he had been under her eyes only a short time. Sometimes drinking was a periodical affair, and at his age one would not show dissipation readily. It must be drink—but he seemed such a nice—— What a fool she was to be curious!

She rose hastily from the table, put a stick of wood in the stove, filled the dishpan, and set about washing the dishes with a vigour that suggested temper.

"Jean Mackaye," she said to herself as she knocked a thin tumbler against the edge of the sink and broke it, "if you are so silly about men that you can get interested in a hired man of intemperate habits, you'd better quit the 'economically independent' game and go back to your own crowd—and marry the first man that proposes. Probably he'll drink too, but at least he'll have money and social position."

The intemperate hired man, feeling storm in the air, disappeared from the kitchen, exulting in his

heart. The interlude had been brief. He and his lady—his cook lady—were back at freezing point, but she had smiled at him, she had dimpled at him, she had looked up at him from under her lashes as if he had been a man not in the slightest degree handy. And, he assured himself, he had behaved extraordinarily well under the circumstances. On less provocation, a cave man would have picked his chosen one up and carried her off to his cave. Civilization had cluttered love making a whole lot.

“But oh, my suffering Aunt Jemima, how she smiles when she *does* smile,” he said, to Venus who happened to be the evening star, though he was ignorant of that auspicious fact.

And, in order that she might be beguiled into smiling again, he trod very cautiously for a day or two—so cautiously that his manner was slightly frigid. There came a morning when the cook, in a friendly mood, did smile again, but even then he did not relax his caution—accepted the bewildering phenomenon with outward calm and made no response beyond a non-committal cheerfulness.

So discreet was he that Jean relaxed her discretion, ventured upon further concession, lapsed into her natural good humour. It was hard for her not to be friendly and, while one must not under any circumstances flirt with an intemperate handy man,

there was no reason why, so long as he was sober and showed no sign of misunderstanding, she should not grant him the friendliness she gave to any chance comer.

So she smiled and laughed and talked and jested, and because he was a man and she was a maid and both were young and the month was May, she embroidered the chance-comer variety of friendliness a bit, thought she was not conscious of it.

Teddy was conscious of it, conscious of it in every tingling nerve, but, having learned wisdom, he took a post-graduate course in self-control.

"Mabel," he said to the car at the end of the first week, "I rather think we've got the carburetter adjusted. Now unless we're darn fools enough to tinker with it, we may run along smoothly for a while, but, old girl, there are times when I have to set my teeth and say the alphabet backward to keep from tearing things wide open and smashing the speed limit."

Like Jean herself, Teddy did a good deal of wondering. He had known that the girl was the rose of the world—had known that, the very first moment he saw her; and after his evening with the stars, he had never for a moment troubled his head about the matter of social caste; but he admitted to himself, now and then, that even in his most

rhapsodic moments he had hardly expected the mould of perfection, on close inspection, to have quite the polish it showed.

Sweetness—yes, of course; sweetness and goodness and prettiness and the distilled essence of charm. Any nice girl from a decent poor family might have those—might even have a fair smattering of education. Girls of the working classes were more likely to go through high school than their brothers—didn't always have to get out to work so early. And, probably, if a girl was quick, and had naturally nice tastes, she might pick up a lot of good ideas of one kind and another; but there was something about Jean——; she was so sure of herself, so completely at her ease with every one. She had such dainty ways. Why, she even ate beautifully, though eating was a performance that ought ordinarily to be done in private. And the way she walked, the way she talked! Yes, above all the way she talked! Hang it all, the girl might have been born to the purple!

Now, how in the name of the seventy-seven devils of Li Chu, did a general housework girl happen to be like that? What sort of a family did she come from? Maybe her mother had been a woman of birth and breeding and had married beneath; or perhaps her father—— Some fellows did n e asses of themselves over parlour maids.

He caught himself up short at that point. Yes, and the parlour maids were probably too good for the fellows—worlds too good for them. He had changed his point of view about all that sort of thing, only, of course, generations of education and social training and—— Oh, what the devil was a girl like Jean Mackaye doing in Mrs. Bonner's kitchen?

She never spoke of her family, of her home; never dropped the smallest crumb of information about her early life; but that might be accidental, not deliberate. There wasn't any reason why she should spill the story of her life and her real name into the sort of talk he had always had with her. Probably if the conversation ever happened to drift around to home and mother, she'd have as much to say as any girl.

Curiosity prompted him to strategy.

On a June evening—when the cook had been more than usually amiable at supper, and, later, he found her sitting on the steps of the back porch, with a dreamy softness blurring her usual brisk alertness—he dropped down beside her and began a conversation that gradually took on a reminiscent flavour.

By way of the man in the moon he led up to "the queer ideas kids have" and fell into talk about his own childhood. Swapping memories of childhood might throw some light on his lady love's background

and every one liked to talk about that sort of thing.

"Always believed the milky way was the cow heaven and that the man in the moon looked after the cows," he said lightly. "Broke me all up when a fool Sunday-school teacher set me right; told me that cows didn't go to heaven—that nobody drank milk up there. I wasn't old enough to realize she hadn't any more inside information about heaven than I had, but I never had much of an opinion of the place after that. Funny little beggar, I must have been. Mother spoiled me more than a bit and I didn't have any brothers to cuff sense into me, nor sisters to snub me."

Jean shifted her position so that she could see his face in the moonlight. Her dreaminess slipped away and left her wide awake, keenly interested, though she still leaned lazily against the verandah pillar and gave no outward sign of her change of mood. Perhaps her curiosity was going to be satisfied. Men usually loved to talk about themselves and this was an evening for expansive confidences—a warm, sweet-scented moon-silvered summer evening with just a hint of loneliness in its hush.

Human companionship, human sympathy, are good on such a night.

"Lonesome business, being an only child," the

girl said; but she volunteered no information about the number of her own brothers and sisters, and the man who had waited hopefully, took up the burden of reminiscence again.

"Oh, well, there are always children to play with. I wasn't lonesome myself—too busy getting into trouble; a fellow can always do that at any age, if life begins to seem dull; but I suppose girls don't take naturally to deviltry, so they get lonesome. Being good *is* lonesome business, if you ask me."

Jean's lips curled a little, scornfully, as she looked down at him. How men did love confessing their sins to women! He was going to tell her what a wild, wicked young dare-devil he had been and he would add brilliant decorative touches. They always did. A man rather fancied himself in a lurid, St. Elmo-Luciferian *rôle* but he never was willing to show himself up as a plain, ordinary, bad lot.

"Were you a very bad small boy," she prompted.

The handy man grinned. "Oh, only so-so. I did my best, but you have to have either a lot of imagination or a lot of experience to be sensationally bad, you know, and the average kid hasn't either. Still, I don't think I've much to reproach myself with, in the way of wasted opportunity. Dad kept his strong right arm in pretty good muscular condition up to the time when I was past being licked. He's fallen off on

his form since then; but he's cultivated a mighty fine, forceful line of talk." The grin broadened. "He could give Billy Sunday cards and spades, when he really gets going; but I'll admit he's slow to anger."

"Poor father!" Jean reflected as she thought of him. It must be dreadful to have an only son go wrong.

"I suppose it's the mother that wrestles with the girl problem," Edward hazarded.

"I can't remember my mother," the girl said quietly.

At last she was beginning to talk about herself. He realized it, but forgot to be glad of it, because he was suddenly so very, very sorry for her. Plucky little dear, bucking the world alone, no mother to help—not even in the small girl days.

"That's hard!" The quick sympathy in his voice brought a tinge of colour to Jean's cheeks. There was something extraordinarily likable about him, she admitted to herself. There often was something extraordinarily likable about ne'er-do-wells.

"It would be hard for anybody," he went on, "but it's worse for a girl than for a boy. No; I don't know that it is, after all. A boy needs a lot besides lickings and man talk. Girls don't have so much inclination to play the fool as boys have, and then there are all kinds of influences to hold them back, but a boy's just got his mother. She's the whole shooting match for

him, so far as the spiritual side of him goes. Why the only reason the ordinary boy has a friendly, respectful feeling toward God is because he knows God's a friend of his mother's, and he's willing to accept almost anybody on her say-so. And the only reason things are bad is because they hurt a fellow's mother. Later on, he dopes out some sort of a system of ethics that recognizes abstract right and wrong; *but* it never does have quite the pull with him that the original idea has—you see it's so frightfully complex—but the mother-test is perfectly simple. A small boy gets mighty well acquainted with his mother. He can't always understand her tastes. She has queer prejudices against so many natural and agreeable things—like swimming in the river and fighting, and letting the dog sleep on the bed. There are times when he really can't bring himself to respect those prejudices; but, on the whole, he believes that her tips about danger zones and safe channels are pretty straight, even if he doesn't always follow them. Why, my mother——”

He did not go on, but sat looking out into the night with a lonesome, boyish look on his face and Jean wanted to comfort him—wanted very much indeed to comfort him—though comforting him wasn't at all the purpose with which she had entered upon this conversation.

"Well, at any rate I can remember her," he said at last. "I'm sorry for you."

And that is as far as they went in self-revelation, for Mrs. Bonner came out to look at the moon and stayed to talk about nights in the arctic circle; so they spent the rest of the evening frigidly. The handy man knew that the cook could not remember her mother and the cook knew that the handy man had loved his mother dearly, and missed her. That was all the moonlit summer night had brought about, in the way of confidences. No great illumination of family history, perhaps: but the two who had been curious felt oddly content. They were sorry for each other, and being sorry for each other seemed, temporarily, an absorbing occupation.

The gardening went well; or at least fertilizers were procured and soil was pulverized and a garden line was religiously used and not a weed showed its head, without being grubbed out. Seeds were sown, as plentifully as they had been bought. That the garden, if it prospered, would be large enough for twenty families, did not affect the enthusiasm of either the gardener or his employer.

"We've got the seeds; let's plant them," said Teddy recklessly indifferent to future weeding and hoeing, spraying and watering. The garden books and Mrs. Bonner and the natural Adam in him had

brought on garden mania in its most virulent form. Supplying vegetables and flowers for a family of four was child's work. He had visions of vegetables by the wagonload—fresh, succulent, perfect vegetables. He saw blue-and-white borders stretching away beside all the stone walls, only, being a man, he would have preferred red-and-white borders—mostly red.

"Oh, Edward, you *are* a comfort," Mrs. Bonner said happily, one morning when she had gone to him with an idea about pink gladioli and heliotrope that involved digging up the bulbs they had planted two days earlier and he had received the shock with undiminished cheerfulness.

"The other men were such wet blankets. I'd have an idea so lovely that I'd lie awake most of the night to gloat over it but when I'd come out and tell Milton—or Oscar or whoever it was—about it, he'd look at me as if I were crazy and tell me ninety-nine reasons why the thing couldn't possibly be done. It wasn't that they didn't have imagination; they had plenty of imagination about unpleasant things. They could make you feel as though you were dying of thirst in a desert land with blight attacking your hair and cut worms and striped beetles swarming over you, and woodchucks chewing your fingers. Even Tubbs could do that; but not one of them could imagine a bed of poppies in the sunline, or a perfect melon.

Now you and I believe we can do such a lot of beautiful impossible things that we'll probably do some of them."

"Why not?" said the gardener, blithely. "I hope you don't mind my sowing flower seeds along the paths in the vegetable garden. I'm keen about flowers in vegetable gardens myself."

Mrs. Bonner clutched at his shirt-sleeve for support.

"Edward"—she was half laughing, half earnest—"I can't bear it. I might have known—you looked so different—but I didn't realize it was a flower-in-the-vegetable-garden look. All my life I've wanted a garden like one in Surrey that I remember."

Teddy nodded. "I know; flowers around the vegetables and a wall with fruit trees smashed out flat against it. I thought we'd have to raise this stone wall about three feet."

The little woman looked at him unbelievably.

"I never even dared suggest it, and we'll never get it done, but to think that you—— Jean, isn't he *too* wonderful?"

The girl who had come out for a bunch of parsley, looked at him—standing there in the sunlight, straight and lean and strong and young and confident—and a little throb of assent ran through her. He *was* rather wonderful, such a beamish boy, and yet

with the man look in his eyes and about his mouth. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and they were rolled up above his elbows. His collar was unbuttoned and fell away from his brown throat. He wore blue overalls, and his hair, wet with sweat, was pushed back in stringy locks from his forehead. His hands were dirty, the knees of his overalls were caked with wet earth, but there was not a hint of self-consciousness or of apology about him. He leaned on his spade and looked at her out of straightforward, honest, smiling eyes; and she liked him—spade, overalls, and all.

However, she did not admit that he was wonderful. She only answered:

“He’s very optimistic,” but there was no edge on the comment. She spoke as though optimism were a commendable thing.

Life slipped into country ways and, on the whole, the ways were pleasant ones. Mr. Bonner was not interested in gardening, but June brought even him out of his shell. He fell into the habit of leaving his study by three or four o’clock in the afternoon and he and his wife went for long walks or sat on Cedar Hill to watch the sunsets. Once when she went to call them for supper, Jean found them standing on the verandah looking out over the steep green slope and the treetops of the valley to the distant hills and

a rose-flushed eastern sky. Mr. Bonner's arm was around the little gray lady and her head was on his shoulder. A great content enveloped them. The glow of the rose-hued clouds—or of rose-hued memories—was on their faces.

The cook went back to her kitchen and put her creamed chicken where it would keep warm. Time enough for feeding those two when they came back out of the Long Ago.

She sat down by the window to wait, and her own thoughts went roaming among the yesterdays but found nothing there to set love-lights in her eyes. There had been foolish men who had fancied themselves in love with her. Even red-headed, freckled *débutantes* were fairly sure of that sort of tribute, and she had had more than the usual amount of it. There had been moonlight and sunset and gloaming and all the world-old stage settings; and some of the men had been good-looking, and some had been clever, and some had been bold, but not one of them had left a memory that thrilled or throbbed.

Memories were all very well for the middle-aged married folk out on the verandah, but remembering was lonesome work for two-and-twenty, and the girl by the window felt a restless quickening of her heart-beats. All of *her* life was ahead of her, and she was eager to set about living it. Wasting youth was

perilous business. It was a pity one could not do all the stodgy, disagreeable things, after one got too old to enjoy the full flavour of doing the agreeable things. Here she was, cooking, dishwashing, making a living, when she was so gloriously capable of *doing* the living.

It would be much more sensible to live in "Behind-the-Looking-Glass" fashion. First you'd *do* your living and then you'd *make* it—only one needed the strength and courage of youth for the making; and, after all, it wasn't work that wasted youth. One could work—slave—and still be riotously happy if there were things to be happy about—big things; but just to go ahead, day after day, doing plain, undecorated living, did seem a waste. If the big things were coming to her, she wished they would hurry along.

Something came hurrying along, but it was only Molly. There was a patter of feet on the back porch, a chuckling laugh from the doorway, a little rush across the room, and the small girl was hugging Jean's knees.

"Yun away!" she announced exultantly.

Jean gathered her into her arms and sat down by the open window.

"Molly's bad," she said; but there was no condemnation in her voice and Molly knew it.

"Yes," agreed the sinner, joyously. "Molly's bad." She was tremendously pleased with herself.

"What will mother do?"

"Hunt! Jimmy too." Molly wiggled with ecstasy at the thought.

"Poor mother!" Jean was much more in sympathy with the culprit than with the authorities, but felt that she really must say a word for law and order.

Molly only laughed.

"She'll hunt an' hunt"—she said happily—"an' ven she'll spank."

Evidently she was not too young to recognize the inevitableness of retribution, but she was too young for fear of it. The game was worth the candle. The excitement was worth the spanking. Jean envied her the courage of her convictions. She felt a bit like running away herself.

"Bimeby Jimmy'll come. Jimmy always comes." Molly cuddled down more comfortably in the friendly arms to wait for Nemesis. "Time to be in bed," she murmured drowsily. A chuckle followed the murmur. Running away was amusing enough at any hour of the day but dodging bed time was added joy.

"Vere was a snake in ve woad——" she sat up straight to impart this thrilling news—"a gween one."

She dropped back against Jean's shoulder. The long lashes fell over the big blue eyes, the red lips parted, the soft breath quieted into rhythm. She had had her fun. She would have her spanking. Meanwhile she would sleep. Jean hugged her close and reflected that there was something to the trite saying that childhood was the happiest time in life. Grown-ups ran away, and grown-ups—figuratively speaking—were spanked; but grown-ups seldom, if ever, were able to sleep peacefully in between.

Just what to do Jean did not know. Susan should not be allowed to worry, but Mrs. Morley had no telephone and the two who had drifted back into June might waken to their usual autumnal habits at any moment and want their supper. Perhaps Jimmy *would* come, and speedily. She would wait a little while and see.

Out beyond the window by which she sat the world was trembling between afterglow and gloaming. There was a hush in the air broken now and then by a floating fragment of some bird's sleepy song or the strident croaking of frogs in a distant pond. Everything was very beautiful—and very lonely. The girl's heart ached with the beauty and the loneliness. Holding Molly's soft little body in her arms and feeling the warm little cheek against her shoulder, eased the loneliness—and yet, oddly

enough, intensified it. She wanted something. Just what it was she did not know, but out through the stillness and the wonder of the world there was something that belonged to her, and if only she could have it, there would be no loneliness between sunset and twilight—only beauty and heart content.

Someone came up the path from the barn and into the kitchen, stooping, as he passed the door.

"Anything wrong?" the handy man asked, bending to look at the child in Jean's arms, and transferring the look to Jean herself.

She stumbled back from dreamland. "Mr. and Mrs. Bonner are loving on the east verandah and the supper is spoiling. Will you have yours?"

Would he have his? She meant his supper; he understood that perfectly, but he wanted his loving, and he came very near telling her so.

To come from work into the shadowy kitchen and to find her waiting there, with a child in her arms and softness in her voice and gentleness in her eyes, was almost more than he could bear without flinging discretion aside and saying what was seething in his mind and heart; but he only drew a long breath and stood looking down at her.

"I'd better take Molly home. Her mother will be worrying." He spoke quietly but there was a queer, husky note in his voice and, meeting his eyes, Jean

hastily stooped her head to press a hot cheek against Molly's cool one.

The hush of the world deepened suddenly—grew unbearable. She was afraid of it, afraid of a thing in the man's eyes, afraid of a thing in her own heart—yes, afraid, most of all, of that thing in her own heart which sent strange little thrills creeping through her nerves and set quick pulses beating in her temples and surged chokingly up into her throat.

The man bent over her and she gave Molly to him without looking up at him or speaking. She could not trust her voice—nor her eyes; and her hot cheeks flushed more deeply in the shielding dusk.

The child murmured something about Jimmy, nestled into comfort against the new shoulder, and slept on.

For a moment the man stood looking down at the girl in the straight-backed kitchen chair. Then, without a word, he turned and went away through the low-linteled door into the gathering shadow.

He came back to a lighted kitchen, and to a brisk and practical young woman who had already fed two elderly sentimentalists and was ready for him. The poetry of the June night had been ruthlessly turned out of doors. A kerosene lamp with a big and gleaming reflector relentlessly chased every shadow from

even the remotest corner. The scent of the syringa that grew beside the kitchen window was blotted out by the masterful smell of fried onions.

The fried onions had not been on the original supper programme. Jean had thrown them in by way of protest against the syringa scent and all that had gone with it. They were her defiance hurled at Mother Nature, at youth and June magic and the world-old lure.

Teddy blinked as he came into the lighted room—looked bewildered, dismayed. Few men are emotional lightning-change artists.

The lover still felt the tug of the summer dusk, but the man's tastes were low. He liked fried onions, and as the smell of them assaulted him, he admitted to himself, frankly, as is the way of men, that one of the things he was hungry for was food.

So he tucked away a man-sized supper and, watching him across the table, the cook's excitement ebbed. There was something very reassuring and prosaic about an appetite like his.

"Did Susan spank her?" she asked.

"No. She's going to do it to-morrow."

Jean laughed. "Nobody could ever spank Molly to-morrow. It would have to be done at the top notch of exasperation—and I don't quite see how any one could do it even then."

Molly was not spanked, but she was shut in a dark closet; came out of the enforced retirement, cheerful, loving, utterly unsubdu'd and ran away again later in the day.

"Indeed, ma'am, I don't know what to do with her," Susan confessed to Mrs. Bonner. "Whipping won't do it; I've tried that. She isn't bad any other way—not to say really bad—but she *will* run away. She says her feet 'just yun vemselves'."

Mrs. Bonner radiated sympathy. "Bless her heart! I know all about it. After a while, her head will bully her feet into staying home, but they will always want to run away. Some people are born with feet like that, Susan. I was, myself. You mustn't be hard on Molly. All the same, it's dangerous for her to go trotting around alone. Somebody must keep an eye on her."

Everybody tried to keep an eye on Molly. She spent as much time at the Bonner place as she did at home. She "helped" Teddy in the garden, changing his labels about, trotting over his seed beds, pulling up his small plants in the fervour of weeding, half drowning herself in the big water barrel.

She helped Jean, mixing and spilling and breaking and getting under foot, all with such irrepressible enthusiasm and good will that scolding was out of

the question. She followed Mrs. Bonner into her study, appropriated the chunky footstool that was an indispensable adjunct of the high desk chair, and demanded "stories" with utter disregard of a public waiting hungrily for an authoritative work on Faroe Island Folk-lore.

By way of climax, she often invaded Mr. Bonner's sacred retreat in mid morning, during the most precious of the day's work hours. Just how she conducted the first attack, no one ever knew; but Jean, going softly by the door of the room where the scientist *must not* be disturbed, noticed that it stood ajar. As she stopped to close it gently, so gently that the working of the scientific mind would not be disturbed, she heard voices—heard a familiar chuckle, a crow of delight. She peered incredulously through the crack. There on the big table desk sat Molly, kicking her heels contentedly, while Mr. Bonner holding up a choice specimen of *Lithosiidæ* before her, was evidently telling a most exciting story of its life and capture.

Yes, they all tried to keep an eye upon Molly, and it was in sheer devotion to this excellent purpose that the Bonners' cook and the Bonners' handy man fell into the way of roaming fields and woods and hills together in the long afternoons.

There was a first time, when Molly, with Jimmy in

tow, appeared and demanded Jean's company. On the way down the lane, the party of three met Teddy returning from a fence-mending expedition, and Molly annexed him by the simple expedient of clinging to one of his legs until the other began walking in the right direction.

So the party of four went on over the brow of the hill and down the glen to the open glade where the tinkling thread of brook widened into a pool before slipping away over great, flat, mossy stones, into the deep shadows.

They stopped now and then on the way—once to pick big prickly burrs which Jean made into amazingly ornate baskets; once at the wood's edge, where the same accomplished person gathered a bunch of little blossoms and leaves and transformed them into the fairest of flower ladies; once under a spreading oak tree, where Teddy, jealous of feminine achievement, fashioned solid and rotund little men out of acorns and twigs; once in a birch grove, where a fleet of birch-bark boats was whittled out and rigged with birch-leaf sails.

But in time they came to the pool. There the grown-ups sat down sedately in the shade of an old tree that grew on the water's edge, while Molly and Jimmy stretched themselves flat on their stomachs and launched the birch-bark boats.

Molly crowded her craft with flower ladies, but Jimmy chose a crew of acorn men and refused to take passengers.

"Mine's a freighter," he announced. "What'll we ship on her?"

"Spices from Araby," suggested Jean—"and dates from Samarcand—and peacocks and greenparrots and ivory and pearls and amber, and silks, and ruby necklaces and cocoanuts and tiger skins and——"

"Let's talk about 'em. Let's talk about 'em all." Jimmy's eyes were shining.

And so they talked about them. They fished for the pearls and snared the parrots and carried the ivory and dates across deserts on camel back and stopped at an oasis for the cocoanuts and finally Teddy killed the tigers in order to get the skins. He really knew a lot about killing tigers, though he didn't mention an Indian tiger-hunt or two in which he had shared, and—for a handy man—he was surprisingly well up on caravans and camels and oases. In fact he carried off the honours in the game when facts were in question but it was Jean who shone in poetry and fiction.

"Tell fings about ladies," commanded Molly, and straightway flower maidens were sent sailing on perilous seas, and were captured by a band of choke-cherry pirates whose stronghold was among the roots

of the old tree, and were rescued by acorn heroes—to the delight of Molly's feminist soul—could not swim half so well as the rescued maidens.

It was all tremendously thrilling and absorbing, so much so that the grown-ups forgot their dignity and lay down flat on *their* stomachs beside the pool, though the feminine grown-up made a concession to the proprieties by not kicking her heels in the air, as Molly did, in moments of tense excitement.

The pirates scuttled all the boats in the end, and the flower ladies were all drowned and the acorn men who were not slain with cutlasses were made to walk the plank. Jean protested but the masculine vote was against her, and Molly was unfemininely set upon wholesale slaughter.

"An' vey groan an' groan an' groan, an' everyfing's all bloody as can be," she explained with fine relish.

They left the pirates in full possession of the pool and went home through the lengthening shadows and the waning gold-green light—Molly in front with Jimmy but making sudden futile dashes around trees and into undergrowth to solve the riddles of queer little sounds and stirrings.

"So many fings won't wait for me," she lamented, her high, sweet little voice clear as bird notes on the quiet air. "Everyfing's vere, but I can't catch it."

"Poor Molly," Jean sighed. "She'll always be trying to catch it and I'm afraid it won't be there."

"Well, that's better than sitting in a rocking-chair to wait for it and not having it happen along." Teddy was optimistic. Suppose he had just gone on sitting in Coles's bay window! Suppose he hadn't tried to catch it!

Not that he *had* caught it. He did not claim that; but here he was, walking through the sweet fern and bayberry with the girl beside him, and the summer was little more than begun. If he had any luck at all, so he told himself, he ought to beat Jacob to it by about six years and nine months.

The day after the piratical fray misfortune came to the white house under the maples. It arrived in a blue envelope bearing the names of Pryor, Balch & Co., Mr. Bonner's lawyers, and Mrs. Bonner laid it carelessly aside while she divided her attention between her luncheon and a collection of mail not sheathed in blue. She had always found blue-envelope mail dry reading.

With the dessert, however, she came to the legal epistle; and after the first, few typewritten lines, it did not prove dry—somewhat unintelligible, absolutely incredible, but not dry. She read it with an expression of bewilderment overspreading her face. A second reading tinged the bewilderment with dismay.

"Rufus," she said, looking across the blue sheet of paper at her husband who was cutting the leaves of a newly arrived scientific magazine.

He evidently did not hear her. Mr. Bonner seldom consciously heard a first appeal to his attention.

"Rufus," she repeated. The disturbed note in her voice caught the attention of her cook but failed to penetrate her husband's detachment.

"Yes, my dear," he answered amiably but remotely.

"I've such a strange letter from Mr. Pryor. I wish you'd listen a moment."

Mr. Bonner withdrew his attention from the magazine but carefully marked with his forefinger a paragraph in which he had become interested.

"It's very confusing," Mrs. Bonner seemed slightly irritated. "Something has happened to the Rubber Company. I can't understand at all what *has* happened—things about minority stock holders and liabilities and reorganization and things like that. They've passed a dividend or something and stockholders won't have any money. I really don't think people ought to do things like that. Mr. Pryor seems to think it is going to be very inconvenient for us and I suppose it is. It does seem as if one's lawyer ought to manage such matters but he doesn't suggest anything—just says he regrets and all that, but there

won't be any money for us this summer. You couldn't do anything about it, could you?"

Mr. Bonner's eyes were already wandering toward the paragraph to which his forefinger faithfully pointed.

"I'm sorry, my dear, but business has never interested me." He spoke with courteous regret, but with finality. So far as he was concerned, the incident appeared to be closed and Mrs. Bonner evidently accepted his statement as simply as he made it.

"Yes, I know," she admitted. For a few moments she sat looking at the letter, with a furrow in her usually placid brow; but gradually her face cleared and when she folded the sheet and put it into the envelope she was smiling cheerfully.

"Well then, Jean, we'll be quite poor until something pleasant happens," she said to the girl who was hovering about the table, doing unnecessary things.

"Do you mean that we will be *really* poor, or just comparatively poor?" Jean asked. She was sympathetic, excited, inclined to treat the event as disaster.

"Oh, quite poor, I should think"—Mrs. Bonner's revived serenity refused to be shaken by the fact she acknowledged—"but probably something pleasant will happen soon. It usually does; and there is the

garden you know, and money doesn't really make so much difference in the country."

"We'll need to change our way of living, won't we?" The cook's mind was running on make-overs and balanced rations. She had never bothered much about these chapters in the cook book.

Mrs. Bonner gave the matter fleeting consideration. "Why yes, I suppose we will," she assented. A hint of helplessness crept into her eyes but was extinguished by a wave of inspiration. "We will *not* have beefsteak." She was unshakably firm about it. "Of course we do like it, but you said it was very expensive—the time Clark's bill was so high you know, and you thought we ought to change butchers. So we'll cut out beefsteak altogether and I'm sure we'll get along beautifully. At any rate we won't worry."

She gathered up her mail, rose from the table and went toward her study looking greatly relieved. The unpleasant situation had been met, adjusted. Mr. Bonner disappeared through the door of *his* study and the dining-room was left to a young woman in whose face and soul amusement and consternation struggled together.

Such Wonderlandish babes! And such an upsetting happening. Did they have any money at all? Could they keep things going? Would she get her wages?

If they had to close the house, what would she do? Questions swarmed in her mind.

If only there were a man to handle the problem. A man could look into the matter, would understand about stockholders and liabilities and things. A man would *do* something. After all there were times when a man——

She stopped short, on her way kitchenward with the dessert plates. Some one was whistling out in the woodshed. She stood listening for a moment, frowned a little, smiled a little, gave her head a decisive nod.

Why not? He was awfully kind and he adored Mrs. Bonner and he wasn't at all stupid—incredibly light-minded and slangy, but not at all stupid. And anyway one had to talk things over with somebody.

She set the dishes on the kitchen table, gave a swift glance at the mirror that hung between the windows, and went sedately out toward the woodshed.

The handy man was mending a hoe handle and did not hear her coming but the mending and the whistle stopped abruptly when she spoke.

"F'ward!" She called him Edward now, but always with a tinkle of ice in the name that made it sound prodigiously formal. He was used to the

frappé solution but to-day there was something else in the "Edward." He noticed it at once. If the thing had not been so improbable, he would have said that she was worried and turning to him for help, but that idea found no lodgment in his mind.

"More wood?" he asked cheerfully, as he laid the crippled hoe aside and came toward her.

"No; there's plenty of wood. I just want to talk to you."

His mind searched the day's record in trace of guilt, but found none. He had made the fire on time. He hadn't gone into her kitchen with muddy boots. He hadn't spilled water on her spotless linoleum. He hadn't kept luncheon waiting—indeed had had his luncheon early. His conscience was clear but she wanted to talk to him and she looked perturbed and her voice sounded younger than usual.

"What's the trouble?" he asked. There must be trouble. She couldn't just have conceived a sudden and overpowering passion for his style of conversation.

Jean sat down on the chopping block and looked up at him.

"It's about the Bonners," she said.

It was about the Bonners. He got that after a brief delay. Just for a moment he was wholly preoccupied by her way of looking up at a man.

"Yes? What's the matter with the cherubs?" he asked disrespectfully.

She told him all about it—at least she told him all she knew about it—and, as she told it, it seemed to grow less and less distressing. Edward was so obviously unmoved by the mention of minority stock holders and liabilities and he was so exceedingly appreciative of Mr. Bonner's refusal to be interested in his own business, and of Mrs. Bonner's masterly domestic strategy in the matter of beefsteak.

"That's all I could get out of them," she ended, "and now they're writing away as contentedly as though an uncle in India had died and left them millions."

"Aren't they the real thing in puncture-proofs?"

Teddy's tone was admiring, affectionate; but his eyes were serious.

"It sounds like rather a mess though. I sympathize with the old gentleman myself. Business has never interested me but it looks as though somebody'd better get busy and find out what's happened. We'll have to know where we stand."

He looked so big and confident and reliable that Jean felt much as Mrs. Bonner had, after her inspiration about the steak. She was sure they would go along beautifully.

"I'll nail Mrs. Bonner this afternoon when she comes to the garden," the man promised.

And he did.

The little gray lady's usual four o'clock stroll was quite spoiled, but she was very amiable about it, and entirely willing to tell her gardener all that she knew about her own business affairs, which was not much. She took him into the house and showed him some business papers—Mr. Bonner's business papers.

"He hasn't room in his desk for things like that," she explained. "So many valuable notes and data you know; but I thought they ought to be kept, so I brought them in here. They haven't anything to do with the Rubber Company stock though. That is mine. I think it's about all we have that pays. My husband has always been attracted to mines. They do sound very interesting, don't they? But they don't seem to be reliable.

"Old Mr. Pryor was a great comfort. He took care of my business for me and didn't bother me at all; just sent me checks twice a year—nice big checks. He died two years ago and his son seems to be different. He writes and wants orders about things and the checks haven't been so big and now there isn't any check at all. Of course it may not be his fault but I can't help feeling that he's not so capable a lawyer as his father was."

Later, Teddy wrote a letter to young Mr. Pryor.

"I'm afraid it means being actually hard up for a while," he reported to Jean. "There's very little in the bank and nothing else in sight. Mr. Bonner's investments are the choicest collection of gold bricks you ever saw. He's bought stock in mines all the way from Mexico to Labrador and I guess none of them has ever made a cent for him. They've had a corking good income out of this rubber stock that she inherited from an uncle, but they've never saved a penny of it—just gone mooning along relying on manna. I don't know but what it's as good a way as any. They've had a bully time and now when they come a cropper, somebody will turn in and help them out. Somebody always does turn in and help the incapables out.

"Did you ever have to learn that beastly French fable about the grasshopper and the ant? I was all for the grasshopper myself—but the fable hasn't got the thing right at all. 'You've sung all summer' the ant says to the grasshopper, you know, 'Well you can dance now.' And then the grasshopper dies a victim of his own idleness. That's fable right enough; it isn't fact. As far as I can see, the ants just groan a little and haul out the food and stuff they've stored up by losing all the fun, and give it to the grasshoppers so that they can go on singing."

"I don't notice an ant hill in the immediate foreground," Jean was too much occupied with the matter in hand to go in for generalization.

The handy man laughed a little softly.

"Looks as though it were up to us to be the ants," he said with a cheerful grin. "I've never been much of a toiler and saver myself but I guess I can get the trick if I have to."

Taking a family upon his hands seemed to have no terrors for him, and Jean, guiltily conscious of an unheroic and culpably selfish concern about her wages, eyed him with open admiration.

"You're splendid," she said frankly. "I didn't suppose men were like that. It isn't business."

The grin broadened.

"I suppose it isn't business but, as Jimmy would say, 'it's beans'; and one can't desert helpless infants by the roadside."

"No; one can't." She waved a mental good-bye to thirty-five dollars a month but sighed softly as she did it.

Teddy caught the fluttering sigh; but, the next moment, doubted whether he had heard it, for she was smiling at him gayly.

"It's exciting, isn't it?" she said. "I wish I had kept all the Woman's-Page newspaper articles about how to live on nothing a year. Can you fish?"

"I can."

"Can you *catch* fish?"

"If there *are* fish."

"Jimmy says there are pickerel in Green River, big ones—and sun fish. I told him I'd go fishing with him."

"We will—twice a week." He was evidently ready to sacrifice himself to any extent.

"Fish would help a lot; and we've prunes—perfect stacks of prunes. And rice; Mrs. Bonner bought tons of rice! The man at Macy's told her there were six hundred and two delicious nourishing dishes that could be made out of rice, and that a Japanese could live and get fat on a handful of rice a day.

"I had a prejudice against that grocery clerk but now my heart warms to him. If worst comes to worst we can live on sardines and kippered herring. He sold Mrs. Bonner enough of those for an army. Wasn't she a lambkin to buy such a silly lot of stuff when she had the money? We'll worry along beautifully until her 'something pleasant' happens. She was perfectly sure something pleasant *would* happen."

"Something pleasant has happened." There was profound conviction in his voice. Wasn't it a pleasant thing to find the walls of Troy town down, and

Helen and himself sitting among the ruins planning a partnership?

A letter came to Mr. Edward Burton from young Mr. Pryor confirming the bad news of the first letter and adding details that were presumably a concession to masculine intelligence.

Things were bad enough temporarily. The tangle would be straightened out in time. The property was sound, but there had been mismanagement; a combination of unfortunate circumstances had made trouble. Mr. Pryor would look out for Mrs. Bonner's interests and report to her; or, with her authorization, to Mr. Burton.

"And so," the aforesaid Mr. Burton explained to the aforesaid Mrs. Bonner's cook, "we've got to cut the *gasolene* and butter bills. If we don't wallop the high cost of living, we won't be able to pay ourselves our wages."

"Wages!" The cook's face radiated relief. "I thought we weren't going to have wages."

"The labourer is worthy of his hire," her fellow servant quoted solemnly, "and we're going to be some little labourers," he added in less stately vein.

He had noticed the flushed cheeks and happy eyes with a thump of his heart.

To think that she needed the measly thirty-five dollars a month—that she actually needed it—and

he'd been loping around spending ten thousand a year!

That thirty-five a month was all she had to depend on and yet she'd been willing to stand by and see the Bonners through.

He wanted to pick her up and run away with her, wanted to give her everything the world had to offer, wanted to pull the social system apart and make it into a necklace for her. It was a crime for a girl like that to have to work and scrimp and worry, while the other girls he had known—— Right there he pulled himself up short.

The other girls he had known had been brought up on the no-work, no-scrimp, no-worry system, and look at them! Maybe idleness and luxury and self-indulgence didn't make girls like this one. Perhaps a girl needed grilling as much as a boy. A woman was likely to have as many hard things to meet as a man when it came to real living, might even have to help a man meet his hard things as a partner should. Fat chance of a partner a fellow had when he picked his winner out of the society bunch. Now Jean—— But, all the same he wanted to give her the universe to play with, and he had just twenty-eight dollars and four cents.

Of course he could get money—borrow it, write to his father for it; not money enough to corral the

universe but enough to see the Bonners through. The girl wouldn't take the universe from him even if he could hand it to her on a silver tray—not yet.

Yes; he could get the money, but it would be a crawl. He had cleaned out his bank account to pay up his debts before leaving town and had written his father that he wouldn't want his allowance any longer, that he was going to make his own way during the summer and jump into the business in the fall. Somehow or other, living on an allowance hadn't seemed good enough—after he'd seen Jean.

The old gentleman hadn't protested, hadn't asked questions, had merely taken him at his word. That was like Dad. Fishing through his pockets, he pulled out a crumpled letter, smoothed it out and read it again. His father had dictated to his stenographer:

DEAR TED: Yours of the 8th to hand and contents noted. You do not go into details; but I assume that you haven't given up your Canada fishing trip and summer in British Columbia except for something you like better. Don't marry it.

However, when you tell me that you don't intend to spend more during the summer than you will earn, I doubt whether a petticoat is responsible for your change of plans.

Let me hear from you when you need me. Probably you'd better let me hear a little in advance of the need.

Your affectionate father,
EDWARD BURTON.

P. S.—You ask me to trust you. I always have done so. I do. Still you've often been a good deal of an ass.
DAD.

(The postscript was in his father's handwriting.)

Teddy's eyes smiled as he read. Bully old Dad. Bursting with curiosity and more worried about this summer at hard labour than he had ever been by anything his prodigal son had sprung upon him, but asking no questions. He had set a two-year limit and he was sticking to it.

No, he wouldn't write to Dad for money. He wouldn't borrow money. For the first time in his life he would see what he was worth when it came down to primitive valuations, find out whether he could buckle down and take care of himself and of a family. Jean would help him. He repeated that to himself several times. "Jean would help." Jean was that kind.

There was something immensely stimulating about the idea of taking care of a family with Jean to help him. Lord! What *couldn't* a man do with a girl like Jean to help?

The new *régime* was inaugurated at once. Revolution swept through the Bonner *ménage* but the Bonners themselves never noticed that anything was happening, and, indeed, there was no place where the new economy pinched their comfort.

Jean had always taken pride in her housekeeping. Now she put heart and brain and body into it and found the game of stretching a dollar to its ultimate limit of value the most absorbing and fascinating one she had ever played.

Perhaps if she had been making the fight single-handed and alone, her enthusiasm might have flagged more readily; but a partner was extraordinarily stimulating and *her* partner, in particular, was appreciative to a degree that spurred her on to miracles of achievement. It is only a very saintly soul that can keep the acts of his right hand from the knowledge of his left hand and still find a spicy flavour in well doing. Your ordinary mortal needs some one to whom he can boast at the end of a well-spent day and Jean's partner tolerated boastfulness, encouraged it. He even boasted a little himself—modestly—and Jean was fair enough to take a fervent interest in his end of the game. She could not thrill to the renting of pasturage as she could to a cut in the butter bill; but she did thrill, and thrilling was such a pink-cheeked shining-eyed process on her part, that

it would have rewarded a man for a doughtier deed than wringing six dollars out of an untilled field.

Still, six dollars would go a long way in the hands of a young woman who was a wizard at manipulating food values. She assured him of that.

"The things I can do with stuff I've always wasted before!" she chortled triumphantly. "It's wonderful, and yet I thought I was being economical all the time. It's odds and ends and corners and all that."

She was not lucid but he got her idea.

"If only we had a cow." Her voice oozed hopeless longing. "A cow and chickens. We've got the garden and the fruit, and with butter and milk and eggs— A cow and chickens would be perfect, simply perfect. If we'd only known what was coming! The Bonners would just as soon have bought cows and chickens as anything else when they had money, but of course we couldn't tell——"

Oh that "we"!—that "we"! The listening man almost purred for joy in it.

She must have a cow and chickens. That was flat. Short of larceny he did not see a way of accomplishing it, but the thing was as good as done.

By way of making a start he took Peter Pease into his confidence the next morning when that friendly neighbour dropped in to watch Teddy at his garden

work. Peter did not work himself—not more than was absolutely necessary. He was alone. A microscopic pension came to him regularly. His wants were few, and violent effort was not one of them—however, he took a tolerant interest in the activities of others and he knew the neighbourhood thoroughly, exhaustively. He had time to know it.

“Want chickens, eh? And the use of a cow?” He seemed surprised, even grieved by the folly of it.

“Mean’s work, son,” he warned but when the Bonners’ handy man insisted that he was suicidally bent upon adding to his own labours, Peter sat down on a wheelbarrow, lighted his pipe, and gave his mind to the problem.

“There’s Tim Kelly down below the hill,” he said. Teddy had never heard of Tim Kelly, but waited hopefully.

“Tim’s come into money from an uncle in Tammany. At least he was in Tammany. Where the man is now I’ll not say, but the crowd he’s training with is maybe much the same as ’twas here. But at any rate Tim’s come into money and he’s going away to spend it. He’ll be selling off his things and Mary Kelly—his wife—has got a fine lot of barred Plymouth Rocks. They’ve about supported the family but now that the family doesn’t need supporting I

guess Plymouth Rocks'll go cheap. Anything to get away quick and begin catching up with the procession. You send Mrs. Morley's Jim down to offer 'em five dollars for the lot. Don't go yourself. If Tim knew summer folks wanted them, he'd stick you, even if he don't need the money—just on principle—but he'll let Mrs. Morley have 'em for five.

“Then about that cow. Parsons, over on Spring Hill's got more cows than he can handle just now. Wife's sick. Can't make butter, and no hired help to be got, and not much pasture, and feed's high. I guess if you was to offer to let him turn his young heifers into your east meadow where there's plenty of water and good grass, and would feed a cow up and let him have it again in September, he'd give you the use of it.”

Tim Kelly, in the flush of sudden prosperity scorned to haggle over chickens. Jimmy returned from his errand divided between exultation over a good bargain and grief over the loss of a better one.

“He'd a let me have 'em for three, if I hadn't been chucklehead enough to offer 'im five before he began tellin' me about how he was goin' to live in New York!”—he reported—“but I got 'im to throw in some nestin' boxes and a roll of chicken wire.”

Mr. Parsons too, was amenable to reason. Three

days later the Bonners' cook and the Bonners' handy man made the acquaintance of a placid Jersey cow and a hysterical tribe of chickens.

"Now," remarked the cook with profound satisfaction, "I feel that the family circle is complete."

Teddy made a chicken run and—to the very considerable inconvenience of Gladys, the new cow—learned to milk. Jean fed chickens and scoured milk pans and made butter.

"There's those that like work," admitted Peter Pease, "and I believe in letting every one be happy in his own way; but it does seem to me as if you two had gone looking for trouble and found it."

It was Peter who suggested selling the surplus garden stuff.

"You've got enough to feed the country. Lord knows why you planted it. What's the use of working to raise it and then giving most of it away?"

"Well, neighbours, you know——" began Teddy.

"No, I don't know—not when it goes as far as work; but I wasn't talking about neighbours. It's Bowles I've got my eye on. Get him to take garden truck in exchange for groceries and meat. He'll do it. He's got to have vegetables, and nobody else around here raises stuff like yours, sits up nights with it and holds its hand and tucks it in and feeds it and gives it drinks and doctors it and all that sort of

Agricultural College foolishness. Bowles'll be glad to make a deal with you."

And Bowles, if not glad, was willing.

Peter Pease smiled indulgently when told the good news.

"You see it isn't that I couldn't make money," he said. "It's that I don't want it."

Ragged, cheerful, contented, the descendant of Puritan stock sat on the well-curb in the sunshine, and was at peace with the world.

"You're rather magnificent you know" (Teddy's voice had a note of envy in it). "You and Buddha and the rest; but I guess I was built for a Thing-worshipper."

"She's a pretty thing." Peter's remark was irrelevant of course; but his face took on a look of even more profound content as he watched Jean Mackaye coming down the path toward the well. He liked to look at a pretty woman. It was pleasant, and it was easy.

Peter was not the only friend the partners made in those first days of feeling their way. There had been no prejudice against the Bonners in the countryside. Like Mr. Flavin, in the city, the country folk had classified the pair as "daft" and were inclined to accord them the tolerant kindness usually granted to the feeble-minded. There were exceptions. Mrs.

Morley, for example, had learned something of Mrs Bonner's quality, and tried to make others believe in it, but few came near enough to understand the little gray lady and her stooping, gentle-mannered husband, and there had been little coming and going between the white house under the maples and the homes round about it.

Now, gradually, the Bonner household began to belong—to be a part of the country life, instead of a God-given, vaguely impersonal source of summer revenue for the community.

The Bonners were hard up. Every one knew it. Jean and Teddy had not talked but Mrs. Bonner had. She had told Mrs. Morley all about it, treating it as a cheerful if unimportant topic of conversation. She had told the minister, too, when he came to make his annual call, and had been frankly amazed when he had treated the situation as one calling for sympathy and quotations from the more encouraging parts of the Psalms.

“But we are getting along perfectly,” she explained. “Jean and Edward are such excellent managers and it isn't as if things weren't going to be all right again very soon. Yes, of course I do pray, but not more than usual. I forget about praying—in words you know—a good deal of the time, but I'm very sure with my heart all the time, and that does

just as well, don't you think? Sometimes I think it's the only part of prayer that gets as far as God anyway; but everybody must pray as he likes—only I wouldn't think of praying a special prayer about the Rubber Company. It doesn't seem as though the Rubber Company would make a good prayer; so I'm just very thankful about having Jean and Edward and that's all the special praying I've been doing."

She wasn't flippant or irreverent. She was only very simple and cheerful; and the lean, long, over-conscientious young man with the ministerial manner and the very human heart, smiled at her as he might have smiled at Molly, and put his professional sympathy and encouragement back in the pocket of his clerical coat.

He met Teddy out in the front yard as he was leaving, and interrupted the lawn mowing for a long time, but the two were not talking about the condition of Teddy's soul. They were discussing fishing and baseball and canoeing and chicken feed and head lettuce; and, finally, they strolled around the house to the garden where they found Jean picking peas for supper.

She showed no consideration whatsoever for the cloth. Here was a young man, a good-looking young man. That he was a very godly young man made no

difference in her attitude toward the phenomenon. For a long time she had been very, very good. Moreover, Mrs. Bonner's handy man had never seen her with another young man.

The young minister enjoyed a very stimulating if slightly bewildering hour on a garden bench and went away with a rose in his buttonhole and confusion in his orderly bachelor heart.

He talked a good deal about the Bonner household, as he made his other visits, not because he was a gossip but because he really could not keep away from the subject and since he was as simple and transparent as he was good, the Ladies' Aid Society, at its next session, devoted much of its time and talk to the susceptibility of the unmarried clergy and to Jean Mackaye's looks and character.

Mrs. Morley, the only member who was actually qualified to express an opinion about the young person's character, spoke with no uncertain note.

"She's as nice a girl as ever stepped—and I don't care where the next one comes from," she declared stoutly. "The way she takes care of those two Bonners! And her kitchen floor so you could eat off it, and always a pleasant word and a smile, and not a hook or button off. Clean as ice she is—and saving, and smart. Susan can tell you. And if she has pretty looks and a way with her, it's what the

Lord's given her. He wasn't thinking of our minister when he gave them to her, and anyway you don't need to be worrying. There'll be plenty of men at her heels before she picks one, and it's my opinion that young Burton isn't blind or deaf or dumb, or mortal slow either."

Whereupon the Ladies' Aid Society transferred its attention to Edward Burton, Junior.

As the local paper put it: "A very pleasant time was had by all present at the meeting of the Ladies' Aid Society on Saturday." And after that meeting, Jean and Teddy were public characters though they did not realize it.

Peter Pease testified, early and late, to their virtues, and though the neighbourhood condemned Peter's philosophy of life, it respected his judgment—and information—about the lives of others.

"Those two young folks at Bonners are stem winders," he declared. "Yes, sir, stem winders. They haven't got much experience, and I don't know as they've got much learning, but they've got horse sense and grit, and they're as lively and sassy as chipmunks—always laughing and joking and taking care of the old gentleman and lady as if it was a blessed privilege instead of hard work. Why, do you know, I don't believe they're taking any wages at all now? I overheard them talking one day. He was

trying to make her take her wages out of some money he'd got for hay, and she asked had he taken his own wages—and when he sort of hesitated a minute, she said it was insulting of him to think she was a horrid mercenary little toad, and the first thing I knew she came tearing around the woodhouse plump into me. Mad as a hornet she was, and tears in her eyes.

“‘Mr. Pease,’ she said, ‘the ideas *you men* have about women are outrageous—perfectly outrageous. I should think you’d be ashamed of yourselves not to have more respect for your mothers!’ And with that she ran into the house and slammed the door.

“I went on around the woodhouse and there was young Burton looking half tickled and half scared.

“‘Son,’ I says, ‘wherever did you get your outrageous ideas about women?’ He began to grin at that, and he says:

“‘Mr. Pease, I haven’t got any ideas about women at all. When it comes to women I’m a dub. I’m sailing without a chart, but I did have a sort of an idea that when a girl worked like the dickens for people she ought to have her wages. Seems I was mistaken,’ he says. No sir, I don’t believe either of those youngsters is drawing a cent. They’re just hustling to keep the Bonners wrapped in cotton wool

and I think they're an honour to the neighbourhood. That's the way I feel about it."

The neighbourhood was inclined to feel the same way and the church festival precipitated the friendliness that was already in solution.

Jean had promised the young minister to "help," so she went around to the church early and offered her services with becoming meekness and modesty.

"Mr. Hanley thought maybe I could do something for you," she said to Mrs. Pettingill, plump, gray-haired, red-cheeked, executive. Mrs. Pettingill took the new recruit's measure with her keen blue eyes.

"You can," she said promptly. "Go and sell to the men everything you can lay hands on."

It was almost too easy.

This was Jean's first church festival, but if a church festival was cousin—no matter how many times removed—to a charity bazaar, her foot was on her native heath.

She began on the young men but quickly worked up to the older ones, leaving bankruptcy in her wake. Elderly deacons who had come to spend ten cents on a plate of ice cream found themselves recklessly, inexplicably, treating groups of women to ice cream and cake, buying candy and peanuts for children, putting their names down as subscribers for the new church carpet.

The size of the cake slices and of the ice cream portions shrunk shamelessly as the evening wore on.

"If only we'd ordered more of everything!" groaned Mrs. Pettingill and her co-workers.

When the food supply ran low, Jean sold button-hole bouquets, hastily requisitioned from neighbouring yards. She took orders for Mrs. Bennet's doughnuts and Myra Anderby's chocolate fudge. She rashly promised to have a church fair and supply pink gingerbread bumpers. She sang old English ballads at fifty cents a ballad—the purse made up among the crowd. And when—having auctioned off the only cake left (a large, sticky one, iced in poisonous green) to the stingiest man in Green Ridge, for a price that was nothing short of highway robbery—she looked hopefully around for new worlds to conquer, nothing seemed left for barter except the organ, the chairs, and the framed texts.

Deacon Ezra Johnson, who in a moment of hypnosis had bought the green cake, confided to Mr. Hanley, the minister, that he had his misgivings about auctions in the church.

"There's that matter of the money changers, you know," he murmured, but the minister only laughed.

"This is giving to the Lord, Deacon," he said reassuringly.

The Ladies' Aid Society had no misgivings what-

soever—only gnawing regret that it had not provided more bountifully for the spoiling of the Egyptians.

As a unit, it kissed Jean Mackaye good-night when she started home.

“Be sure and come to the meeting at Mrs. Pettingill’s Saturday, so we can plan about a Fair,” the women chorused.

She was no longer Mrs. Bonner’s city cook. She was a Green Ridge institution.

“Aren’t they darling?” she sighed happily to Teddy as he started the car. “Aren’t they perfectly darling?”

“Darling!” echoed the man. It was a very fervent echo. Hearing it without the context one might have taken it for a vocative.

Once taken to the heart of the neighbourhood, “the Bonners’ young folks,” as they were usually called, found themselves in demand. Teddy’s church-festival career, though not so meteoric as Jean’s, had been eventful. He had hung Japanese lanterns. He had opened pop bottles, he had lifted ice-cream freezers, he had carried heavy trays and tables and chairs.

“You’re the handiest young man I ever saw,” Mrs. Pettingill had commented admiringly.

“It’s my profession,” Teddy had reminded her with modest pride.

In the intervals of work he had promised to join the Grange and to organize a baseball team and to set off the fireworks at the Fourth of July picnic and to help the Cemetery Association clean up the neglected graveyard and to go to Hartford with the Better Roads Committee.

In such a fine glow of neighbourly good feeling was he that if somebody had asked him to lead the next prayer meeting he would have agreed without a moment's hesitation; but in the cold light of the day after the festival, he took stock of his promises and smiled ruefully.

"This get-together business is all very well," he remarked to the cook, "but when do you and I go fishing?"

She looked down at him from dizzy spiritual heights.

"Ladies' Aiding is going to be my chosen sport, after this, Edward. I have put away the milder forms of dissipation."

CHAPTER XI

MRS. MORLEY'S first boarder arrived shortly after the Fourth of July.

He had been heralded by a suave, quiet young man who one day drove over from Taylorsville, the nearest station, stopped at the little Green Ridge post-office and told Mrs. Betts, the postmistress' that he was looking for a boarding place for an elderly gentleman who needed country air and quiet. Mrs. Betts—so he told Mrs. Morley later—assured him that Mrs. Morley's home was exactly what he wanted.

Mrs. Morley looked gratified but modest and said she always tried to make her boarders comfortable.

"Have you any boarders at the moment?" asked the stranger.

"No," she hadn't.

He nodded approvingly. "That's very nice, very nice indeed. Mr. Brown was in hopes he might find a place where he would be the only boarder."

"But there will be others later. The last of July and August, there's always somebody."

Mrs. Morley could not bind herself to turn away all comers because of an exclusive old gentlemen.

The visitor moved a careless hand. "Mr. Brown will probably stay only a short time. While he is here he will be glad to pay a price proportioned to what you would make if all of your rooms were full. How many boarders can you take?"

"Four." Mrs. Morley's voice was weak from astonishment.

"Exactly. Then Mr. Brown will pay at the rate for four persons."

The landlady's honest soul rebelled. "I really couldn't," she began.

"We will consider that settled." He had a very firm way with him. "You will find Mr. Brown a very pleasant gentleman but, as I have said, he is greatly in need of seclusion and complete rest. His eyes and his nerves are very bad and he is quite unequal to meeting stranger—outside of your family of course. You will excuse him, if he keeps himself very much to himself, and realize that it is matter of health, not crankiness. He will arrive on the twelve-o'clock train Thursday, and I will make arrangements in the village to have him brought over, so he will be here for luncheon. He will find everything very comfortable I am sure. Your rates are—you said?"

"Eight dollars a week."

"Exactly. Four times eight—thirty-two." He took out a roll of bills, and handed the overwhelmed landlady thirty-two dollars. "A stranger you see, and of course you couldn't know. Good-morning, madam. A beautiful view you have here. Good-morning."

He whisked out to the waiting motor car and was off in a cloud of dust, leaving Mrs. Morley staring speechlessly at the money in her hand.

"He was like machinery," she told Susan later. "Clip, clip, clip—not a minute wasted; comes, settles things, goes. Clip, clip, clip!"

Mr. Brown arrived at twelve-thirty on Thursday, according to schedule, and was greeted by a nervous landlady whose anxious face relaxed perceptibly as her new boarder shook hands with her and thanked her for taking him in.

"He's not at all what I expected," she reported to Susan when she had shown him his rooms and left him to rest until dinner time.

"I'd been looking for something thin and snappy. Nerves 'most always take them that way; but he's real stout and he speaks as cheerful and friendly as can be. It's a pity he has to wear those huge dark glasses. You can't tell what he rightly looks like, and I shouldn't wonder if he's a mighty pleasant-

looking man when his eyes are well. Not so old, either."

The appetite the boarder displayed at the midday dinner completed his conquest of his landlady. "And me figuring on gruel and soft food!" she laughed as she gave him his second piece of pie.

Mr. Brown's face, or at least the part of his face not hidden by the big glasses, looked guilty but he joined in the laugh.

"It's often that way with nervous cases," he explained. "They need feeding up. I believe your cooking will do more than medicine for me, Mrs. Morley."

The light of battle dawned in the landlady's eyes. If what this afflicted man needed was feeding up, she would see that he got what he needed.

"An old-fashioned boiled dinner, now," the invalid suggested. "I dare say you can cook a boiled dinner that tastes right. It's a thing I can't seem to get in town."

Mrs. Morley smiled the smile of conscious power.

"It's pretty hearty," she warned; Mr. Brown waved the warning aside.

"I like my food hearty. There's a thing I used to have for breakfast when I was a boy: Salt pork, fried crisp and brown, and some sort of white gravy—

not a sauce you know, just an honest gravy—lots of it poured over the pork and then some. And boiled potatoes.”

Mrs. Morley's, thin, wrinkled face was all aglow.

“My land, man, it's going to be a treat—a real treat—to cook for you.”

“And doughnuts.” The pleasant mouth below the disfiguring glasses was smiling boyishly. “And pie—plenty of pie. This is a pie to put a soul under the ribs of death, madam.”

The flattered pie maker smoothed back her scant blonde hair with both hands—her habitual gesture in moments of great excitement. The hair was already skinned back from her forehead so tightly that it drew her eyebrows upward. Everything about Mrs. Morley was under more or less strain. Life's demands upon her had always been just a little more than she could meet easily, though they had been met pluckily, and to the effort demanded of her, she had added the free tribute of a generous and unselfish heart

“Lucilla Morley,” Mrs. Pettingill had once said to her in a moment of friendly exasperation, “you're good to everybody but yourself. You'll let anybody on earth impose on you. It's all nonsense. I tell you those that will, *may*.”

And Mrs. Morley, quite missing the point, but

catching at the last phrase, had smiled contentedly into her friend's face.

"Yes; we can always help, if we want to. There's always some way opened up, so's you can. Isn't it splendid, Sarah?"

As for cooking boiled dinners and salt pork and pie for a man whose nerves needed them and whose appetite clamoured for them, and being paid generously for doing it, Mrs. Morley's cup of happiness was full. Another drop, and it would have spilled over.

"Susan," she said, when the boarder had retired to his own room, "I'm a wicked woman—doubting and fussing and looking up my arrowroot-jelly recipe—and the Lord having a fine hearty eater picked out for me all the time!"

Susan laid aside her sewing to help in clearing the table.

"The boarder that wouldn't be satisfied with your cooking 'd ought to choke to death on his first meal here," she said vehemently, but Mrs. Morley shook her head.

"A man's got a right to expect mighty good victuals at thirty-two dollars a week. Seems as if a boiled dinner wasn't hardly dressy enough. I'm going to look through the old copies of the *Ladies' Companion* for some of those trimmed-up dishes

with cut-out eggs and olives, and roses and paper frills and things on them."

All through that first afternoon Mrs. Morley and Susan tiptoed about the house and talked in hushed voices. A boarder with frayed nerves needed absolute quiet, undisturbed repose and they were determined he should have them.

"It's lucky Molly is off with Jim or down at the Bonners' most of the time," Molly's mother said, thankfully. "She won't bother him, except on rainy days."

"Jim can play in the hay-mow with her when it rains," Mrs. Morley suggested.

"Yes she loves the hay-mow."

And while they planned Molly's suppression, that quite irrepressible young person was introducing the nervous Mr. Brown to the new calf, and the spotted cow, and the chicken with the lame leg, and the pig that "liked to be dirty," and Ebenezer the cat that was "just so stubborn he wouldn't have kittens" though "ve uvver old cat vat got lost used to have lots and lots of lovely ones."

For a man with a passion for seclusion, the boarder seemed wonderfully resigned to companionship. He had found his room comfortable but lonely, and, wandering down to the front porch, had been

promptly annexed by Molly who had been preparing to run away—but suddenly discovered that home was a place of absorbing interest.

“Are you ve new boarder,” she asked, breathlessly.

He admitted that he was.

“Don’t you want to see little girls eiver?” She was not reproachful. She merely wanted to know the length and breadth of his prejudices.

“Muvver said you didn’t want to see peoples,” she explained, “but five going on six isn’t a people, is it?”

“Five going on six is a splendid age.” The boarder was profoundly serious. “*I always* want to see fives-going-on-sixes.”

She chuckled happily.

“Ven I’ll show you. Come on.”

She showed him, and when he had seen all of the family except Jimmy, and the big toad that lived under the stone well-curb and wouldn’t come out for all Molly’s coaxing, she took him down to the garden where Jimmy was hoeing corn.

“Jimmy ain’t a people eiver,” she announced cheerfully. “You’ll like Jimmy awful much.”

He did like Jimmy awful much; and Jimmy, after the first few moments of painful embarrassment, liked him.

“Have to hoe?” asked the boarder.

“Nope.”

"Well then come along."

The three went down the lane and into the woods. When they came back to the house through the long shadows of the late afternoon, they were friends. Even at a distance, Mrs. Morley, standing in the kitchen doorway, could see that. It was in the way Molly swung on the boarder's hand, in the way Jimmy grinned up into the boarder's face, in the way the boarder's lips were smiling below the disfiguring brown glasses.

"Well for land's sake!" Mrs. Morley's astonishment brought Susan to her side.

"Muvver," Molly called joyfully, "ve boarder knows about Indians. He tells us—an' whistles—an' sling sots an' 'doodle bug, doodle bug' an' everyfing——"

"You children'd ought to be ashamed of yourselves." Mrs. Morley tried to be severe but was only helplessly reproachful.

"Mr. Brown, if I'd had any idea they were pestering you——"

"They weren't," the boarder was emphatic about it. For a nervous wreck, as Susan remarked to Jean Mackaye when she strolled down later in the evening, he had a very boyish way with him.

Jean was curious about the boarder. Everybody in the neighbourhood was curious about the boarder.

The story of his nerves and his distaste for society and his thirty-two dollars a week had travelled to the remotest end of Green Ridge, and beyond. Taylorsville hummed with him. Even in Wilkesbury, ten miles away, conversation began and ended with him. The Ridge itself was not only curious about him but proud of him. A man as rich and nervous as Mrs. Morley's boarder conferred distinction upon the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Morley herself became a storm centre of gossip. Not that the good woman knowingly gossiped. She did not, but wherever she went gossip swirled round about her. At the Ladies' Aid meetings, at the sewing circle, in the church vestibule, she was the centre of an interested and slightly anxious group. Neighbours ran in to visit with her, early and late. Invitations showered upon her.

Being but human, she sunned herself in this sudden popularity and, being the kindest of women, she tried to do what was expected of her and supply new data about her boarder from day to day.

Nothing that she told was ill-natured; ill nature was not in Mrs. Morley. But Green Ridge knew when Mr. Brown went to bed and when he got up, how he liked his coffee, what he thought about city shortcake, how many cans of water he used for his

morning bath, and how high he opened his bedroom window at night. The colour of his pyjamas was no secret from the Ladies' Aid Society, and the fact that the pyjamas were of silk, shook the Ridge from Cedar Brook to Cooper's Landing.

The number of Mrs. Morley's visitors swelled and swelled. She had always been a hospitable soul and neighbours had dropped in upon her whenever they felt so inclined, sure of a welcome; but now they came on every possible pretext and without any pretext. Some of them, like Mrs. Pettingill, were perfectly frank about the motive for frequent visits.

"It's a pity if I can't run into Lucilla Morley's for a bit of gossip about her boarder without taking her a batch of fresh-raised rolls, or borrowing her Indian-pudding recipe, or pretending I've come to ask her what she'd do if her chickens had pip," Mrs. Pettin-gill said in high disgust with Ridge diplomacy. "I go down and say: 'Well Lucilla, what's your Rockefeller sensitive plant been doing lately?' And we have a good comfortable talk about him and then I come away. He don't seem to do much but fool around with those two young ones, though. Lucilla says Jim and Molly are crazy about him, and he wants them around all the time. Molly may be his idea of a nerve quieter, but she isn't mine. Jim, now, he's an understanding little chap. He can keep quiet

when you want him to, but Molly—she's about as restless as a terrier pup, and as cute, too."

Mr. Brown was not so interested in all the neighbours as all the neighbours were in him; but he was always willing to listen to Jimmy's and Molly's graphic descriptions of Ridge characters, Ridge happenings, and Ridge ways; and, from the first, he showed curiosity about certain persons.

"No city summer folk around here, I suppose?" he said to Jimmy, on the afternoon of their first meeting.

"Nope." Jim was notching a willow whistle of a very superior kind to which the boarder had introduced him and was consequently absent-minded, but when the tension relaxed he remembered the Bonners and mentioned them.

"Bonners? Who are they?" Mr. Brown was lazily indifferent but seemed to feel the necessity of making conversation.

"Oh they're nuts." Jim liked the Bonners, but youth is blithely irreverent.

"Nuts?"

"Yep—sort of loony. Not crazy you know, but writin' all the time and don't know anything's happened since year before last."

"Oh, I see—literary folk. Any young people in the family?"

"Nope. They're so absent-minded they forgot to have any."

The boarder laughed. "And they're the only city people around here? No other boarders like me?"

Jim tried the whistle with triumphant results.

"Nope. Ain't she a screecher though?"

Mr. Brown's nerves might, presumably, have protested against the shrill clamour, but he only admitted that she *was* a screecher. There was a puzzled look in the eyes from which he had removed the disfiguring spectacles.

"I wonder," he said, "if there is another Green Ridge in Connecticut."

Jimmy did not know—or care. He was practising what he fondly believed to be "Tipperary" and absorbed in the effort.

Molly, who having finished burying a dead beetle with appropriate ceremony was for the moment unoccupied, relieved Mr. Brown of the conversational burden.

"An'vere was a mouse in Mrs. Bonner's room," she said, going back to the last word that had caught her attention. If they were going to talk about the Bonners why not tell dramatic things about them? Molly's taste ran to the dramatic.

"An' Jean was 'fraid of ve mouse, and Mrs. Bonner went up on ve chair, an' I ran got Teddy an'——"

"Teddy? Teddy who?"

Mr. Brown sat up suddenly—lively interest in every line of his face.

Molly eyed him with disapproval. Her climax is not spoiled, was marred; but she did her best in spite of the interruption.

"An' ve mouse ran under ve table an' Teddy came an' he took the poker, an' Jean said, 'Oh, don't!' an' Mrs. Bonner said, 'Oh, don't!' an' Teddy said, 'Well, what d'you want me to do?' an' Jean said, 'It'd make me sick,' an' Mrs. Bonner said, 'You'll have to catch it'; an' ven Teddy laughed an' laughed, an' he took ve table cover an' he ran round an' round, an' ve mouse ran round an' round, an' Teddy froo ve table cover over it, an' ven he picked it up, an' it wiggled Jean said, 'Oh ve poor fing,' an' Mrs. Bonner said, 'Put it out doors'; but Teddy took it out to ve woods'ed an' drownded it—only he said I mustn't tell."

She came to a full stop and Mr. Brown repeated his question.

"Who's Teddy?" he asked. This time Molly was willing to answer.

"He's just Teddy," she explained helpfully.

The man turned to Jim who met the appeal by putting the screecher carefully in his inside pocket and settling down to the lesser joy of conversation.

"She means Mr. Burton. He's the Bonners' hired man."

A wave of emotion passed over Mr. Brown's face. He opened his mouth but no words came; so he closed it again and, taking out his handkerchief, wiped his brow carefully, then put on his goggles.

"Light hurt you?" Jimmy asked sympathetically.

"A little," admitted the Boarder. "This Burton is hired man for the—the nuts?"

"Yep. And say, he's the greatest you ever saw." Jimmy was launched upon a favourite topic. "He's got the finest garden, and he could make a car skip rope if he wanted to, and he can mend anything, and Peter Pease says he's the best natural hand with cattle he ever knew. Never drove a yoke in his life till he came here and now he can make those contrary big red ones of Mr. Pettingill's pull the whole of Cedar Hill if he wanted to. And shoot! Say, he can hit anything! He's got a rifle club down at the old mill but I ain't old enough yet. He's goin' to put me in a scrub ball team though—left field. It's a pity you wasn't here for the Fourth. Gee! but we walloped the Wilkesbury team. Teddy he'd been coachin' and he pitched for us. Some pitcher! I tell you—and he was tired at that, because he'd been helpin' fix up Grange Hall for the meetin' and doin' most of it himself—made the best speech too.

He said we was a punk bunch of Americans compared to Washington and those guys and that we'd better get up and hump ourselves, and that a good way to start 'd be keepin' out the saloon that's tryin' to come in."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the listening Mr. Brown, feebly.

"He cooked that saloon man's goose all right, all right!" exulted Jimmy. "They got up a committee and all the men was on it—except some that wasn't sober enough. Fourth of July and everything you know.

"He's got 'em goin' about good roads, too. Mr. Anderson he started it, but Teddy's whoopin' it up. He's the greatest one at whoopin' things up."

A queer smile appeared below Mr. Brown's goggles and spread.

"Yes, I can believe it. I can quite believe it. As a whooper up, I shouldn't wonder if he's in the front rank."

"Hungry!" announced Molly. Jim took a look at the sky and jumped to his feet.

"Great Scott! it's past supper time!"

He grabbed Molly's hand and set off hastily toward home, the Boarder following at a more leisurely pace and evidently deep in thought, but at the end of the lane, Mr. Brown shook off his thought-

ful mood, overtook the two who were scampering ahead of him and met Mrs. Morley and Susan with imperturbable calm.

Not until the next afternoon did he again refer to the Bonners' hired man. Then he strolled into the kitchen where Mrs. Morley was puttering about and dropped into the big rocking chair by the window.

"Smells so good, I couldn't keep away," he said sniffing enjoyably.

"Ginger bread—soft ginger bread. You sit right there a few minutes and I'll give you some of it hot—with a glass of real rich milk. Mr. Morley used to think there wasn't anything like hot ginger bread and milk with the cream stirred in."

"Mr. Morley was a man of judgment." The man by the window spoke in his usual cheerful way, and rocked contentedly as he waited for his ginger bread but if so much of his face had not been hidden even Mrs. Morley might have noticed a shade of anxiety in his expression.

"Jim tells me you've got some city neighbours," he said.

Mrs. Morley opened the oven door, looked in, shook her head and closed the door again.

"Not quite done. What were you saying? Oh yes, the Bonners! They're as nice people as you ever

saw, but sort of queer and flighty you know. They do say writing mostly always takes people that way. It's lucky they've got somebody to take good care of them."

The Boarder's chair stopped swaying.

"Yes; they're lucky, if they have somebody to do that. Who does it?"

Mrs. Morley turned the stove damper and looked at the clock.

"I'm afraid that ginger bread won't be as light as usual. It's baking too slow."

"You were saying there was someone to look after your literary neighbours," prompted Mr. Brown gently.

"Oh, yes. Well they've got the best help I ever saw—I don't care where the next comes from. You hear such a lot about the servant trouble nowadays that you'd think there wasn't a decent one on earth, but look at the Bonners! They've got a man that can't be beat."

"Yes, Jim spoke of him."

"He's as fine a young fe'low as ever stepped and the way he works to keep things going down there! Well, you wouldn't believe it. The Bonners haven't got any money this summer, but bless you they don't need any—not with Edward and Jean there."

The rocking chair creaked violently once and steadied itself.

"Ah, yes; Jean?"

It was half exclamation, half question. Mrs. Morley answered the question.

"Jean Mackaye. She's a perfect wonder. The greatest worker—and smart and sensible and pretty! My land, that girl's so pretty it's no wonder every manbody from the minister down to Jim's crazy about her."

"A relative of the Bonners?"

"No; she's their cook."

The man in the rocking chair strangled a violent exclamation; but Mrs. Morley did not notice it, for a smell of burning had suddenly filled the air and she hurried toward the stove, lamenting.

"That oven's bewitched to-day. First it won't bake, and then it burns, and there's no knowing what it'll do. I'll have to have the man over from Borlon's. Might have been worse though—just scorched a mite along one edge. I'll cut yours off the other side."

The Boarder sat quietly looking out of the window while she filled a glass with milk and cream, cut some squares of ginger bread, and set the plate and glass on the spotless kitchen table. His lips were closed in a thin straight line and the knuckles of the hands

that grasped the chair arms showed white, but the big dark goggles hid whatever was in his eyes.

"Maybe you'd rather take it out on the porch," Mrs. Morley suggested.

"No; I like a kitchen." He spoke pleasantly, smoothly, but the usual genial ring was not in his voice. He ate the ginger bread, very deliberately drank the milk.

"Wonderful ginger bread. You certainly *are* a cook."

He winced a little on the last word, but smiled at his flattered landlady and talked for a few moments before going to his room.

"I sort of feel as though that hot ginger bread wasn't the thing for Mr. Brown's stomach," Mrs. Morley confided to Susan that night when they were locking up. "He didn't seem just like himself at supper."

By the next morning, however, any ill effect of the ginger bread seemed to have worn off. The Boarder was himself again and he showed only an amiable interest in the literary couple and their extraordinary "help."

The Bonners' help, like everyone else on the Ridge, took an interest in Mr. Brown.

"Funny about him," Jean explained to Edward. "He's the original Boojum—just 'silently vanishes

away' whenever anybody goes near, and yet Mrs. Morley and Susan say he's the nicest friendliest soul imaginable and Jim and Molly are wild about him."

"Never laid eyes on the chap myself." Edward was training tomato vines and not free to give his entire attention to gossip but he lent a willing ear. "But from what Jimmy tells me, the old gentleman's a good sort even if his nerves are jumpy."

"Yes, they're all devoted to him up there. Susan says he's jolly as a boy and Mrs. Morley says he's the heartiest eater she's ever boarded. Doesn't sound like jumpy nerves, does it?"

She stood and watched the tomato pruning for a while in silence.

"Do you know," she said finally, "I think there's something awfully queer about that man—seeming so well, but being afraid to meet anybody, and wearing goggles, and pulling his hat brim down and his coat collar up whenever he goes out and——"

Teddy turned from his work to grin at her.

"Well, Miss Sherlock?"

She blushed guiltily, but stood to her guns.

"I don't care. It *is* funny; and Jim says he always takes off his goggles as soon as they get away from the house and the road and doesn't seem to need them at all."

"He's probably Jack the Ripper." Having thrown

out this helpful suggestion, Edward went back to his tomatoes.

Men, Jean reflected, had no imaginations. They always refused to take a thing seriously until after it had happened—and this particular man seldom took it seriously even then. Still she had an idea that he *could* be serious. If he cared enormously about anything he'd probably be as obstinate and as desperately in earnest as any one. He didn't have that chin of his for nothing, even if his eyes did smile most of the time.

All the same there was something queer about Mrs. Morley's boarder and Edward had not shown proper respect for her opinion; so she let him severely alone for a day or two, and he, poor owlish mole that he was, wondered helplessly what he had done to be, as he classically put it, "in Dutch with the Queen."

Whatever the modern young man may feel, when fathoms deep in love, it does not run to Attic prose.

Not only at the Bonners, but all up and down the Ridge, Mr. Brown, unknowingly, brought about a pronounced sex cleavage. The women having found out all that his landlady knew about him, resented the blank wall that rose before their curiosity. Not able to secure facts they tried to satisfy themselves with fancy and the gossip that had at first been

spirited but kindly rapidly veered round to dark suspicion.

"Nerves nothing!" Mrs. Pettingill said flatly. "He eats like a horse and he's fat and he tramps all over the woods with the children and he's cheerful and good natured and he likes to visit with Mrs. Morley and Susan and Molly and Jim when there aren't any strangers around. Far as I can see, all his nerves run to is wearing outrageous big dark glasses and turning up his coat collar and running away from company. If you ask me, I'd say that looks more like guilt than like nerves. You mark my words. *That man's done something.*"

The women all marked her words—and believed them. Lucilla Morley's boarder had *done something*. They agreed upon that but opinions varied as to what he had done. Even Mrs. Pettingill, sturdy soul that she was, did not go so far as murder. Robbery, arson, kidnapping, and other popular forms of crime were brought up and discussed, but the consensus of opinion leaned toward something less crude, something high class—"the sort of thing a gentleman might do, if he was pushed too far," as Mrs. Rollins put it. "Of course I've never seen him close to," she added, "but he's shaped a good deal like a bank president."

At first the men rallied to the defence of one who

was a fellow man, albeit a stranger. There's a solidarity among men that women lack. Masculine Green Ridge laughed at feminine Green Ridge and talked about gossip and mare's nests and the righteousness and good sense of minding one's own business; but no one in the neighbourhood had *any* really interesting business of his own to mind, and the average man loves gossip as well as the average woman does, though he seldom has the initiative to start it and usually saves his face by allowing his wife to collect it for him.

So the men listened even while they laughed, and gradually began to listen without laughing.

Things did look suspicious, they admitted to each other. The stranger acted mighty queer. It wasn't natural to pay thirty-two dollars for board you could get at eight—not if you came by your money honestly and weren't afraid to have other boarders in the house watching you. He must be hiding for some reason or other. You couldn't figure it out any other way, and the Ridge was a first-rate place for hiding away—six miles off the railroad and not even a main highway running through. A fellow'd have been safer right there than in Canada, if only he'd had the sense not to go disguising himself and dodging around and setting folks to wondering.

At the end of two weeks any Green Ridge jury

would have sentenced the mysterious Mr. Brown to at least ten years without even listening to the prosecuting attorney.

And in the meantime, Mr. Brown, unconscious of the futility of his disguise and seclusion went on eating more than was good for him and wandering about the woods and fields with Jim and Molly, and rocking lazily in the big chair by the kitchen window, or in its twin on the side porch, and visiting sociably with Mrs. Morley and Susan.

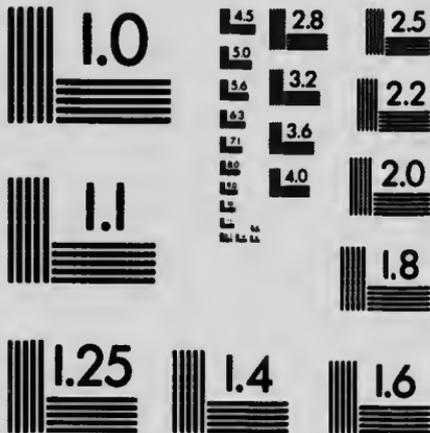
Once in a while he went for a walk alone. One of these solitary walks led him past a field where Teddy Burton was hauling stone for wall mending and he stopped in the shade, at half a field's distance from the scene of action, to watch the work. He knew that the man who was handling Farmer Pettin-gill's "contrary red steers" and a stone drag and a fine assortment of Connecticut granite must be Teddy Burton, because Jim had mentioned, at the dinner table, that Teddy was working down in the lot by the brook; and he evidently approved of the way the Bonners' hired man was doing his job, for he smiled and swore softly over each point scored against the steers and grunted sympathetically every time Teddy heaved a heavy stone into place in the wall.

"Well the damned young scoundrel!" he said, as he



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turned at last toward home. "The damned young scoundrel!" The words were not highly flattering but the tone in which they were uttered and the grin that accompanied them smacked loudly of approval. Whatever his criminal record, he seemed to be a man who appreciated honest work and youthful enthusiasm.

After that he made rather a point of watching Teddy work when opportunity offered. He even overcame his dislike for the public road sufficiently to walk down past the Bonners' house now and then and turn keen, observing eyes upon the garden and lawn and outbuildings.

"Hinge off the barn door. Shiftless! Shiftless!" he commented one day; but, when, the next afternoon he strolled that way again and saw a new hinge in place, he chuckled, rammed his hands deeper into his pockets, and swore once more—cheerfully, proudly. Mr. Brown was a profane man—but what can one expect from the criminal classes?

There was considerable talk of the Bonners' handy man in Mrs. Morley's family circle during those days. In one way or another the conversation usually drifted around to him and the boarder showed a lively interest in the subject.

"Like to hear of a young man who takes hold like that," he would say beamingly, and Mrs. Morley and

Susan would bear down more heavily on the loud pedal.

"For you can't tell," Mrs. Morley said to Susan, "Mr. Brown's a rich man, and they take notions, and Edward'll be out of a job when the Bonners go back to town. It won't do any harm to praise him up, even if nothing comes of it."

They praised up Jean too, but feminine virtues appeared to leave Mr. Brown cold, even irritated him.

"A very remarkable young woman, I've no doubt."

That was the highest pitch of enthusiasm to which their tales of Jean could move him, and ice tinkled in his voice.

"Seems as if he had a scunner against women." Mrs. Morley was grieved over the flaw in an otherwise admirable boarder, and eager to find excuse for it. She was always eager to find excuses for human failings. "Like as not it's a woman that upset his nerves."

Upon second thought she did not quite like the sound of that and hastened to amend it. "His wife you know. Maybe she's left him. They're always doing it in cities."

"You don't have to leave a man to upset his nerves. Lots of women do it by staying right at home." Susan spoke with authority. A general house

worker has opportunity to study the ways of wives and husbands. "But I don't believe Mr. Brown's set against women," she went on. "He's nice as can be to you and me and he's interested about the other women folks in the neighbourhood. Don't you remember how he laughed when you told him about Mrs. Meyers having every disease she reads about in the papers, and about Mrs. Pettingill forgetting to take her crimps out of the curlers and going to church that way? It's just Jean he don't like to hear about. Maybe he thinks working-out girls aren't worth noticing."

Mrs. Morley rushed to her boarder's defence.

"Now, Susan, he isn't a bit that kind. You know he isn't. It's just that he hasn't seen Jean, and thinks she's only a pretty flighty young thing. If he could meet her once, he'd be interested fast enough, but she won't come near since he's here. She says dodging visitors won't help frazzled nerves."

It was not altogether consideration for Mr. Brown's nerves that kept Jean away. She was busy at home.

Running a house and family on a system of rigid economy was, she found, a very different thing from doing it on a liberal allowance. One had to make up in time and thought and effort what one saved in money.

There was a fascination about it, for a while. When one was young and strong, and the scrimping and working were only an interlude between a joyous past and a glorious future, one could make a game of the thing. One summer of hard work and economy was rather a lark, but she often wondered about the women who summered and wintered so, all through their lives.

How could they endure it? How could they possibly endure it? There must be thousands of them, hundreds of thousands. Most of the women on the Ridge were living that way. How could they be satisfied and cheerful as most of them seemed to be?

She did not want to be idle again—not for long at a time. She would work and be useful, but she wanted to choose her work and to be useful in an interesting and dramatic way, against a satisfactory background.

After all, money was frightfully important. Life was grubby without it; and yet those cheerful, happy, hard-working, home-bound women? What was the secret of their content?

She was thinking about them one afternoon as she skimmed milk for churning. Milk always made her think about them, because she hated it and yet was everlastingly fussing with it. Never in her wildest imaginings had she glimpsed the upheaval that one cow could cause in the routine of a well ordered

household. There were moments when it seemed incredible, impossible that she had ever longed to take a cow into the family, but she had. She had been crazy for a cow—had prodded Edward into getting Gladys—but how could she have known that that mild-eyed, ruminating Jersey would be recklessly prodigal in her contribution to the family support?

Probably the creature had a generous impulsive nature and wanted to help in the family's financial crisis but she was overdoing the thing. No family could use as much milk as Gladys gave and yet one couldn't with a clear conscience waste any of it.

When the cook came downstairs in the morning, a foaming pail of milk was on the kitchen table to greet her. All day long she was skimming and cooking custards and trying recipes that called for sour milk, and cleaning milk pans and making Dutch cheese and puttering over butter and feeding clabber to the chickens—and, in the evening Teddy came in with more milk. There was no sense in a cow's giving milk twice a day, absolutely no sense in it.

"And if it isn't milk it's something else," she said, viciously slapping a ladelful of sour cream into the churn. "How do they stand it for ever and ever? How can they?"

"Ready for me?"

Jean looked up at the handy man, standing in the doorway between pantry and kitchen. He was smiling at her and, as she met the smile, a curious thing happened. From deep down in the soul of her welled up a feeling that drove doubt and question from her fumbling thoughts—that brought swift, sure understanding of the secret at the heart of content. It passed as swiftly as it came but it left a flush on her face and a glow in her heart.

“Almost ready,” she answered, bending over her work and trying to steady her voice. What had happened? Nothing, she told herself; nothing at all. She was tired and her nerves were on edge and Teddy had startled her.

She called him Teddy now. Everybody called him Teddy. He wasn't at all an Edwardish person.

He came over and stood beside her, as she closed the lid of the churn, but what had that to do with the queer tightening of her throat? He almost always churned for her, and there was no reason in the world why she should fumble nervously with the churn top instead of clapping it down briskly and unconcernedly.

“Something wrong?”

He leaned forward, shoulder touching her shoulder, face close to her face. His big, capable hands touched hers, as he took the churn top from her, and

again the quivering flash of illumination ran through her nerves.

She drew back hastily, gathered up some empty milk pans and carried them to the kitchen, but, as she washed them, her thrilling pulses mocked at her defiant brain.

From the pantry came the sound of the churn dasher splashing in time to a whistled tune. She could not see the man who was handling it, but she knew exactly how he looked as he stood working the dasher up and down, with a checked gingham apron tied around him; his collar off, his shirtsleeves rolled up. Not a heroic figure.

Splashing and whistling were syncopated now, broken in upon by pauses and thumpings.

In a little while he would call her. She knew what he would say. Funny how well she knew his ways.

Working together brought people close—closer and closer—if they could come close at all. Playing together wouldn't do it, but working and planning and accomplishing together— Those other women! Her thoughts swung back to them. Perhaps some one had helped them churn. Perhaps they could stand life's everlasting churning because—

"Butter's come!" Teddy called proudly. He never got over feeling that the butter's coming was a tribute to his superior masculine method of splashing.

Churning made him prodigiously pleased with himself—and violently hungry. When he had turned the churn over to Jean he always sat on the end of the pantry table, where he could reach the cookie jar, talking lightly, consuming innumerable spice cookies, and watching the butter-making until the last pat was stamped with an imposing "B" and set in the refrigerator.

On this day, conversation flagged. Jean was irresponsible, absorbed in her task, but still he lingered.

The pantry was a pleasant place—big, cool, white-shelved, white-cupboarded, immaculate. He liked being there. He liked spice cookies too. That was why there was always a supply of them in the jar behind the cupboard door, though the cook would have resented the suggestion that they were there because he liked them.

Most of all, he liked watching the butter-maker. Small wonder, he told himself, that dairy maids had figured largely in poetry and fiction. There was something about a pretty girl making butter that —; well, there certainly was something.

Jean's blue chambray sleeves were pushed up above her elbows. Her collar was rolled widely away from her throat. The elbows and the throat were excuse enough for a young man's lingering in the pantry, even without the spice cookies; and

there was more, much more. For instance, there was the chin above the throat—a rounded chin that was browner than the throat; and, just where the brown melted into the white, there was a place——Teddy reached hastily for another cookie. Occupation is an aid to resisting temptation; but even though he munched vigorously, it seemed wiser to stop looking at that place just under her chin, on the right hand side.

So he transferred his gaze to the back of her head, but gained no repose of spirit by the change. Her hair was lovely, thick and soft, and gathered up into a most engaging knot; but he could stand the knot and the waving locks above her ears. It was a soft, moist little curl at the nape of her neck that was too much for him.

A most tantalizing, bewitching, provocative little curl and near, invitingly near.

He leaned swiftly forward and kissed it.

A butter bowl broke into pieces on the pantry floor. A girl whirled quickly round, with anger flaming in her face. The sinner braced himself for the wrath to come.

And then, to her own amazement as to his, Jean laughed—laughed helplessly, half hysterically, with tears of rage in her eyes and with a tempest in her heart.

"You l-l-ook s-so id-didiotic in that ap-p-pron!" she gasped, wiping her eyes.

It was no way to meet an insult. She realized that perfectly. It reflected neither what she ought to have felt nor much of what she really felt, but it cleared the air of sentiment, as no anger or scorn could have cleared it.

What girl with a sense of humour could take seriously the digressions of a large young man in a checked gingham apron? What large young man in a checked gingham apron could follow up a kiss as a kiss should be followed up according to the rules of the game?

"I'd forgotten it." Teddy took off the apron, folded it carefully, laid it on the shelf where it belonged.

"Sure I don't know whether it's spoiled my life or saved it," he said with a rueful grin; but inwardly he cursed that apron and the mill that wove it and the machine that spun it and the cotton plant that bore it.

A young woman, no longer amused but preternaturally calm, turned her back upon him and went on with her interrupted butter-making.

"You might pick up those pieces of crockery and throw them away," she said briskly.

He picked them up, hesitated a moment, and

went toward the kitchen. Jean looked back at him across her shoulder.

"And please remember, ' her voice was as quiet as it was cold, "that another such occurrence would make it impossible for me to stay with Mrs. Bonner."

"I'm sorry," he began. "No, I'll be hanged if I am."

The outside door slammed behind him.

Jean finished her butter, put it away, rolled down her sleeves, took a wide-brimmed straw hat from its hook behind the kitchen door, and went away down the path to the pasture lots. She wanted to think, and she could always think better in the open. She wanted to be alone, and the rough hill 'pastures running down to Green River were lonely. Perhaps she wanted to feel too, and the hill pastures were lovesome as well as lonely.

CHAPTER XII

GREEN RIDGE folk always spoke of the fields and woods running from the Bonner farm down to Green River as the Back Lots—a prosaic name for an enchanted place, but only the children knew that the Back Lots were enchanted.

Just at first the land sloped gently. Sumach and juniper rose in clumps, above a sea of sweet fern and bayberry and low huckleberry bushes. Small cedars, erect and trim, rebuked the straggling untidy bushes. Groups of white birch wavered delicately against the sky line. Here and there a larger tree, spared by the wood choppers, flung a wide spreading shade.

There were well-worn, narrow trails through the thick crowding bush growth—paths made by leisurely roaming cattle, and, occasionally, an old wood road offered a broader trail.

Nearer the river, the ground pitched steeply downward and the woods began—second-growth woods but thick and shadowy and cool and full of glamour, with dusky paths wandering through a

green, sun-sifted gloaming and coming out now and then into open glades, flower-strewn and fern-fringed.

Jean had never been able to decide which she liked the better, fields or woods, but the day was warm and she was tired, and the woods meant climbing a very steep hill on her homeward way; so she threw herself down among the sweet fern, where a sycamore tree offered shade and a group of junipers shut her away from the trail. The bruised fern beneath her poured out fragrance, aromatic, delicious. Little warm, vagrant, sweet-scented breezes drifted over her. A drowsy hum and buzz of insect life was in the air, and up through the white-blotched boughs of the old sycamore was infinite blueness, cloud-flecked.

The girl nestled more comfortably into her sweet fern nest and gave herself up to the spell of the place and the summer day.

She had come away from the house to think; but serious thinking would have been easier in her own room. The out-of-doors world was distracting and things that, within four walls, had seemed enormously important, refused to loom horrific down in the Back Lots.

A young man had kissed a girl. Well, what of it? The Back Lots made nothing of it, nothing at all.

"A most natural and delightful proceeding,"

crooned the summer world, and, though Jean clutched at her standards of propriety, her dignity, her pride, they all wilted in her grasp. Yes; the Back Lots were enchanted.

She tried to fix her mind upon the offence and work up a glow of indignation, but a devil's darning needle alighted on a fern frond that swayed just above her head and prevented her giving her attention to minor matters. Then a rabbit hopped out from a thicket and, before it had disappeared down the trail, a meadow lark left its nest for the tip-top twig of an alder bush and swung there for a moment or two.

When the bird had taken flight, Jean came back to the matter of being kissed—by a young man in a checked apron. She smiled drowsily. He really *had* looked ridiculous in that apron; no, not exactly ridiculous. Funny, but not ridiculous. She couldn't quite imagine him looking ridiculous.

She tried to realize that he had spoiled things—spoiled the comradeship, the working together and planning together, the taking care of the Bonners together—but things absolutely refused to seem spoiled. The Back Lots would not have it.

Of course she would be very severe. He must be made to feel the enormity of his offence.

“Enormity? Offence?” smiled the Back Lots.

“Certainly,” the girl insisted. “Enormity! Offence!”—but she tried in vain to feel offended. Such a swift, fugitive kiss! One could not take it seriously; but odd little shivering thrills went through her, at the memory of it. She had never felt that way before when she had been kissed by a man. Oh yes, she had been kissed before. Not that she had made a habit of it; but few girls reach the age of twenty-two without having been kissed by a young man or two on one provocation or another. She did not feel ashamed of those past kisses. There had been very few of them, and they had not meant anything; but this last kiss—; perhaps the hotness of her cheeks and the tingling of her blood meant that she was ashamed of it. But why be ashamed? He had not even touched her, save for that soft touch against her hair. If he had put his arms around her and kissed her on the lips——

She began the supposition calmly enough but abandoned it in panic. If he had—— Every pulse in her body began a sudden throbbing. Her throat tightened chokingly. If he had—if he had——

She was faint with the thought of it, dizzy, drowning in the sweetness of the thing that had not been; and, lying so with every nerve aquiver, she was honest with herself for the first time in many a day.

Love had come to her and had laughed at her

denials. Ever since that far-off dusk—when she had sat by the kitchen window with Molly in her arms and the syringa scents drifting past her, and Teddy Burton had come in through the low, open door—Love had been waiting, close beside her, patient, insistent, not to be driven away by any mood of hers. There had been times when she had known, but she had never admitted to herself that she knew.

Even now, she was up in arms against the intruder. If she was in love she would get over it; and it couldn't be the biggest kind of love, the kind she had dreamed of, the kind every girl dreams of.

In love that way with Teddy Burton? Absurd, preposterous!

But even his name as she said it to herself made waves of feeling run up to the brain that was denying love, and play havoc there. She could not remember how absurd and preposterous the idea of loving Teddy was. She could only remember the light in his gray eyes whenever she came upon him unawares; the smile, out of all his jolly smiles, that was especially for her; the strength and resourcefulness that went so oddly with the light-hearted, slangy boyishness of him; his gentleness, the gentleness he had for Molly and for Mrs. Bonner—for all women—and most of all for her. He was dear—dear—dear. And

what a scurvy trick fate had played her! To hold Love out to her and ask a price she could not pay! Why couldn't she have fallen in love with a man of her own class, a man she could marry? Love wasn't enough. In spite of all the poets said, it wasn't enough. She would have been willing to give up wealth and luxury for it—but marry a man who had evidently had an education, a chance, yet, at twenty-five was contented to do farm chores at thirty-five dollars a month? A sensible girl could not do it, could not possibly do it, and yet——

She had had such hopes, ambitions, ideals. She had planned such a wonderful future for herself. She had set out on her adventure so confidently, so gaily, and now——

She sat up suddenly, pushed her hair back out of her eyes, dabbed ineffectually at the tears that were running down her flushed cheeks and hurled the shameful truth into the lovely mocking face of the Back Lots.

“I'm in love with a hired man!”

“Why, God bless my soul!” gasped a pink and portly old gentleman who rounded the juniper bush at that moment and received the full force of the shock.

He rallied valiantly.

“That's very nice for the hired man,” he said, twinkling down at her.

Something curiously familiar about the twinkle distracted Jean's attention from her grievance and her embarrassment and before she could swing back to them, the stranger had seated himself on the ground beside her and was wiping the perspiration from his face and his bald head.

"What are you going to do about it?" he asked in a pleasant, conversational way. He was not excited by the topic, but he was politely interested; and, somehow or other, it seemed quite natural and right for him to sit down and talk it over.

Going over the episode, in her own room later, Jean wondered why she had not resented his familiarity, why she had not risen, as a properly trained young woman should have risen, and walked haughtily away; but at the moment the idea of rising and walking haughtily away simply did not occur to her.

He was evidently such a nice, amiable old gentleman, and he took things so amazingly for granted, and there was something about him that made her feel as if she had known him and trusted him for a long time, and it was a topsy-turvy upsetting afternoon anyway.

"I'm going to get over it," she answered with great firmness.

The old gentleman laughed, but not offensively. When she came to look at him more closely he was not

so terribly old—elderly rather and with something pleasantly youthful about him in spite of his bald head and his fatherly ways.

“But why get over it? Isn’t it enjoyable?”

He had her there. Of course there were imperative reasons for getting over it, but she couldn’t make up her mind whether it was enjoyable or not and stopped to think it over.

For a moment or two she sat looking out across the sun-soaked hill slope, with queer expressions playing over her face. Being in love was wonderful. Even when one wasn’t happy over it and must get out of love at once, there was something breathlessly glorious about it and if one could only give oneself up to the wonder and the glory—

“You see,” the old gentleman went on, in a cheerful, impersonal way that seemed to take all the embarrassment out of the discussion, “there are very few things as agonizingly enjoyable as being genuinely in love.

“It would be a pity to lose one’s chance at the enjoyment—and the agony. I can specially recommend the agony. Why, even the German measles form of love couldn’t very well be spared. I remember when I was seventeen—she was twenty-four. It was terrific while it lasted, and I was sure it would last forever.

"Now that's what impresses me about your experience. It's my observation that one is always sure he'll die of German measles. You are so morally certain you'll get over this attack of yours that I'm wondering whether you haven't picked up the real thing."

"Real or German, I'm going to get over it."

"But why?"

It was none of his business but he was so elderly, and fatherly, and he had such a nice voice and such kind eyes, and such a reassuring air of serenity. And, besides, he already knew the worst. She had shouted it at him as he came round the juniper bush.

"Do you think" (Jean looked at him seriously as she put the question), "do you think that an able-bodied, intelligent young man of twenty-five who has evidently had a fair education and been out in the world, would take a hired man's position, at thirty-five dollars a month, in the back country, if he had any backbone or ambition?"

Her listener's serenity showed signs of disturbance as she spoke. Keeness replaced kindness in his eyes and he leaned forward to study the girl's face more closely.

"That depends," he said slowly, "on his reasons for accepting the position."

"But what could have influenced him except the wages?" She could not deal in abstractions any longer. This was a definite "he." "Mrs. Bonner advertised and he just answered the advertisement."

"I see—and you are——"

"Mrs. Bonner's cook."

There was a hint of defiance in her voice and the eyes that met his held a challenge, but he gave no sign of a prejudice against cooks.

"Of course you had known him before he came to the Bonners?"

She looked surprised.

"Oh, no, I hadn't. I'd never seen him until we came up here and I thought I'd loathe him; but I couldn't."

"H'm!" The old gentleman cleared his throat and looked regretful. The kindness came slowly creeping back into his eyes, but he was disturbed, puzzled.

Jean smiled at him gratefully. It was nice of him to take such an interest.

"Behaved himself since he came?" The voice was gruff but there was an anxious note in it.

"Beautifully."

"Hasn't bothered you—made things uncomfortable for you?"

"Not a bit—ever; until to-day."

"Eh? What's that? What did he say to-day?"

It was splendid of him, Jean felt, to be so excited about her being made uncomfortable, but she wished she hadn't said anything about to-day.

"It wasn't that he said anything," she explained. "He—well, he——" Her face crimsoned slowly, deeply, under the watching eyes. "You see I was churning and he had been helping and—but it wasn't really—— He just——"

"Small blame to him!" asserted the old gentleman stoutly. "He'd have been less than a man—or more than one, which is just as bad for practical purposes—if he hadn't."

He was a most surprising person with his sudden gusts of anxiety and fierceness, and his sudden tolerance.

"Your young hired man doesn't sound like a bad sort," he went on, "but, of course, as you say, he's only a hired man and——"

"That wasn't what I said," Jean interrupted. "I said a man like him wouldn't be a hired man unless there was something radically wrong with him."

"Then you wouldn't mind his being a hired man, if there wasn't anything radically wrong with him?"

She hesitated, threw back her head and looked him frankly in the eyes.

"Yes, I'd mind. I'd mind a lot—but I'd be ashamed of minding."

"Of course he hasn't any money."

"Oh, that!" She dismissed that objection lightly.

"We could make money." There was honest pride in her voice. She could be a helpmate now. She had proved herself.

"I'd like money," she admitted. "You see, I always had such a lot of it before Uncle John lost mine along with his."

She realized suddenly what she was telling him and stopped short in utter dismay.

"Nobody knows—I didn't mean—it would be so impossible, you see—I couldn't sponge and I didn't know how to do anything except cook. It was silly to care—but people talk so and it seemed easier, only—oh, *please!*"

It wasn't lucid but he got her idea through all the stammered confusion and it seemed to appeal to him amazingly.

"Don't worry, little girl. I'm not one of the talk-people. Tell me all about it."

She gulped down a little sob. He was the fatherliest man! The sob refused to stay down and suddenly she found herself smothering it against a tweed shoulder, while a gentle hand patted her back. It was a most shocking exhibition but the man did not seem shocked.

"There, there, daughter!" he said consolingly.

"It's all right." "The daughter" really did make things seem right. Of course, if he took it that way; and he did, he undoubtedly did.

"I'm n-not—p-p-erfectly horrid," she insisted. "I d-do like money—and I hate g-g-g-rubby things, and I don't believe I'd be happy if I had to live my whole life out among them, but there'd be something nice about helping to make the money."

Her voice was steady now. She raised a scarlet, tear-stained face from the comfortable shoulder and moved a little farther away from the fatherly man, but she did not feel ashamed, only tremendously relieved. She had been needing a good cry and a shoulder for months and months and months.

"Working isn't bad," she explained. "I haven't minded working. I've liked it. I could work like fury, with some one—for some one—but I'd want to be sure the man had the thing in him that would make him win out. That's it you know. It's not the winning that's important. It's the thing that makes it possible to put up the fight. That's what I want to find in a man. If it were there, I don't believe I'd care how long or hard our fight was. I don't believe I'd even care if we didn't get the material things we worked for. I could stand by a man who fell fighting, but a man who wouldn't make the try, who wouldn't do his part, didn't care——"

The fatherly man beamed encouragement. Even self-absorbed as she was, she noticed that he looked as though relieved about something—looked extraordinarily cheerful.

“My dear” [he wasn’t so very old but she was past wondering at being called “my dear” by a perfectly strange man; such things happened in the Back Lots], “My dear, fine, little girl, I’ve an idea that that young hired man you’ve been telling me about would measure up all right if you knew all about him. Give h’m the benefit of the doubt. You women have to give any man the benefit of all the doubts and then forgive him a lot there’s no doubt about.”

There was a crashing of bushes, a series of shrill halloos, an excited squeal or two. A small girl and a boy carrying berry pails broke into the trail from out of the scrub growth, and, looking searchingly around, spied the two seated figures under the sycamore tree.

The squeals were repeated—*Crescendo, altissimo*.

“Jean, Jean!” shouted Molly, racing down the path to throw herself into Jean’s arms.

“Vere was a big sheep an’ his nose was all black and I wanted to feel would the black rub off an’ he knocked me down, ven he knocked me some more—an’ I never knew sheep did—an’ Jimmy he made ve sheep run after him an’ he yelled ‘Get over ve fence,

My, an' I did. An' I don't know was his nose dirty or was it made vat way."

"Well, for the love of Mike, let it go at that!" urged Jimmy.

"She got over into the lot where Pettingill's big ram is," he explained. "I can't handle him so I just had to get him mad at me while she ran and then I dodged and beat it. Where'd you find Jean, Mr. Brown?"

"Right here. We've had a fine visit. I was taken berrying," he explained to Jean, "but I struck."

She was looking at him wonderingly. So this was Mrs. Morley's boarder! She might have guessed it. There was no other stranger in the neighbourhood, but he wasn't at all what she had expected.

"I'm up here for my health," he explained, "and I felt sure that over-berrying on a day like this would be ruinous to the health, and by the way, one of my worst symptoms is loss of memory—total loss of memory. It's utterly impossible for me to remember anything that is told to me for more than five minutes after I hear it."

"How frightfully distressing!" Jean dimpled at him gratefully. He was such a duck of an old gentleman. Anybody would tell him a fatal secret on sight, and would feel astonishingly more comfortable for having told him.

"Yes, isn't it," he assented, showing marked appreciation of the dimpling. "Still life has its compensations. On the whole, I should say, life is fairly kind to us. It holds pleasant surprises. One never knows what one may find around the next juniper bush."

They climbed the hill together and, when they came to the parting of the trails, the man stood and watched the girl going away toward a white house on the hilltop.

"Lucky young rascal," he said, smiling, but he was not talking about the girl.

CHAPTER XIII

TEDDY BURTON knew that the episode of the pantry should have been followed up promptly, undauntedly. By all the rules of warfare, heavy artillery should have supported the infantry. He had retreated after his first daring skirmish; but that was because the skirmish had been as much of a surprise to him as to the enemy—had been so unpremeditated, so totally a thing of impulse that it had left him bewildered and reft of strategy.

When his bewilderment wore off he saw clearly that he had lost an advantage. She had been angry, but the time to face anger is when one's fighting spirit is up—and the anger is also up. Watching anger rise is the blood-curdling, nerve-paralyzing thing.

He should have told her, then and there, that he adored her—that he intended to marry her. She couldn't have resented that much more than she had resented the kiss—nor have ridiculed it more effectively—and it would have been a great relief to him to get the statement on record. As matters stood,

he had offended her, put her on guard, and had little to show for it—only the tingling touch of soft brown hair against his lips and the memory of a warm, fleeting nearness that made his blood run swiftly, in retrospect.

Slight as this harvest of his rashness was, he spent a good deal of time thinking about it; but at last he rose from the nail keg on which he had dropped when he had reached sanctuary in the barn, and screwed his courage to the sticking point.

He would go to her and tell her how he loved her, make her listen. Heaven grant that she was still angry. It would be appalling to find her indifferent.

He did not find her at all. She had disappeared, gone away somewhere so that she wouldn't have to be on the premises with him, he told himself dejectedly.

When he next saw her she was cooking supper and Mrs. Bonner was in the kitchen. While he ate his own supper she went back and forth to the dining room. She was not disagreeable to him, showed no signs of anger, was merely busy—unceasingly, absorbingly busy. How could a man stop a girl on her way to the dining room with steaming hot dishes in her hands and tell her that he adored her, that he was going to marry her?

No; he had bungled the thing and, anyway, a

kitchen was no place for a propitious wooing. There was something so deadly utilitarian about the aspect of the place. The rows of shining pots and pans frowned down romance. He would need moonlight or dusk, woodland or hilltop magic, all the adventitious aid he could get, when he tried to make this very competent, practical young person believe that she was going to marry him.

So he filled the water pails and brought the wood and flung out into the night.

The cook suddenly and completely lost interest in her work and went over to the window where, dish-cloth in hand, she watched the long, sturdy figure go swinging down the walk, through the gate, and up the road.

She flushed a little and frowned a little and smiled a little, then frowned again.

"Coward!" she said scornfully.

Once more a smile came on the heels of the frown.

"Poor lamb," she murmured.

One epithet might have seemed to the unprejudiced as bad as the other; but the tone—there was a vast difference in the tone.

For a week or so life in the Bonner family moved along much as it had moved before the handy man's fall from grace. After a slight interval of frost, the cook relaxed into guarded amiability, but Teddy

had no more long hours alone with her and they treated each other with what a Correct Letter Writer would call "distinguished consideration."

So polite were they to each other that Molly, paying an afternoon visit and insisting that both her Jean and her Teddy should be on the entertainment committee, watched them and listened to them for a while with growing disapproval and then entered protest.

"Now let's not play it's a party any more," she insisted. "Let's play we're just *us* and we've got firteen children and ve littlest one's got ve mumps, an' I'm it."

Half of the entertainment committee fell back on the grass and whooped for joy. The other half, though dimply about the mouth, gravely tied a handkerchief around the afflicted infant's jaw and stuffed grass inside it to produce an adequate swelling.

"We aren't going to play party any more?"

The man had stopped laughing and asked the question eagerly but cautiously.

"Thirteen children and mumps would break up any family's company manners," he urged.

Jean laughed. How could one be dignified and play with Molly?

She took the child home later, while Teddy went

back to his gardening, and Mrs. Morley's boarder left his hammock in the shady backyard to open the gate for her.

It was not the first time they had met since the afternoon in the Back Lots. She had found him on Cedar Hill one evening when she had gone there alone to watch the sunset; and they had sat on the edge of the cliff together, until the last flecks of amethyst and rose were gone and the stars had come out, talking of many things, but not of hired men. Evidently Mr. Brown had been as good as his word. He had forgotten all that she had said to him beside the juniper bush.

Yet their talk kept the curiously intimate key it had struck at that first meeting. It seemed impossible not to confide in Mrs. Morley's boarder. He understood so perfectly even when the i's were not dotted nor the t's crossed.

He seemed very glad to see her when he opened Mrs. Morley's gate for Molly and her, and he carried her off to the hammock, where Susan joined them and where Mrs. Morley came later bringing the inevitable fresh cookies and a pot of tea.

"All here but Jim," the Boarder said contentedly. "Where is Jim?"

"Down at Sarab Middleton's, helping," Mrs. Morley's voice had a note of apology in it.

"Not hard work, you know—just redding up. I never let him go anywheres for heavy work; but you see Sarah's brother George came unexpected, the other day—first time he's been here in six years—and Sarah didn't want to be doing chores all the time he was here, so she asked about Jim. 'Twon't hurt him, and he can have the money for himself."

"What's the matter with brother George doing the chores?" Mr. Brown asked idly.

Mrs. Morley laughed.

"Well, they never was able to make him do them when he lived at home—always reading dime novels up in the hay-mow. I reckon Sarah wouldn't be likely to get much work out of him now. They say he's done real well, though—travelling around peddling something—needle books 'tis I think."

Jim was still away when Jean went home at five o'clock; but as she opened her kitchen door a small figure came to meet her.

"Why, Jim!" she cried in cheerful welcome. Then, after a look at his face, "Why, Jim—dear!"

"I've been waitin'," he said. "I had to see you." He was flushed, big-eyed, choking from nervousness or fright. Jean slipped an arm around his shoulders.

"Come on up to my room, Jim. There's no hurry about supper."

Up in the quiet room, with the door closed against

the world and the friendly arm still around him, the boy stammered out his story.

"It's George Middleton. He's got the sheriff. I heard them when I was working outside the window. He suspected right away, and he had some newspapers with pictures in, and all about the bank and everybody thinks they look like him, but I'd like to know how they could tell. I bet there ain't one of them ever saw him with his glasses off."

"Oh!" A gleam of understanding shot through the bewilderment in the listener's face.

"Wait a minute, Jim. Let's begin at the beginning. What was that about a bank?"

"In New London. The cashier stole fifty thousand dollars. Got away as slick as a whistle Mr. Middleton said. Seemed as if he'd just faded off the map, and some of the detectives was sure he was staying somewheres close by, but they couldn't get any trace.

"So then Mr. Middleton came up here and folks told him about Mr. Brown and how he didn't want to meet folks, and wore goggles, and paid such a lot for board so's there wouldn't be any other boarders. And Mr. Middleton he got to thinkin' and asked when Mr. Brown came here. Miss Middleton said 'twas the 18th of July, 'cause she sold her cow on the 17th and he came the next day.

"And Mr. Middleton said that was funny because

the bank cashier skipped on the 17th of July. Then they got out the pictures. He'd kept them 'cause he thought travelling around the . . . e does maybe he'd spot the fellow somewhere and there's a reward.

"Everybody says the pictures look like Mr. Brown. They're dead sure it's him. There was Mr. Pettingill and Mrs. Pettingill and the Rollins down there and they sent for the sheriff from New London. He's comin' to-night. They're all comin' up with him. Anyway, the men are. I wisht they'd fall in the old quarry and break their necks. I do so. The old pie-faced snoopers!

"He never did and anyway he's better'n the whole bunch. I don't care if he did. I'm goin' to tell him. I run all the way up the hill and then I thought I'd tell you first 'cause you like him and you'd know what to do. How'll he get away? Would Teddy take him in the car? Do you s'pose Teddy would?"

"I don't know—maybe," Jean's face was serious. "But if he isn't the man they think he is, he won't want to go, Jim."

Jim nodded.

"Yes, I know; but if he wants to go we've got to fix it. Don't you guess Teddy would?"

She looked doubtful.

"I'm afraid—you see Teddy doesn't know Mr. Brown, Jim, and men think a lot of their old silly laws, except when they're breaking them for their own benefit. I don't believe Teddy would want to do it."

"Well, you would, wouldn't you? You said you thought he was fine, and he likes you a lot. He told me so. You'd help, wouldn't you?"

She realized that she ought not to promise, that she was pledging herself to lawless adventure; but she could not see Mrs. Morley's boarder robbing a bank. She simply *could not* see it. And, if he had robbed the bank—well, she felt just as Jim did about it.

"He's a dear old thing," she said defiantly, "and if he wants to get away, he shall. I'll take the car and drive him, myself. Now run along home and tell him, Jim, and then let me know what he's going to do."

Jim wriggled miserably.

"It's an awful thing to go and poke right at him."

"Yes," she agreed, "but it's the only way to help him."

"Yep: I suppose you wouldn't want to do it instead of me."

"It's your job, Jim, and you're wasting time."

He went away homeward, dragging his bare feet

laggingly, but with a comforted heart. Jean had promised and Jean was very wonderful. She could do 'most anything, he assured himself. Mr. Brown was as good as saved.

Still, the actual saving was trying business. Supper was ready when the boy reached home but he could not eat. There was a large lump in his throat and another in his stomach, and he felt queer and all-overish.

Mrs. Morley eyed him sharply.

"Jim Wells, you ain't sickening with something, are you?"

"No'm."

It seemed to him that supper lasted for hours. When it was over, he went to his evening work but he scrambled through it recklessly, watching the side yard as he worked. Mr. Brown usually walked out there after supper.

At last the boarder came out through the side door, down the steps.

Jim hurried to him.

"Let's walk down to the orchard, Mr. Brown," he proposed. "'Tain't wet. P'r'aps there's deer down there. There were tracks Sunday. Come on, let's go see."

The words tumbled out breathlessly. His eyes implored.

The boarder began a humorous remark, looked into the pleading, unhappy little face and left his joke hanging in the air.

"All right, son. Come along," he said quietly.

In the orchard there were no deer but there was solitude. Mr. Brown talked lightly about clover and tent caterpillars and various familiar, commonplace things while his companion struggled for breath and courage; but finally, realizing that more than time was needed, he put a friendly hand on each of the boy's shoulders and smiled down at him.

"Well, Jim, out with it. Don't worry. I'll see you through."

His voice was kind. His eyes were even more kind. Jim was in trouble of some sort, and boys in trouble needed fathering.

"What's happened, my boy, what have you done?"

Jim made a desperate effort.

"I ain't," he said wretchedly. "It's you."

"Eh? What's that?"

"It's you," Jim repeated, "about the bank."

"Bank? What bank?"

"The bank in New London. They think you're the cashier that took the money. George Middleton's got a newspaper picture of him."

"God bless my soul." Mr. Brown was startled but

Jim saw, with an upward swoop of spirits, that he was not alarmed—that he even seemed amused.

“They was talking about it down at Middleton’s where I’ve been workin’. It’s on account of you wearin’ goggles and acting funny about people seeing you, and coming the morning after the bank was robbed, and being sort of fat and bald, like the picture.”

The story was running freely now.

“I didn’t take any stock in it all but I thought maybe—well, anyway, I thought you’d ought to know before the sheriff comes.”

“What?” The word exploded noisily on the still evening air.

“The sheriff from New London. They wrote to him and he’s coming to-night. They got a telegram.”

Mr. Brown turned from the boy and stared out through the orchard boughs at the afterglow in the western sky. His lips were set in a straight line and there was a furrow between his eyes. Once he smiled sheepishly, but the frown quickly followed the smile. When he spoke, his voice was curt and crisp, a business-like voice.

“When’s the sheriff coming?”

“‘Bout eleven or half past. He’s going to motor up from Saybrook.”

"Is there a train out of here before then?"

"No, sir."

"Where could I get one?"

"I don't know—Meriden maybe, or Hartford."

"Hartford! That's it. How far is it to Hartford?"

"'Bout twenty-five miles."

"Whom could I get to run me over there and keep quiet about it?"

Jim's lips were trembling again and his faith was ebbing, but his loyalty stood firm.

"There ain't anybody—except Jean."

"Jean?"

"Yes, sir. I told her. I thought maybe Teddy'd help, but she says we'd better not ask him, 'cause men are sort of silly about their old laws when they ain't breakin' them for themselves."

Mr. Brown made a peculiar noise that might have been a laugh and might have been a sneeze. "She's quite right. The hired man mustn't know anything about it—not on any account. We don't want him. Isn't there anybody else—anybody who'd do it for good big pay?"

"Jean said she'd take the car and drive you herself."

"Oh, she did! Then she isn't down on me?"

"Well, she said she didn't believe you did it and, if you did, you were an old dear anyway."

"Women! Women!" murmured the fugitive from justice. "What would the criminal life be without them! Jim, Miss Mackaye is a brick."

"Yes, sir," agreed Jim. "Shall I go down and tell her?"

The man hesitated.

"It might make trouble for her."

"We'd be back by half-past ten."

"And she isn't afraid to drive?"

"'Fraid nothin'! Jean ain't the 'fraid kind."

"No, I guess not. I guess not. She'd always stand by—if she cared about a man. See here, Jim. I'm going to tell you something. It's the gospel truth and some day this fall I'll prove it to you; but until then I want you to take my word for it.

"I'm not that bank cashier. I don't know anything about that bank robbery. I'm not hiding on account of anything wrong I've done, but there's a reason why it would be very embarrassing and inconvenient for me to get mixed up in a thing of this sort. I could prove that I'm not the man the sheriff wants but I'd have to do it by proving who I really am and it would make a lot of talk—get into the papers probably. I'd hate that. I had a good reason for coming up here, and I've had a fine time, and some day I'm coming back; but, just now, I'm

going to cut and run. Think you can believe in me even if I do run away?"

"Betcher life!"

Jim's face was shining. Doubt had melted away and unhappiness had gone with it. Only a glorious excitement remained. Never in his wildest dreams had he planned a better adventure than this.

"I'll go tell Jean."

Mr. Brown nodded assent.

"Tell her just what I've told you, Jim. And tell her that if she thinks taking me to Hartford will make trouble for her, she mustn't do it. I'd much rather face the music; but, if she can manage it—and is willing—well, I'll be very greatly in her debt.

"I won't take my trunk; nothing in it I care about. I'll just pack my bag, leave a note for Mrs. Morley, and go down to the school-house corner—where it's so dark under the trees, you know. Miss Mackaye and you can pick me up there; but see here, my boy, how are you going to explain your being away? I don't want to get you into trouble, either."

"Nobody'll care, if they think I'm down at the Bonners'."

"Sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Cut along."

"Do you believe him, Jim?" Jean asked, when the boy had given her his message.

The homely, sensitive boy face turned up to hers brimmed with confidence.

"I wouldn't believe he'd robbed that bank if I'd seen him doin' it."

The girl tossed her doubts aside with a reckless gesture of both hands.

"All right. Here goes; Teddy's up at the minister's planning about the men's club. That's luck. I told Mrs. Bonner I was going to take the car out. She's forgotten it by this time but I didn't like to take it without telling her.

"Jimmy, this is going to be fun. This is going to be great fun—only I wish I had a racing car. A Ford's not the thing for a career of crime."

She was gay, given over to the adventure; and when, a little later, she ran the car into the dense shade at the school-house corner, her spirits were on tiptoe and her face was sparkling.

Mr. Brown looked at her appreciatively as he climbed into the seat beside her.

"Do you always twinkle-twinkle so, when you are rescuing bank robbers from sheriffs?" he asked.

"Always."

"If I were a younger man I would acquire the

bank robbery habit. I suppose you think you *are* rescuing a criminal?"

"No such luck; but it *is* rather larky, isn't it?"

She was driving the car skilfully, daringly, getting a surprising speed out of it, even over the hilly road.

It *was* rather larky. Mr. Brown admitted as much to himself. He was stout and elderly; but flying through the twilight, dashing into inky woods, darting out upon open stretches where shreds of daylight lingered, coasting downhill, scrambling uphill, with a face like Jean's beside him and danger spurring him on—really the criminal life had its thrills.

"We are taking the back road," the driver explained. "It's rough and corkscrewy. We can't make as good time, but we won't meet any one. All right back there, Jim?"

"Fine! Let 'er rip!"

The voice from the back seat was full of thrill such as the stout and elderly, even if criminal, cannot know.

Jim was having the time of his life. Every noise was the sound of a car in pursuit. Every shadow in the road ahead was an ambush. Around every corner, the sheriff was coming to meet them.

He prickled with gooseflesh. There was a squeamish uneasiness about his middle; but he was gloriously happy.

After eight miles of back country road they ran into the turnpike and began passing other cars, but the dusk had closed in and there was no chance of recognition.

Jean drove less dashingly now, but steadily and fast.

No one talked much. The driver was busy with her task, Mr. Brown with his thoughts, Jimmy with his imagination; but when the street lights of Hartford swung into marching lines Jean turned to her passenger with a laugh that held a tremolo admission of relaxed tension.

"How's that?" she asked with pride.

Mr. Brown laid a palm gently on one of the gloved hands that held the wheel.

"Jean," he said. "You're the daughter I've always wanted. I couldn't say more than that, could I? But I *will* say more some day, when I explain all this foolishness. *Now*, I'm going to say good-bye. There's a car line over there at the next corner. I'll take a car into town and spend the night with friends. After I'm with them it doesn't matter who sees me or recognizes me; but I'll worry until I know you are safe at home. I wouldn't have let you come if I'd known what the roads were.

"When you get home, will you call up George Allan in Hartford and ask him to send your order

to-morrow? He will understand and the others on the party wire can't make anything out of that. But if anything's wrong, if there's the slightest unpleasantness for you, just tell Allan so, and he and I will run down to your rescue."

Jean nodded. To her surprise she felt choked and miserable. She did not want to say good-bye to him. But she stopped the car and he climbed out, set his bag on the ground, and held out a hand to Jim.

"Good-bye, Jim. I'll be back in the fall; and when I come, things are going to happen to you. I think you'll like them. I know you will. You've been a mighty good comrade, my boy."

"It'll be poison lonesome." Jim's excitement was temporarily submerged in gloom.

"Yes, but think about the fall, and the things that are going to happen—and nobody can be really lonesome with Jean around."

He turned to the girl at the wheel and the friendliness that had been in his eyes for Jim glowed more warmly.

"Good-bye, little woman," he said, and his voice was as tender as though she had really been the daughter he had always wanted.

"I like owing you a debt. Good-bye—till fall. You aren't afraid of many things, child. Don't be afraid of your own heart."

She sat watching him as he walked away and swung himself on a car.

"He's coming back," Jim sniffed audibly, but spoke with conviction.

"Yes, I wonder if I'll be here." She did not sniff but she sounded forlorn. "Come on over into the front seat, Jim. It's lonesome. Now for home."

They ran the car into the barn at half-past ten and no one marked their coming. Teddy was still working over club plans. The Bonners were fast asleep. The coast was clear.

Jim chuckled happily.

"The folks said they was goin' to bed early 'cause they'd been puttin' up jam, and Mr. Brown was in his room. They was goin' to leave the key under the mat for me. There won't a soul know when I get in."

He spoke in a conspirator's whisper, with furtive looks into the shadowy places.

"It's a shame you can't be there when the sheriff comes, Jean, but I'll tell you in the morning."

He told her in the morning. So did Mrs. Morley and Susan and Molly, Molly's account making up in dramatic quality what it lacked in clearness. Everybody on Green Ridge told everybody else.

It was a wonderful day for the Ridge.

"Beats all how he got away," Ezra Pettingill

told a group at the post office. "Rollins and Middleton and I went up there with Sheriff Day, but there wasn't anything doing. He'd left his trunk full of silk pyjamas and such things and a note for Lucilla saying he'd been called away suddenly and would be back for his things in the fall. Like Hell he will! Left board money up to the end of the week. He could afford it. Easy come, easy go."

"And will you believe it," the postmistress added. "Those silly women won't hear to a word about his robbing the bank. Lucilla says nothing could make her believe he's a bad man and that she hopes the late peaches won't all be gone when he comes, because he's so fond of cobbler. Susan's just as bad. It's a mercy they weren't murdered in their beds. The sheriff suspicioned them some at first, but he soon saw they were as surprised as he was. Jim said he left the man down in the orchard long about seven when he went down to Miss Mackaye's and the folks heard him come into his room. That's the last they know."

For a week or so excitement raged; then the detectives who had come to the sheriff's help went away, and Ridge life lapsed into uneventfulness.

But one person knew who had spirited Mr. Brown from the Ridge.

The morning after the bank robber's flight Teddy

Burton came into the Bonner kitchen with a puzzled frown on his face.

"Somebody had the car out last night. You didn't hear any noise about the barn, did you, Jean?"

The cook put a pan of rolls into the oven carefully before she answered.

"I had the car out myself," she said after the oven door was closed.

"Oh!"

She went about her work humming.

"Must have taken a long drive!"

She coloured hotly. The gasolene! Stupid not to have had the tank partly filled somewhere; but, after all, the length of her drives was no affair of his.

"Yes, we did—Jim and I."

"I see."

He did see. That was the distressing part of it. For a moment he stood looking at her thoughtfully. Then comprehension dawned in his eyes, and the line of his lips straightened.

"You mustn't do that sort of thing, Jean."

His tone was crisp, authoritative, and the slave that is in every woman, however deeply buried under militancy, thrilled to the masterfulness; but, as a matter of principle, the authority was swiftly challenged.

"Why not?"

She might have asked, "What sort of thing?" but

scorned the evasion and met him flatly on the main issue. A bomb-laden suffragette, defying the House of Commons would have seemed humble, propitiatory beside her; but Teddy did not quail. The pasha that is in every man, however deeply hidden under indulgence, was outraged.

"Because I won't have you taking such chances."

She gasped at the temerity of him.

"You might have got into all kinds of a mess," he went on. "Suppose something had gone wrong with the car; suppose you'd had an accident! Suppose some one had seen you and recognized you. Suppose the sheriff had run foul of you and held you up! Nice story it would have made for the papers, wouldn't it? A young woman motoring a bank robber all over Connecticut in the night, helping him to make a getaway! Scare heads and pictures and nasty scandal, and the Bonners dragged in!"

"Teddy Burton!"

She tried to make it scathing but it was only surprised. He was so amazingly big and mannish when he was angry and he wouldn't be so angry if he didn't care. She liked it. She rather hoped he would beat her before he got through.

"I thought you had more sense, Jean." It was a new experience to have a young man disapproving of her in that uncompromising fashion and telling her so.

"If somebody had to interfere with the law and keep a thug out of jail, why didn't you ask me to do it?"

Suddenly his face flushed more deeply and a wave of suspicion swept over it.

"How old is that man, anyway?" There was a sharp edge on his voice.

Jean drew a long breath and pulled herself together. She was on familiar ground when jealousy showed its head. It was only being well scolded—and liking it, liking it enormously—that was new and upsetting.

"Oh, not old."

"I thought he was an old gentleman."

"Well, of course he's not a boy"—her voice expressed immeasurable distaste for boys—"but not old. One could never think of him as old. He's so fine—and splendid. And he didn't rob the bank, you know. He couldn't. Nothing would make me believe anything against him. I'm glad I did it. I'd do it again for him to-night."

She meant it; but she knew that she was giving a false impression and impish enjoyment danced in her downcast eyes, though her face was all demureness.

He did not beat her.

He did something far more disconcerting. He gathered her into his arms and kissed her full on the lips.

All that she had dreamed down among the sweet fern and bayberry of the Back Lots came true and more, much more that she could never have dreamed.

Protest, resistance—they could have made no headway against the flood of strange, sweet feeling that was sweeping through her, drowning anger and doubts and fears, carrying away old landmarks, sending her familiar everyday world whirling round and round and crashing off into oblivion, creating a new heaven and a new earth for her.

No; she could never have dreamed it. It was beyond the reach of a girl's dreams.

He freed her lips, but still held her close, looking down exultantly into her wonder-filled face.

"My girl!" There were heart throbs in the homely words. "*My girl!*"

Even passion could not give him eloquence. He was no poet, just an ordinary young modern, but fathoms deep in love and so, for the moment, at one in heart with poets back to the earliest rhymester of them all.

And the girl in his arms was not in critical mood. For her his "my girl," *was* poetry, rhythmic, rapt, inspired.

"Tell me," the man commanded.

If he had begged, she might have refused. It is the masterful lover that has his way.

"Tell me."

Every line of her face told him. Every quick, sobbing breath told him. Her eyes were full of it, her cheeks were aglow with it, her lips were quivering with it; but he was not content.

"Tell me, Jean. Do you love me?"

She nodded shyly, all the calm assurance gone out of her.

"Say it."

She said it and he kissed her again.

As he lifted his head, he saw the rows of shining pots and pans glaring at him from the wall and laughed at them triumphantly. Why had he ever thought that a kitchen was not the place for love-making? Why had he ever thought that the everyday world of work and its commonplaces were outside the gates of paradise!

"You darling, you blessed little darling!" he murmured to the back of a brown head whose face was hidden now against his shoulder.

"How I'll love you, and work for you, and——"

"Bully me," said a small, choked voice. "Don't forget to bully me. It's so—terribly—good for me."

"Why, my dears, my dears!"

The voice came from the pantry doorway where

Mrs. Bonner stood looking in a bewildered way at her cook and her handy man.

"I'm so glad," she said, smiling, but the smile was a wavering white-lipped one; and Jean, who, blushing rosily, had fled from Teddy's arms to the opposite side of the kitchen, forgot her embarrassment in swift alarm.

"What is it?" she asked, running forward. "What is it, dear?"

Mrs. Bonner clung to her, trembling.

"Rufus! There's something wrong. He can't breathe. He doesn't know me. I'm frightened, Jean."

The doctor came an hour later; but long before that Teddy had carried the sick man to his room, put him to bed, given him a heart stimulant, done all that could be done, skillfully, wisely.

Mrs. Bonner, still clinging fast to Jean, watched him with grateful eyes.

"I thought he was just a boy," she said, "just a nice, jolly, capable boy; but he's a man, isn't he? I never *realized* he could be like this, so strong and gentle and quiet, did you, Jean?"

The girl shook her head. She could not trust her voice. Loving did such queer things to one's voice.

"Pleuro pneumonia," the doctor said, when he had made his examination, "and very low vitality. Too

much work and too little red blood. It's going to be a fight. We'd better have a nurse at once."

The sick man's cook shot a startled glance at his handy man. A nurse! Twenty-five dollars a week!

"Yes, we'll need a nurse. Will you be kind enough to telephone for one, Doctor?"

Teddy recognized the financial problem involved, but spoke as though twenty-five dollars grew on every bush. He would borrow the money from Coles. Borrowing to get out of work and borrowing in an emergency like this were two very different things.

"How *can* we, Teddy?" Jean whispered to him in the hall later, as they turned from seeing the doctor off.

"There's always a way of getting what one absolutely has to have," he answered sturdily. "I can get the money. When will you marry me, Jean?"

The sequence of thought was obvious, but the proposal was extraordinarily off hand. She would probably have resented its calm assurance if the real things of life had not been crowding in upon her. With the glory of love and the shadow of death in the house, coquetry and quibbling seemed poor senseless things.

Still—marrying!

"We can't leave the Bonners now," she protested hastily. "He may be ill a long time; and, if any-

thing should happen, she'd be—— Oh, we mustn't think about it. Teddy—not yet.”

He smiled into her startled eyes.

“No, of course, not just yet, not until things are straightened out and we can turn the blessed infants over to other foster parents; but just as soon as things are right for them? September, October. Surely by October.”

“We can't, Teddy. We can't possibly. He's dreadfully ill, and this is August and I—— Oh, no; not October.”

There was panic in her voice. She had travelled far and fast that day and the country to whose border she had come seemed wide and strange and full of mystery.

“Are you afraid, dear?”

She met the challenge honestly.

“A little.”

“Of me?”

“Of Life.”

“With me?”

She nodded slowly.

“Yes—but I'd be more afraid of life without you—now.”

So he had his way again. They would be married just as soon as the Bonners could spare them. In the meanwhile, they would stand by.

Miss Potter, the nurse, came with the twilight, a brusque, starchy autocrat, who turned every one out of the sick room and took the campaign into her own hands.

"I can't like her, but she makes me feel much safer—much," Mrs. Bonner told Jean, when they found themselves on the outside of the sick-room door.

"Of course, if it's better for Rufus not to have me there—but it does seem as if I—— Oh, Jean, begin early, begin as early as you can. A lifetime isn't long enough for being together. Rufus and I began so late and we were always so busy. Everybody needs work, but the years go by very fast. Don't be too desperately busy, Jean. Take plenty of time for realizing that you are happy. There's too much taking for granted and there are days and days that might count but don't. Then some day one or the other is alone and grudges those days. I'm grudging them now, and if Rufus——" Her voice broke.

"But he won't. He won't," Jean declared stoutly. "Teddy says he won't."

She knew it was foolish when she said it; but it had comforted her and Mrs. Bonner seemed to find it comforting, too. Teddy was such a reliable person.

But the shaken little woman came back to the

regret again when, hours after, Jean had tucked her into bed and was saying good-night.

"I'm glad about Teddy and you, child, very glad—though I don't know what we will do without you. You mustn't think about us though. Don't keep him waiting. Rufus and I waited a year—so that I could go back to the Faroes. I can't see why I thought the Faroes were important. A whole year! Good-night, dear."

Jean lay awake long that night.

She was happy, very happy—and very miserable. Friends out of the old life came trooping to her, and made her look at marriage with Teddy through their eyes. Old dreams, old plans, old ideals clutched at her. Old prejudices asserted themselves.

She thought of the women who drudged their way through life, tired women with the youth and joy and hope crushed out of them by weariness and monotony. She shuddered at the ugliness of poverty and counted over the beautiful things that money could buy. And she cried a little, there in the darkness, because she must choose between the things she loved and the man she loved, instead of having both.

But when the harvest moon came around the corner of the house and looked in through her window, she could not remember about the friends and

the money and the things money could buy. The moon has no patience with heart searchings of that kind, none whatever.

A flood of silver light came drifting through the windows and across the floor. It found the bed and crept up over the counterpane to a face that smiled mistily.

Lying there in the moonlight, Jean could remember nothing but the strength of a man's arms, the touch of his lips, the sound of his voice, the love-light in his eyes. All of the questions and warnings and threats that had come stealing up out of the darkness went back to the darkness, were clean forgot in a world where there was only love and more love and love past all telling, with service for the handmaid of love.

October was not too soon. Jean admitted it to herself, happily, drowsily. Mrs. Bonner had been right. A lifetime of being together was not enough.

Just on the edge of the borderland of sleep, memory caught at her.

What was it she had written to Babs, long ago, before Teddy had come?

"All my pains are growing pains. Some day, God willing, I'm going to be a *woman!*"

"Well, now"—the thought was mixed with moonshine and dreams and remembered kisses but she

held fast to it—"well, now, thank God, I *am* a woman."

The doctor had been right when he foretold a fight, and, for a while, the fight seemed to be a losing one.

Mr. Bonner drifted swiftly, steadily on the ebb tide and a queer hush held the house. Mrs. Bonner sat in her own room, white and still and very gentle. Jean was with her whenever work allowed. They did not talk much, only sat there together and waited for the doctor to come, waited for the doctor to go, waited for him to come again. It was Teddy who relieved the nurse when she needed rest. She had arranged that.

"He is steady and quiet and dependable," she had said in her curt way. "I will feel safe with him in charge."

Even Mrs. Bonner did not resent the choice. Every one leaned on Teddy.

The doctor was less and less encouraging as the days went by, and Teddy shook his head gravely when Jean's eyes questioned him, but the nurse's face only set in more stubborn lines and her few words snapped more and more like whip lashes.

There came a night when that hush in the house deepened, when the doctor came and stayed, when

Teddy sat with Mrs. Bonner and Jean in the little study and all three listened breathlessly for sounds beyond the door behind which Science was fighting Death to the last ditch.

Outside the window the darkness grew less dark. A little breeze stirred shadowy tumult in the trees. Off somewhere in the graying gloom a whippoorwill gave strident warning of the dawn.

There was a sound of steps in the sick room and Jean's hand tightened round Mrs. Bonner's.

The door opened and the doctor came out. Just for a second Mrs. Bonner closed her eyes. She was afraid to see his face; but when she opened them, he was smiling at her.

"Mr. Bonner is sleeping," he said. "He will do very well now—with care."

Mr. Bonner did do very well—with care; but September was half gone before he was like himself once more. Even then, he did not go back to work but lay contentedly in the hammock or wandered about the farm with Mrs. Bonner always beside him, a smile on her lips and a curious look of youth in her face.

"When are you and Teddy going to be married?" she asked Jean, on the day when the doctor made his last call. "You've both been so good. I don't know what we would have done without you. Rufus

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"Tell me you forgive me," he begged

and I both realize and we dread your leaving, but we don't want to be selfish. We wouldn't have you miss a day together because of us—not a day. I've been thinking that Susan would come to us. She's well now and kind and capable, and Molly would keep us young. There's no one like you, Jean, but you must take your happiness quickly. Don't think of us."

"The dear soul hasn't the faintest idea that they haven't money enough to get along without us," Jean told Teddy, half laughing, half crying. "She doesn't remember how much she gave you to put in the bank. I don't suppose she even knew how much it was when she gave it to you. I don't see how we can ever leave them."

There was a hint of impatience in Teddy's laugh.

"If only those dividends would come rolling in again! They don't need us for anything except financial props. Don't flatter yourself they do. They don't need anybody. They're so blamed glad to be alive and together that the rest of the world simply doesn't count. Jean, I wonder if, when I'm old and bald and stooped in the shoulders and a bit groggy in the legs——"

She did not allow him to finish. There was a long and foolish interval.

"And I don't see how you can even smile at them,"

Jean reproached, considerably later. "I think they are adorable—perfectly adorable."

The postman came late that day. The Bonners had finished their luncheon when Teddy brought in the mail, but were still at the table, and Mr. Bonner balanced a spoon carefully on the edge of his glass while his wife ran through the letters. He had fallen out of the way of bothering with his own mail, bothered very little about anything, since his journey to the edge of Beyond.

"Why, Rufus," Mrs. Bonner exclaimed suddenly. "Why, Rufus!"

"Yes, my dear." He was vaguely polite.

"This is very interesting. It's from Mr. Pryor."

Jean, carrying dishes from the table, stopped by the sideboard and busied herself there, listening shamelessly. History seemed to be repeating itself. Perhaps those dividends——"

"It's about a mine, Rufus, a lead mine—only there isn't any lead in it."

"Yes." Mr. Bonner nodded understanding. It was his experience that there was never lead in lead mines, nor silver in silver mines, nor gold in gold mines.

"Still," he remarked cheerfully, "mines are interesting. g. I've always considered them extremely interesting."

"This one has oil in it," Mrs. Bonner explained.

Over by the sideboard, Jean held her breath but Mr. Bonner was not impressed.

"Curious," he commented, "but that's why mines *are* interesting, I suppose. They are so uncertain. One never knows; but oil—in a lead mine—I should think that is quite unusual."

"It seems an oil mine is very valuable—only Mr. Pryor calls it a well. He says we are most fortunate, that we will be rich; in fact, that we *are* rich already. That's pleasant, isn't it?"

She might have been discussing an invitation to afternoon tea.

A cup fell and smashed, the door of the pantry swung open and 'ut, the kitchen door slammed, and an excited young woman confronted a serene young man who was splitting kindling in the woodshed.

"They've struck oil," she announced dramatically.

Teddy put down the axe and eyed her with concern.

"Oil?" he echoed.

"Yes, in a lead mine."

"Jean, my child, you're raving."

"It's true. They have. One of those silly mines of Mr. Bonner's. They're rich. Mr. Pryor says so."

For one brief moment he stood staring at her, allowing the news to sink in.

Then he caught her to him.

"When, Jean? When? To-morrow? Monday? Monday at the latest!"

But this time he did not have his way. They waited two weeks. A woman must assert herself occasionally.

There was much to be done in the two weeks. Susan had to be trained to the ways of the household. The town apartment was made ready. The farmhouse was put in order for the winter, though not entirely dismantled.

"It must look pretty for the wedding," Mrs. Bonner insisted. "Yes, I know it's to be a quiet wedding but it's to be a pretty one. My heart's set on that."

She was in her element now, buying from catalogues, running down to New York in search of more to buy, brushing aside Jean's protests, spending with both hands.

"There's something very stimulating about an oil well," she explained happily. "It gushes, you know. Mr. Pryor says ours is a gusher. I feel that I have to gush, too; but no matter how fast I gush I can't seem to keep up with it. Mr. Pryor and Teddy are investing most of the money where we can only get the interest. That seems a dull way to use a gusher, doesn't it? But I dare say it's wise, and at least I can have a beautiful time getting you ready.

Don't spoil my fun, Jean. Please don't spoil my fun."

So after all there was a trousseau but *things* seemed astonishingly unimportant to Jean in those last days. She did not even know what kind of a home she was to have. Teddy had said it would be in Buffalo and that they would see about it after they reached there. His salary would be enough to make them comfortable. That was all he had told her and she was not curious. She had made her choice and was contented—oddly, restfully contented.

Just what their circumstances would be Teddy himself did not know; but he could support his wife. Of that he was sure. He had written to his father telling him the bald facts. He was going to be married. The girl was poor, had been working as a servant. She was too good for him, worlds too good for him, and the truest gentlewoman he had ever known. He hoped his father would come to the wedding.

"You'll love her, Dad." It was the world-old formula of fatuous lovers for disapproving parents. "You can't help it. Everybody loves her. Is the job in the factory still open to me? I hope so; but, if it isn't, I've a chance with the Marbury people—through Carter. Don't think I'm going to lie back on you, Dad. I've grown up since I fell in love with Jean."

Mr. Burton, Senior, answered by wire.

"Congratulations. Will be there. Job waiting for you."

Not effusive but satisfactory, Teddy told himself. His father was coming, would meet Jean. The rest was sure to be clear sailing.

Jean, too, had written a letter—a letter that was a feminized version of Teddy's. She, too, stated the facts but she did not leave them bald. She adorned them with luxuriant tresses and marcelled the tresses.

How could a girl write bald facts about the only man in the world to her dearest friend, particularly when the dearest friend would be sure to think some of the facts damning to the man?

Of course Teddy *was* the only man in the world, whatever friends might think or say; but it would be a great comfort to have Barbara Herrick thoroughly understand his superlative excellence, so she tried to give her some slight idea of it and, at the bottom of the twentieth page, abandoned the undertaking.

"There's no use writing, Babs," she admitted. "You'll have to know him to understand. Maybe you won't understand even then. I don't. I wouldn't have believed I could give up all the 'half gods.' They seemed so terribly important when I was putting flowers on their altars; but now—well,

it's quite true that 'when the gods arrive the half gods go.'

"I'd like some of the old luxuries, I wish we were going to have money and social position, and I know, as well as you do, that most of the women who have gone in for the 'all for love and the world well lost' stakes have come dreadful croppers; but, all the same, I haven't any misgivings. I buried them all under a juniper bush.

"I'm the happiest girl in the world, Babs, and it's fast colour. Just come and see. Do please come, dear. You and Tom are all of the old life I really must take with me into the new; and you'll both feel much better after you meet Teddy—and the Bonners. The Bonners diffuse an atmosphere that would make the maddest of doings appear altogether normal—and they've been heavenly good to me.

"But, Babs, I haven't told Teddy about my criminal past. He thinks I was born to the kitchen—bless him!

"I don't believe he'd throw me over if he knew the worst; but it might make him unhappy and doubtful about his ability to make *me* happy; so I'm going to wait until it's too late for him to be noble and over-modest. I'm counting on you and Tom, remember. There's no one else. Don't fail me—JEAN."

"She's mad, stark staring mad," little Mrs. Herrick sobbed when she had read the letter and told the news to her husband.

"A hired man and our Jean! How could she? She mustn't. She shan't."

Tom Herrick grinned cheerfully across the breakfast table.

"She's as sane a girl as I ever knew," he said encouragingly; "and she's a dead game sport. No use arguing with her, Honey. Let's just see her through with a whoop and not spoil the mad tea party."

Mrs. Herrick's whoop, sent by post, was tremulous but bravely optimistic, and the prospective bride cried a little over it—happily.

"Such dears," she said to herself. "Such loyal dears! So absolutely sure I'm making a mistake but standing by, just the same."

The wedding day came after a night of rain—a glorious, fresh-washed, breeze-swept day, with a tang of frost in the air, a dash of red in the maples, a glint of gold in the birches, and a wonderful blue on the distant hills.

Through the shouting joy of it the Herricks motored up from New York; and, long before their car stopped in front of the white house under the maples, at noon, they were converted to rashness, in tune with romance, ready to believe in miracles.

"After all, if they're frightfully in love with each other," Barbara murmured indulgently.

Her husband stopped the car on a hilltop and the two foolish married folk kissed each other, while a group of cows looked over a stone wall with mild approval.

Then the car coasted down the hill, climbed another hill, and Babs was in Jean's arms while two men took each other's measure and waited for the first, fine frenzy to subside.

"He seems like the real thing," Tom confided to his wife, later, "but what in thunder is a chap like that doing here?"

"He's marrying Jean, and he's a blessed angel," Mrs. Herrick stated with profound conviction and rapturous relief.

"But, Babs——"

"She's crazy about him."

"Yes, I know; but——"

"I'm crazy about him myself."

She fled brideward and her husband, shaking his head doubtfully, strolled out into the yard.

There Teddy joined him and once more the two studied each other, under cover of desultory talk.

"You've known Jean a long time?" Teddy said at last.

"Yes; a long time."

"She thinks a lot of you."

"We think a lot of her."

Teddy squared his shoulders and drew a long breath.

"There's something I think I'd better tell you," he began shamefacedly. Tom Herrick's genial face hardened. There *was* something wrong, after all.

"Suppose we walk out through the garden." Teddy cast an apprehensive glance toward the house windows as he spoke.

"You see I ought to have told Jean," he went on, "but I hated to spoil things. It was all so perfect and I didn't know what foolish idea she might take into her head, if she knew, and I—well, I put it off."

Guilt sat heavily upon him and the listener's heart sank. Poor Jean! But it was better to know now. Maybe things weren't so hopelessly rotten. Perhaps there was nothing worse than a divorce or——

"Better get it out of your system," he advised curtly.

A moment later Jean and Barbara, dressing in the bride's room, were interrupted in serious talk by a howl of mirth.

"That's Tom," Tom's wife said positively. "Nobody else in the world ever laughs like a Calliope. I wonder what's so funny; but really, Jean, I think you ought to do it. Tom thinks so, too. Of course if it

were something bad you might keep it to yourself."

"Well, of all the immoral sentiments," protested the bride.

"But this sort of thing can't make any real difference," Babs continued severely, "and it does look as if you hadn't much confidence in him. I'd tell him beforehand, Jean. Truly I would. Tom says it isn't playing the game not to—that a man would hate not being told."

The girl before the mirror studied her own reflection anxiously.

"He'll hate it—but he likes me in white. Perhaps you're right. I'll go and tell him now. Pat me on the back, Babs. I feel as though I were going to confess that I'd been married three times and had two husbands living."

"Jean!" It was Tom Herrick's voice from the foot of the stairs and it sounded oddly choked and very solemn.

"Come down a minute. Burton wants to see you. It's important. He's in the library."

She went slowly down the stairs, slim and sweet and girlish in her simple white frock, but hesitating, all her blithe self-confidence gone, a mute appeal in her eyes.

The slimness and sweetness tugged at Teddy's

heart but he missed the appeal. He had troubles of his own. Any ordinary girl would be glad to hear that her lover had a rich father, but Jean was different—so frank, so honest. She hated deceit. Perhaps——

“Herrick said I ought to tell you,” he began bravely. “I would have told you before only I wasn’t sure how you’d take it. You see I was mad about you the moment I saw you. I’d have done anything to get you and it didn’t seem—I meant to tell you but—well, you won’t let it make any difference will you, dear?”

The girl’s face was as white as her frock now, and fright had replaced the appeal in her eyes.

She had not dreamed of this; had tossed all her early suspicions away; and now——

“Tell me,” she said. Her voice was quiet, but she put a hand upon a high-backed chair to steady herself.

“Well, you know, I saw you on the street. It was all over but the shouting right then, so far as I was concerned.” The man was stumbling through his confession desperately. “But there wasn’t any way. I had to meet you—and I saw the advertisement. It *was* a way, you know—and I took a chance—and then I was worse hit than ever; and I liked the work, too, and took on the Bonners—and you were so—so—— Oh, Jean! Jean, darling!”

He came toward her, arms outstretched, but the look on her face stopped him.

"What was it?" she asked. "What had you done?"

"Done?" He stared at her in bewilderment. Hadn't he just explained? "Done? Why, chucked the fishing trip, you know, and signed on as hired man, and kept it dark that Dad had money to burn and I'd been burning it; but I didn't take a cent from him after I met you. Word of honour! I went on my own like a shot. Going to stay on my own; but of course if Dad—— Oh, I say, don't take it that way, Jean! Don't!"

She had dropped into the high-backed chair and was crying—or was she laughing? Doing both; that was it—and he couldn't stand it.

"Darling," he pleaded, on his knees beside her, his arms close round her. "Darling! *Don't!* I'll never deceive you again. It was only that I couldn't see any other way and it seemed harmless enough and you had me shot all to pieces and then it was all so blamed sweet the way it was. I'd been plumb fed up with loafing and I've loved working—with you. I'll work like a wop for you, Jean, and I've been a decent sort aside from being a silly idle young ass. Truly I have."

The girl was still sobbing a little, laughing a little, but clinging to him in a way that was vastly reassuring.

"Tell me you forgive me," he begged.

"We—we're partners in crime."

The voice was very small and shaky and muffled by his coat lapel. "I've a horrible past of my own, Ted. You see I—not money. It was all lost—but I did—and I butterflied around—and then I cut loose to prove I could earn my own living; but I wanted to go back. I've got a grubby little soul. And then you came—and I wouldn't at first; but afterward I didn't care. I was satisfied. I knew nothing else mattered."

"My darling! My blessed, plucky darling!"

His voice was shaky now; but his face was radiant and in the face Jean at last lifted to his there was utter content.

A succession of blood-curdling shrieks broke in upon their good moment and sent them hurrying out of doors with the rest of the household.

A big motor car was standing before the gate. A liveried chauffeur sat like a graven image at the wheel and Molly, squealing with excitement, was swarming over some one on the back seat.

"Jimmy!" she called. "Jimmy, come see! Come quick!"

A man climbed out of the car with the small girl in his arms and came up the walk.

"Dad!" Teddy shouted, running to meet him;

but, at his heels, Jean and Jimmy and Mrs. Morley and Susan were calling out glad greetings to Mr. Brown.

He was a wonderful wedding guest, was Mr. Brown, after he had gripped his boy's hand and looked into his eyes and knew that all was well between them.

"Don't be angry, Ted," he said. "I didn't intend to interfere and I didn't suspect anything shady, but you had me guessing. I wanted to know what was up and be ready to haul you out if you were wading in over your depth. Then when I found you were in head over ears already, and when I met Jean—— Ted, if you aren't good to that girl, I'll——well, never mind, but you needn't grin like a demented chimpanzee. She's worth ten of you.

"I had the house done over when I went home. You won't mind coming in there, will you, Jean? It's so confounded big and lonely and it needs a mistress."

"I'll love it." Jean's voice was humble. She was being invited to fill a place long vacant and she realized all it meant.

"But we'll buy a farm for summers. You said you wanted a farm, Jean. There's an old one five miles out—on a hilltop. You specified a hilltop. Lilacs, too, but elms instead of maples. I believe you'll like it."

He patted her hand gently and looked around him with satisfied eyes.

"Then you'll all come to visit us. I'd like a farm here on Green Ridge if it weren't so far from the factory. Great place. I came for a week and stayed until the sheriff chased me out.

"By the way, I went over to New London yesterday and saw that sheriff. Nice fellow.

"You see it was this touchy boy of mine I didn't want to meet—afraid he'd think I wasn't playing fair, but I stirred up a hullabaloo, didn't I?"

"My stars, wait till I get a chance at the Ladies' Aid Society!" There was triumph in Mrs. Morley's voice.

"Invite the Ladies' Aid down," Mr. Brown urged genially. "Invite all the neighbours down, especially the Middleton man. I'd like to apologize to him for his disappointment about that reward. I'm going to spend a week with you, Mrs. Morley, and turn the car over to these youngsters. You can murder the chauffeur or send him back to town if he's a crowd, Ted. You won't need him. Jean can drive. I'll swear to that. How's the pie supply, Mrs. Morley?"

Mrs. Morley was fidgeting restlessly on the edge of her chair. The light of battle was in her eyes.

"Well, just as soon as this wedding's over——"

"Don't hurry them. I can wait for my pie."

"Jim, remember those things that were going to happen to you? They're going to begin. New York next week with me, then school and college, and after that you'll have to come out and help Ted run the factory. It'll be a two-man job to keep Jean and me in funds."

Molly was on his knee. Jim stood shy but ecstatic in the circle of his arm. He reached out his free hand and drew Jean to him.

"That boy of mine has his living to earn," he said, smiling proudly up at her, "but you and I, daughter—we're going to play around a bit."

Then the minister came and the Bonners' young folk were married.

They went away in the car from which the chauffeur had been eliminated; but Jean was not driving. She was throwing kisses back to the group at the door of the white house under the maples.

"The lambs!" she said chokingly. "The lambs!"

"You aren't crying?"

Her husband could drive an eight-cylinder car with one hand and he proved it.

"I am," the bride sobbed. "I'm *wailing!* Why shouldn't I cry, Teddy Burton? This is the funeral of the best friend I ever had. She was a cook lady!"

THE END



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