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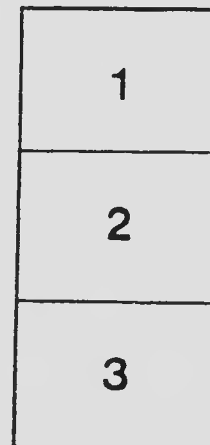

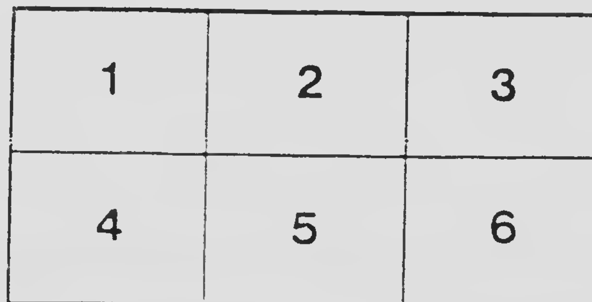

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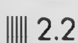

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THE OLD NEST

RUPERT HUGHES

The Old Nest

"Don't love your children too much, little bird.
They'll fly away."

The Old Nest

BY

RUPERT HUGHES

AUTHOR OF "EXCUSE ME,"
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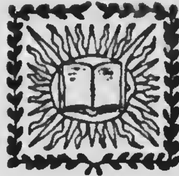

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TO
YOUR
MOTHER

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PART I
THE LAST FLEDGLING

THE OLD NEST

I

"IT 'S too much for us, Hannah. I guess you 'll have to call Uncle Ned."

"Gimme a minute to git my breath."

The old cook and her older mistress had fought with the dining-room table in a futile tug-of-war. It would not come apart. They braced themselves, and hung back in antipodal directions like the human handles of a Greek jug; but the table clung grimly to its own.

They sank into opposite chairs, gasping with the unusual effort, and looked helplessly at each other across the tenacious boards. Mrs. Anthon panted, "The ta-

ble holds together better than the family does, Hannah."

"Yes, ma'am. It does so."

Mrs. Anthon reached forward an old ivory hand, and ran it along the venerable mahogany, with an approving caress. Since any group of objects that coheres seems to take on personality in human eyes, this table had come to be regarded of old as a somebody, an ancient retainer of the house. It had even outlived three generations of the family dog that crouched at its edge like an immortal Lazarus pleading for crumbs.

When Hannah decided that she had got her breath, she rose from her chair, difficultly, as cooks always rise from chairs, and went to the porch to call in Uncle Ned.

He was supposed to be engaged in the usual spring yard-cleaning, but he

was lazy as only a negro knows how to be lazy, and he spent most of his time reflecting upon the consequences of his last gesture, or deliberating over the probable effects of his next. He raked a pile of winter-sodden leaves as carefully as if they were flakes of gold that must not be broken with rough handling; he swept a walk more solemnly and minutely than a monk illuminating one of the Epistles of Paul.

Hannah found him leaning on a hoe, as immobile as a painted peasant on a painted field. At the sound of her voice he suffered a positive epilepsy of energy, and she must name him thrice before he vouchsafed a hasty:

"Cain't you see Ah'm busy?"

The same habit has been noted in laborers on street-car tracks. They evade toil with a lotus-eater's leisureliness till a car comes along, when they

assail their task so fanatically that the car must stop, or play Juggernaut over their infatuated frames.

Uncle Ned relinquished his hoe with a sigh of regret, and reluctantly at length consented to follow Hannah. He had one rheumatismic knee, and his mode of motion gave him the look of walking cautiously around his own feet.

He was not often invited into the house, and seemed unutterably afraid of injuring the walls or the floor. Once in the presence of his mistress, his hat slid from his head and he made many a salaam, wrinkling up his face and grinning like a wheedling hound.

"Hyah Ah am, Miss' Anth'n," he said. "Ah had to leave ma hoe in de air, but hyah Ah am. Yassum, hyah Ah am. Ah'm hyah—"

Uncle Ned would go on like an alarm

clock till he was cut off. Mrs. Anthon spoke softly into his talk:

"Hannah and I have been trying to pull the table apart so that we can take this leaf out. But it 's too much for us, Uncle Ned. Do you think you can fix it?"

"Well, Ah don' like to brag or boas', but Ah reckon Ah kin lick dat ole tabl[illegible] Yassum, Ah reckon Ah kin just abot[illegible] wrastle dat ole table to a stan'still Yassum, Ah should n' be supprise[illegible] ef—"

"It sticks awfully tight, and you 'r[illegible] not as strong as you used to be."

"No'm, dat's de dismal fack. W[illegible] wid rheumatics an' ovawuk, Ah[illegible] con-siderable disparaged, but—" h[illegible] drew himself up with pride—"but Ah kin well rememba de day when Ah could do a lick of wuk as good as ever Ah could."

After an elaborate debate on the plan of attack, he set the two women at one end of the table, while he laid hold of the other. They fought the table up and down the room and into the sideboard. It clung to its last leaf like a mother resisting kidnappers; but at length, by wrenches and jerks, it was overpowered. Its arms came out of their sleeves, squealing protest, and the leaf was left with tenons divorced from their mortises.

Uncle Ned's face was like glowing charcoal, and he held the plank aloft in triumph.

"You see, dey's one or two things still a-goin' dat ole Uncle Ned can lick. Yassum, dey's one or two,—mebbe three—"

"It 's the only leaf left in the old table," Mrs. Antho[illegible] mourned. "The others went into it o[illegible] by one, and came

out one by one. And now the last of them is gone."

There was such a dismay of loneliness in her tone and such a presage of tears in her voice that even the old darky's slow heart was touched. He wiped his eye with the back of his wrist bone, and proffered consolation.

"Don' you worry, Miss' Anth'n. Dis hyah ole leaf ain't gone fo' good. No, ma'am. It 'll come a-snoopin' an' a-slippin' back in place ag'in befo' it knows it 's loose. Ain't Miss Em'ly tole me herseff dis ve'y mawnin' whilst Ah was ca'yin' her trunk down to de ca'ige, dat she 's gwine to come home in jus' a little less 'n no time at all?"

Mrs. Anthon refused to hope. Uncle Ned persisted.

"Ah don' see what fo' you take dis ole leaf out, anyhow. Only got to go to

de trouble o' slammin' him back in ag'in. Don't seem like you orter 'a' took me away f'm ma job in de yahd fo' any such nonsense."

"The table is plenty large enough for the doctor and me without it," said Mrs. Anthon. "It makes it easier for us to pass things, and it saves Hannah a lot of steps, and—and—"

She could not trust herself to speak the real reason: that the old-time expanse of table was an unendurable reminder of the absent children. The empty spaces around the board showed where plates had stood, plates that had clattered much and come often back to be refilled. She could never endure the mute reminder of an empty chair against the wall. As the children had vanished from the family one by one, their chairs were spirited away one by one, to the garret.

She ordered Ned to take the evicted leaf down to the cellar, and store it in the rack with those that had gone before. As he bent his shoulders to it, he said:

"What 's dese mahks on de undaneath o' dis hyah table? Feels like somebody done cyahve somethin'. Ah can't mek out de name. Ma eyes is growin' fibbler ev'y day. When Ah was young, though, Ah was sharpasighted dan a lynnix. Ah could see in de dahk. Ah could out-see a yowl."

Mrs. Anthon hardly needed to glance at the time-blurred inscription. Her eyes were feeble, too, but her memory was keener for the trifles of lang syne than for recent history.

"It must be Tom's name. I remember it now just as if it was yesterday," she said, and she made Ned put down the board while she fumbled for her eye-

glasses. "It was his first pocket-knife. He had always wanted one, and I was always afraid, and his father was afraid he 'd cut himself, too. But one day he traded two of his school-books for a jack-knife, and—I was out calling that day, and the poor child was left alone in the house, and he had to amuse himself some way, and so he pushed back the tablecloth and cut his name where his plate stood. See, there it is—if I can ever find my glasses!—in letters half an inch deep. I can feel them now. Hannah, you ought to remember that."

"Oh, yes'm. I remember it. I remember it perfect. You and the doctor come home an' caught him before he could finish it, and his paw whaled the daylights out of him."

Mrs. Anthon winced at the pain and the outcry even now.

"He had no right to whip him," she

insisted. "The poor child did n't mean any harm. He thought it would please everybody. He did n't want any mistake made as to his place at table. But his father was so unreasonable. We had the board planed off as much as we could, and it was all right when it was turned over. It made the table a little uneven, but—Oh, here they are!"

She slipped her forehead into the shafts of her spectacles, and smiled as she made out the legend.

tHOmAS ANt

It was smoothed down like an old epitaph, and about all that could be seen was that the S and the N were faced the wrong way. Thomas also had been faced the wrong way by his father. The mother forgot the intensely undignified and unheroic vision of the yowling lad taking his larruping—the child had

learned early in life that a yelp in time saves nine switches. The mother remembered rather the solemn child, gouging as earnestly as if he were an Egyptian historian carving a Pharaoh's cartouche on an obelisk.

Uncle Ned rubbed his thumb across the half-obliterated scars in the wood, and chuckled.

"Dat suttainly is cyahved good and deep! But Mista Tom has gone an' cyahved his name deepa and higha yit in dat old New Yawk City town. An' people do tell me it takes a mighty smaht man to make a deep dint in New Yawk."

"Yes, he 's doing wonderfully well there, Uncle Ned. That 's the worst of it, all the children are doing so well they have no time to come home."

"Dat's de trebble of havin' such smaht child'n. Ah got abote fo'ty of

ma own, and dey hang on ma back like Ah was a possum."

"You 're lucky to have them near you, Uncle Ned."

"Mebbe so, mebbe so, but Ah could stan' a few of 'em a mite fuddah off. Seems lak all yo' child'n was nach'ly talentous, Miss' Anth'n. Miss Kate, now; she useteh sing like a yangel, settin' out on top of a rainbow. Ah reckon she 's singin' betta yit out in New Yawk."

"She does n't sing any more," sighed Mrs. Anthon.

"Well, dat's too bad, but Ah reckon she sung herseff into a nice husban'."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Ambler is a nice man," Mrs. Anthon admitted with the caution mothers use in praising their children's mates.

Uncle Ned was beginning to enjoy the warmth of the dining-room and the lux-

ury of reminiscence. Sometimes he had found that if he made himself very agreeable, and, at just the right moment, suffered a violent attack of coughing and a rheumatic contortion or two, he could successfully hint forth what he called "one live coal from de good old bottle" that was kept upstairs—strictly for medicinal purposes.

And now he began edging in that direction.

"Yassum, yo' child'n is suttainly a credit to you, Miss' Anth'n. Mista Frank, now: Ah undastan' he 's a yahtist of de ve'y highest pasuasium. When he was abote knee-high to a duck, he tole me he was goin' to be a house and sign [illegible]nta."

M[illegible] Anthon was glad to brag about her children to almost anybody, most of all to those who had known them in their unformed and riotous years. So she

told Uncle Ned, "Oh, he is n't painting signs now. He lives in Paris and paints for the Salons."

"Well, what you think of dat! Lives in Pa'is now! You know, Ah come from Kentucky myseff. Yassum, my fust owna lived not fur from Pa'is. Seems to me Ah rememba de Salons, too. Neah as Ah can recollec' dey was abote de bes' people dey was in Pa'is.

"So Mista Frank paints for 'em. Well, what you think of dat? And on'y dis mawnin' Ah been lookin' at de fust paintin' he eveh done. Mista Tom, he cyahved large an' deep, but Mista Frank he painted wide an' high. You rememba he made up his min' he 'd paint his name acrost de front de house, and he clomb up yonda by de rough ends of dem bricks like he was a fly, an' he got de fust letta finished a foot or mo' high, when he was interruptioned."

"Humph," sniffed Hannah. "I guess [illegible]e was! The poor child fell about a hunderd feet or more, and lit on his poor little head. And was n't I washin' a winder in the poller, and seen him go by. And I run out the house, and found him layin' there whiter than flour, and I let out a scream; and the doctor happened to be home; and he come runnin' out; and I says, 'Oh, Doctor, the poor child 's killed.' And the doctor turned whiter than what the boy was; and gethered Frankie [illegible] in his arms; and run into his office ho[illegible]' him tight; and tears spatterin' down on the blessed child's face; and he laid Frankie down on his table; and ran round the room lookin' for things; grabbin' the wrong bottles, and asking me what the labels was—he could n't read 'em himself—you know doctors is different when it 's their own. Well, it was me that really brought

Frankie round, and the first thing he said was—and we bent down to hear what it was, and the doctor that scared I thought he 'd flop—and the first thing that Frankie said, was, 'Papa, I 'm hurt so bad this time, I think I ought to have a dollar.' "

It was one of those heirloom anecdotes, of which every family has its collection,—like Diggory's story of "the grouse in the gunnery room." The Anthon family had laughed at this story this twenty year. It was perennial, blooming afresh every time it was told, and now the three hearers received it as if it were this spring's own, laughing themselves out upon it anew.

Uncle Ned was the first to stop laughing. He felt at once that this hilarity was a poor atmosphere for his progress bottlewards. He brought the laughter to a short stop with a quiet comment.

"Whilst Ah been lookin' at dat letta on de front de house dis mawnin' Ah been thinkin' what a narrer 'scape dat po' boy had from nach'ly killin' hisseff permanent."

Mrs. Anthon felt again the terror of the thought. Hannah saw again the pale, limp child on the ground, and there was no more mirth. Women have a way of taking their tragedies anyway; those that they have escaped they suffer just the same—as if grief were a luxury they would not be cheated out of. Now Uncle Ned found the two women as terrified and mournful as if the accident had happened yesterday instead of twenty years ago, and had ended in crape instead of a family joke.

Uncle Ned despaired of the whole sex, and of his live coal. He caught up the table-leaf in a manner full of impatient

impudence, though his words were only a gruff:

"Whereat yo' want me put dis leaf?"

"Down in the cellar in the frame with the others. It stands between the vinegar barrel and the cabinet where the preserved strawberries are, and you must n't hit your head on the rafters."

"Is de raftas weak?" he grinned; then he shuffled toward the door, only to turn round again. It took him four steps to turn each way, and by that time his grin was spread over his face like molasses on a hoe-cake.

"You listen to me, and mahk my words and mahk 'em good. De nex' time you sen' me down in dat ole cella, it 'll be fo' to bring back de whole case of table-leafs."

"Why do you say that?"

"Dey's somethin' in ma bones dat

tells me somethin', an' ma bones ain't fooled me yit. Ah always believes ma bones. And ma bones tells me," he paused dramatically, and smacked his lips, because he felt that now at last he had found the way to the live coal—"ma bones tells me Miss Em'ly is gone on Yeast fo' to bring back a husban' of her own."

If Uncle Ned had dreamed that this prophecy would be received with joy, he was quickly wakened. Unbelief and anger and horror were all blended in Mrs. Anthon's indignant denial. Hannah reached for a broom.

"Get on out of here! Trying to scare Miss' Anthon to death!"

Uncle Ned was sincerely sorry. His jaw hung low, as he blinked:

"Don' yo' want Miss Em'ly ma'ied?"

"She 's only a child," Mrs. Anthon gasped.

"Well, mebbe so, mebbe so. Ah reckon Uncle Ned 'd betta hurry up an' die. He don' even know what a chile is, no mo'. Ah thought Miss Em'ly was a fine, han'some, high-steppin' young lady just a-inchin' and a-inchin' towa'ds de altar, and now Ah up and fines she 's a baby in ahms."

He began to move himself round again on the slow turntable of his feet, and his head shook as he muttered, "Well, mebbe so, mebbe so. But Ah did n' think she was any chile de way she 's went moonin' roun' sence she come back home de las' time. Good mawnin'!"

"Wait a minute. What do you mean by saying you 've seen Miss Emily mooning around? What do you mean by 'mooning,' anyway?"

"Moonin'? Aw, go on, Miss' Anth'n, you know what moonin' is as well as anybody. Moonin' is what you call when a

young lady goes roun' and stan's roun' in de broad daylight like he thought she was in de full moonlight."

"Get along with that board," Mrs. Anthon commanded bruskly.

"Yassum, Ah'm on ma way," he chuckled and wheezed. "But Ah'll be back soon," he wheezed and chuckled. "Miss Kate got ma'ied in dis house, and —well, Ah ain't callin' no names out loud, but dey's one mo' plum on de tree, an' it 's a-slippin' loose—yah, yah, whee-ee! Dey's goin' to be one mo' weddin' not fur from hyah, and Uncle Ned 'll be dressed up wit' genuwine white cotton gloves on his black old han's once ag'in fer to open de ca'ige do'."

He made his exit with a whoop, but the table-leaf caught in the casement, and seemed reluctant to leave its domicile of years on years. When the old

man had finally carried it away to exile, Mrs. Anthon nodded to Hannah. The table had been left all ajar.

The two old women closed it, and it came together across the empty space with a snap! The table was at its minimum. There were no more leaves to fall from that dead tree.

Mrs. Anthon sank into a chair. The old negro was the last person in the world to look to for a romantic prophecy, but sorry and shabby as the raven may be, his croak does not encourage cheer.

The mother-heart suddenly let go of its belief that it could keep this girl a girl; and the loss brought bleeding with it. Long ago she had hoped, in spite of all she knew of babes, that her own would somehow, by miracle, be kept at babyhood, helpless bundles of love, precious playthings. She had seen them

outgrow the haven of her bosom, the compass of her embrace, or the power of her arms to hold. They had outgrown lullabies and rocking to sleep. They had come to wash their own ears, and the backs of their own necks, to comb their own hair, to insist on bathing by themselves unaided, and to put on their own clothes. They had outgrown the empire of the home fence, and sought their play and knowledge outside the yard. They had outgrown the very town.

And now the last of them, the final babe at breast, the final doll to clothe, the final infant to teach, the final curly head to comb and soothe, had grown and changed and escaped. The mother was childless now indeed.

It seemed only a night or two ago that Emily was a little drowsy thing that knelt by her knees, and fell asleep in the

middle of her prayer—only a night or two ago. And to-day the very servant was saying that soon she would be kneeling under the overshadowing palms of a preacher, kneeling at the elbow of a grown man and a stranger who would call her and make her his own, and take her away from her home to a strange place that they would call home, a strange place where yesterday's babe would be to-morrow's mother.

Mrs. Anthon gripped the arms of her chair, and thought so hard, felt so fiercely, that she did not hear the cough racking Uncle Ned as he came up the cellar stairs. He also coughed in at the dining-room door. He had to cough again and again before she turned her dismal eyes his way.

"Cu'ious thing abote dese ole lungs of mine!" he said. "Even befo' Ah go on out in de yahd to commence ma wuk

ag'in, dem old lights o' mine re'lize how dat cold wind is goin' to smash 'em afta me standin' in dis hot room so long, and gettin' ma po's starin' wide!"

Hannah came back in the room to lay the cloth, and Mrs. Anthon simply nodded to her:

"The bottle is up in the bathroom medicine chest."

"Ah feel betta a'ready," sighed Uncle Ned, and he tried to look better without looking quite well enough to be pronounced cured. He was greatly concerned with looking unconcerned, and kept his eyes shyly on the floor, though his chops worked thirstily, and he perked one ear after Hannah's footsteps, which made a slow but dramatic diminuendo up the steps, and a thrilling crescendo down.

Uncle Ned took the glass she brought,

with a reproachful murmur: "Too bad you went so fur and fotch so little." But when she offered the pitcher, he growled: "Never po' water on a live coal. It spiles de coal, and leaves on'y de smoke."

He raised the glass with a courtly gesture, and gave Mrs. Anthon a silent toast for benediction. His huge lips smacked and his left hand followed the course of the gulp. He felt and locked as if he had swallowed a small comet. The tears sprang out of his eyes, and he gasped with exquisite anguish. Then he grinned and said:

"Thank you ve'y kinely, Miss' Anth'n. Dat little live coal done staht sech a blaze Ah'm goin' out an' nach'ly bu'n up dat yahd."

He made his turn, and went out, circumventing his own feet. For several

minutes he almost worked, before the reverie in which he lived enveloped him again.

Mrs. Anthon had hardly seen or heard him. She sat musing upon her loneliness, not heeding the slow errands of Hannah to and fro, till finally the abridged table was clothed and set.

Doctor Anthon found his wife still there when he came home. He popped a kiss on her tired brow, and said with a professional sick-room cheer that disguised his own personal fatigues and regrets:

"Well, Mother, I saw the little girl off on the train. She sent you a million kisses, and waved good-by till the train started across the river. Why, what 's happened to the dining-room? It looks so much bigger."

"The table is smaller."

"Oh!"

He understood, and they took their places at the dual festival that now confronted them for some indefinite time. He wanted to comfort his wife, but he had no source of comfort to draw from.

He was picturing the dining-room as it had been from the first high-chair that wedged between them to the growing colony of chairs, some high, some low, and usually one chair with a big dictionary upon it for a middling child. For years it had seemed that the table was bigger than the room; the children were perched almost on the window sills and against the stove. When the Doctor was alled to the telephone, as he usually was at meal-time, he could barely squeeze between the sierra of chair-backs and the wall. And the time he had had feeding that mob! The amount of provender they could whisk from view! The innocent greed, the

boisterous war of silver and china, the chatter and laughter; the appalling bills they meant at butcher's and baker's, grocer's and shoemaker's!

And now the small table, the tablecloth immaculate of gravy-splash and jelly-blotch, the frugal meals, the soft conversation of the lonely old captain and mate on a deserted and drifting ship, without cargo, crew or destination —now and evermore.

He felt all that his wife felt, but in a man's way, and with a man's necessity for looking bold in all adversities. The dreary meal was nearly done before he could muster the words and the spirit to say:

"We must n't sit here and mope like this, Mother. We 're back where we started,—just you and me. We have each other, and the children are all good children, and they 'll be piling home any

day, and Emily at least will be with us a long while yet. That was the last thing she said as the train pulled out: 'Tell mama,' she shouted, 'tell mama, I 'll be home just as soon as ever I can.' "

Mrs. Anthon met his smile with another, but there was more bravery than hope in those two old smiles.

II

WHILE these white polls were drawing such deep significances from the business of reducing a piece of furniture by the width of one plank, the young girl, the recentest deserter from the family, was making magic carpet adventure and Arabian enchantment out of the taking of one of the regular trains for New York.

Emily was running East with all the speed an express could lend her. Even that was not enough for her impatience, for she sat with one warm cheek chilling on the window as she tried to send her eyes ahead like scouts to bring in yet earlier tidings of Canaan.

Her eyes were still wet with the tears

she had shed in leaving her father and mother, but the tears had been less those of regret at the parting than tears of tender affection and of pity for the tears oozing from their brave old eyes. Hers were the sweet April sprinkle of sympathy and affection; theirs were the acrid drops of age relinquishing yet one more dear thing—the very eye-sweat of agony.

The young girl's heart was as good as any young heart, and it ached for the old hearts; but it had its own needs and duties. It called itself selfish and granted itself absolution; for everybody believes in expiation by nomination.

Emily was going East to visit her married sister, and so her clearance papers read. If she smuggled a little undeclared romance out of harbor, and carried Cupid as a stowaway more or less connived at—well, youth has a right

to a few secrets. Heaven knows how many old age acquires, and has thrust upon it.

This train made its usual stops at the usual matter-of-fact cities, but to Emily their names were nothing more prosaic than Verona, Ispahan, Damascus and Istamboul. The station at the end of Emily's time-table was entitled Eden, but the porter said, "We are just coming into New York. Shall I bresh you off?"

Her sister actually met her at the station—which is something of a feat in Manhattan. Kate had lived long enough in a great city to have acquired the habit of being always as busy as a demon, and she hoped that Emily would understand what a tribute of devotion she was paying in being on hand. It was almost the last word in hospitality, not to say agility, to find on which of the

countless tracks, on which of the levels, that one invariably late train would probably sneak in. And then Kate had to wait in the huddled humiliation of a roped-in mob.

Kate, who was something of a cynic, had noted what peculiar-looking people had rushed out to meet what peculiar-looking arrivals in the slipshod caravan disgorged from the trains, and she could not help hoping that Emily, whom she had not seen for years, would not be quite too unutterably dowdy and small-town.

She was not prepared for the vision that arrived. Emily came up the line like an allegory of spring, winsoming her way across a wintry marsh.

Kate threw her head a little higher to have one good proud look at her before she claimed her. At that moment a strange young man, who had stood at

Kate's side, tiptoeing and peering, started forward, ducked under the rope, brushed aside two or three restraining guards, and dashed through the incoming crowd. To Kate's amazement, he made straight for Emily and Emily made straight for him.

They merely shook hands, but their looks were so ardent that it would have been decenter to hug and kiss and be done with it. In the grim and bustling railroad station, mutual idolatry like theirs was so conspicuous that even the red-capped porters noted it, and rolled their billiard eyes.

Kate gasped with curiosity and vexation. When her sister came along, she could do no more than say:

"Well, Emily—"

And Emily only said:

"Why, Kitty!"

Kate kissed Emily sisterly, with a

railroad-station decorum; Emily, while she was at it, hugged Kate so hard, and kissed her so often, that Kate felt sure the salute was vicarious, and that Emily's treacherous eyes were looking past her own ear into the young man's eyes.

Kate fell in and walked alongside, and Emily had the impudent naïveté to finish what she was saying to the young man before she asked how Harry was—or even the children. At length Kate nudged her:

"You might at least introduce me."

Emily blushed six shades deeper, and was so confused that she only mumbled:

"Oh, forgive me, Stephen. I want to present you to my sister."

Kate nodded, and said:

"I am Mrs. Ambler. I presume you are Mr. ——"

"Mr. MacLeod, yes," the young man stammered, feeling now sure that Kate

had been told all about him, and approved.

He tagged along with them to the taxicab. Kate wondered if he were going to get in, but he and Emily began a serial farewell so prolonged that Kate clambered in alone to hold the cab before the indignant starter rented it to somebody else.

When the tangle of other passengers began to murmur protests, the young couple consented to adjourn their session. Mr. MacLeod boosted Emily in by the elbow, then pushed his hand on to Kate. She took it, and said, meaning to be sarcastic: "Come up and see us some time, won't you?" But he answered with the most complacent delight: "Oh, thank you! I 'd love to!"

Kate was going to give him the address, but he gave it himself to the chauffeur, and the door was slammed

upon him. For the first few minutes, Kate's indignation at Emily was knocked out of her by the appalling plunges of the taxicab. She wondered if her head would not be snapped off, and sent hurtling through the glass, and she was hoping that when it did, it would take the chauffeur's head along with it.

When the necessity of keeping her cranium on her vertebræ had passed, she turned to administer an elder-sisterly, married-sisterly reproof to the selfish young monster at her side. She found Emily simmering in utter contentment like a cozy little kettle; and Emily, again forgetting to ask how Harry was, and the children, proceeded to say, or rather to croon: "Isn't Stephen simply the handsomest, dearest thing you ever saw in all your born days?"

Kate might have achieved something

crushing, but just then the taxicab vol-planed over a glorious boulder, plounced into a pile of Belgian blocks, and slid-dered through a pool of black mush all at once. Kate was so churned and bat-tered and twisted askew that she was glad to be alive.

Then they worried into Fifth Avenue, and the going was good enough for them to get their heads and hats and hair on straight again, and settle down for a woman-to-womanly chat, both talking at once.

Somewhere in this chaos of conversa-tion Emily asked the polite questions, and was told that Harry was all right and the children all well except that one was just getting over bronchitis, the youngest was half-way through the mumps, and the second boy just coming down with vulgar fractions.

Emily asked also about brother Tom, the lawyer, and Kate answered:

"Oh, he 's well. At least, I suppose he is. Of course, I never see him. I read his name in the papers once in a while and telephone him my congratulations when he wins a big case. Then I invite him to dinner, and spend half an hour agreeing on an evening he can dine with us, and then he telephones me that he 's unexpectedly prevented, which is just what I expected.

"But he promised to come over to see you this evening, if he had to disappoint the Supreme Court. Tom 's awfully fond of you, Emily. But he thinks of you as still in short skirts, with freckles. You have n't freckles any more, have you? That 's nice. Tom will be killed, though, to hear that you 've got a love affair. So am I. Little Emily with a

love affair. Think of it! It will make us all feel terribly old. What do father and mother say about it?"

"Well, I have n't told them yet. It has n't gone quite far enough."

"Thank Heaven for that. But I suppose that some of these days you will be stepping off into space the way the rest of us did. And then how will they get along at home—those poor old souls with not a single chick left! Really, you ought to think of them, Emily."

"Well, in the first place, even if I should marry Stephen, it won't be for years and years."

"Oh, it 's one of that kind of—"

"Not at all, but you see, he has n't got very far along in the world yet."

"That 's good. I hope he starves till he 's ninety. Because really, papa and mama ought n't to be left alone out there."

"Why did n't you think of that when you got married?"

"Well, you see, the rest of us always left somebody at home. But it 's different with you, Emily. It 's more serious when the last child goes, for one child can keep a father and mother as busy as ten! You really must be very careful, Emily. And if I were you, I 'd try to marry some nice fellow in Carthage. There must be some nice fellows there in Carthage—several new families have moved in since I left. Now if you really love your poor old papa and mama, you 'll do that, Emily. And try to live next door, so that you can run in often. Or better yet, you might just go and live in the old house. There 's plenty of room since we are all away."

Kate was so delighted with the plans she was devising for the little snub-nosed, pig-tailed gawk she had bossed

about during her last years at Carthage, that she was almost dazed when she turned to Emily to see the effect of her words, and found before her a stranger, a perfect-featured, well-groomed, fashionably-gowned lady whose expression was one of smiling disdain. Worse yet was the poised self-control of Emily's quiet comment: "Since you 're arranging all the rest, Kate dear, what complexion would you prefer my husband to have? and what wall-paper would you select for our living-room?"

Kate flushed and gasped:

"Why, Emily, what a nasty temper you 've developed since I knew you!"

III

THAT night elder brother Tom came to dinner. He, too, was astounded to find that the ugly duckling he had left in the home pond was a serene white swan. Emily was astounded to find how the hard work that brings success had left grooves of hard work rather than any glow of success on Tom's strong face. He looked older than she could have imagined an own brother of hers to be.

When Kate broke the horrible news that Emily had taken on a love affair, Tom was worse shocked than she had been. His first feeling was a primitive revulsion against the brutality of any man's daring to approach this child

amorously. A glance at Emily showed him that many men were bound to approach her so. His heart swung then into the fear that Kate felt.

"Oh, Lord, the poor old folks at home are in for it now! The final solitude is ahead of them! You must n't forget, Emily, how good they 've always been to you. Even parents have some rights."

"And grown-up children have none, it seems," Emily retorted. "Well, if you all insist, I suppose I 'll have to go back to Carthage, and live and die an old maid."

"Oh, no, of course not. We don't mean that at all. But—"

"But what?"

There was no answer, and the conversation flagged. Emily was bewildered. She had come East expecting to be received with glowing welcome. And she

was received as a something wicked to be admonished and reformed.

And her love affair: she had thought of it as a gleaming altruism, a superlative surrender of herself to a young man's career and his noble desires, something sacred, a beatitude with a halo on it. And lo, in the eyes of her own brother and sister her sacrifice was looked upon as a merciless act of abnormal selfishness! She wished she had never come East. She wished she had never been born.

Kate had prepared an elaborate dinner for the guest of honor, but this Banquo of tragedy had come and taken a chair at Emily's side. The feast was as doleful as the lonely dinner in the far-off old home which Kate and Tom were picturing in their own minds. The vision embittered them toward the relentless Emily. Tom kept silence, but Kate,

when the dessert came round, was moved to a parab[illegible]

Everybody declined [illegible] as everybody always does at [illegible]an dinners. One would as soon think of eating the silver or the flowers. [illegible] took up a large and [illegible] from [illegible]li-fornia, and [illegible] to say.

"This peach [illegible] in[illegible] [illegible]ain young lad[illegible] [illegible] [illegible]pel, and sweet, [illegible] nd you find the hea[illegible] of [illegible] and dark and bitter."

She wrenched apart the mellow flesh of [illegible] h, and [illegible] stone, wrinkled an[illegible] yieldin[illegible] on her plate. [illegible]ly winced [illegible]ned pale at the [illegible]; [illegible]tty brows bowed [illegible] den pain and her wide [illegible] of sudden tears.

[illegible] of sympathy for the

girl. His hand went out to seize and squeeze her hand, and he stared tenderly at her, though his words went to the elder sister:

"We must n't forget, Kate, that without that rock inside the peach, there is no seed and no hope of future peaches. Let 's let the poor child alone. She has youth and she has beauty, and if she does n't find happiness now, when, in God's name, will she find it?"

This unexpected reënforcement touched Emily's lonesome little soul, and this middle-aged stranger was magically restored to the brother she had loved long ago. But curiously, though as usual, approval and support shook her faith in her own righteousness, when opposition and rebuke had strengthened it.

And now she was all for surrendering herself to this other martyrdom. Emily

was determined to be a martyr to somebody or something.

"No, I'll go home. I see now how heartless it would be of me to leave papa and mama. I promised them to come back and I will. I'll go home to-morrow morning."

IV

PROTESTS were vain. To-morrow morning she would go. A little later, however, she remembered that young Mr. MacLeod had arranged to call the next evening. She would be compelled to stay over one day more—but not a second day at any cost.

Mr. MacLeod came the next evening. He announced that he had bought tickets for a very important play the next evening. Emily could hardly throw those back on his hands, especially as they were expensive seats, and Mr. MacLeod had to work too hard for what little money his cruel employers begrudged him, to waste the tickets.

"Perhaps he might take some other

girl," Kate insinuated with amiable malice.

Emily ridiculed the suggestion, but she took no risks. Her father and mother would not miss her for one day more,—or, in fact, a day or two more. They would probably be displeased at her taking so long and costly a voyage for so brief a taste of the advantages of the city. They would at least want her to see the Metropolitan Art Gallery. That was educational, and Stephen had planned to take her there Sunday afternoon. He was very fond of pictures, Stephen was.

Young Mr. MacLeod had met Emily at a football game, when he was a collegian and she a collegienne. He was no special athlete, and she was not unusually bloodthirsty. They happened to be seated together in the same crowd of friends. She had come with another

fellow, and he had brought another girl; but before the first half of the game was over, he had ceased to bellow himself scarlet to the bâton of the cheer-captain, and was explaining the game in dulcet tones to Emily. During the second half, he and Emily had found so much to say to each other that they ignored the shocks of the rival buffalo lines. They did not even see the sensational sixty-five-yard run of whoever it was made the famous sixty-five-yard run which won that famous game for whichever side it was that won it.

After the game was over, in the horrible jam of the crowd, he somehow lost the young lady he brought, and Emily somehow lost the young man that brought her. So Stephen had to take charge of her; and very gallant it was of him, too—with the accent on the "lant."

The crush was so oppressive and so

rowdy that Emily came near fainting. Mr. MacLeod fought the mob back dauntlessly and with such unexpected strength that he reminded her of Leonidas or Leander or somebody at the bridge of Thermopylas, keeping back the Persians from the city of Xerxes, or something.

He got her home safely, but not very speedily. Of course, she had to invite him to call. Of course, he called.

They exchanged many letters during the rest of the year, and the temperature rose so gradually from "Dear Miss Anthon" *via* "Dear Miss Emily Anthon" to "Dearest Emily" that she hardly noticed it. He graduated and obtained a miserably unworthy and mercantile position with an importing house in New York.

Letters continued to flit back and forth like carrier pigeons through the

long summer and the long winter. Then the frenzy of spring that released all the banked fires of the earth had stirred their young hearts to unendurable desire, and Emily had manipulated the visit to Kate. And now they were met again in mating time. Other ties and other duties were like the ice walls that jailed the streams, the withes of snow that held back the tulips, the frosts that drugged the leaves in their buds.

All over the world, the same thing was going on in countless hearts. A young Chinaman drafting a constitution for a prehistoric despotism stopped in the midst of an epoch-making clause to kiss a cherry blossom that had been thrown to him. A middle-aged German general, drafting a plan of attack on Greenwich, paused to read over again a letter from his third Frau-to-be. A Norwegian scientist let slip a Nobel-

Prize-winning discovery because he was thinking of somebody when the reaction took place.

The apple trees that year were full of the same longing, the grass whispered it, herds lowed it, and birds fluted it. To each and every, it was the one new and important event of human chronicle, and began a new calendar.

By a conservative estimate, there were only as many love-affairs on earth that year as there are stars in the sky, and they were all as absolutely novel and unheard-of as an engaged couple's first full moon.

The spring that year was also wonderful beyond words. It was written expressly for Emily and Stephen, and no season like it had been seen upon this earth since the previous spring. Nothing at all could resemble its ineffable sorceries, with the possible exception of

a hundred thousand springs or more before and as many springs or more as may come after.

For one thing, the snows melted that spring, and the ice on the streams went away somewhere. The ground which winter had left as dark and hard as bronze somehow took on the most exquisite green patina, and became so soft that a number of people ran plows through it. There were numerous inconspicuous spots where small purple miracles were enacted closely resembling the violets one had bought in the shops during the winter. Apple and cherry trees were suddenly overveiled with brocaded robes that turned them into huge bouquets upheld to a smiling sky. That spring's breezes were æolian tunes whose rapturous syllables nobody could explain, nor anybody understand except any two bodies who

happened to be lovering at a window or in a meadow or a room or a park or anywhere.

That spring was so fine, so superlatively fine, that several persons tried to describe it in poetry. Every language was used, from Dyak to Basque, but no language seemed entirely satisfactory. Music was tried. An Arab cross-legged in a sea of sand endeavored to play it on a many-stringed santir, while a copper-colored Apache in Arizona squatted in the alkali and tried to tap it on a drum to the satisfaction of somebody under a blanket a little distance off. But nobody managed quite to succeed and the bliss remained excruciating.

Stephen and his Emily knew, however, that this spring was theirs alone, made for them, and they for it. They were grateful for it, and the only things

in the world they found hateful were the absence of enough money for matrimony, and the presence of too many people for solitude.

When Sunday afternoon came, Stephen MacLeod came with it. Emily told him that she had told her sister that she was leaving for home Monday—or Tuesday.

"Or Wednesday—or Thursday," Stephen said; "or next year—or not at all."

Emily giggled at this, and thought how amazing it was that the same man could be at the same time so wonderfully intelligent, so terribly handsome, and so awfully witty. They could have driven to the Metropolitan Art Gallery, but walking was such good exercise.

The park was painfully crowded. As Stephen deliciously put it: "The trouble with this park is that it is so well

named. It 's so blamed Central that everybody goes through it."

They found, however, certain fields, where they could get a few yards away from the throng. Emily said that ever since that terrible experience in the football crowd, crowds made her nervous. But usually, just as they were comfortably aloof on a plushy sward, some policeman would blow his whistle and howl to them to keep off the grass.

The whole park was a Gretna Green of bird marriages and elopements. In one of the trees, Stephen noted the beginnings of a nest. He was wonderfully observing, Stephen. And here was a very early bird already erecting his—or was it her?—home. Stephen said that if the bird were n't careful, the policeman would arrest it for working on Sunday and walking on the grass. Stephen also wondered what the bird

labor organizations would have to say about a non-union bird building his own house.

Emily and Stephen sat on the nearest bench they could find and watched the patient little squatter wattling his own hut. Stephen, who knew a lot about architecture and things, said: "That bird builds his thatched roof upside down, and forgets to put in his cellar."

He was always thinking up the quaintest things. He kept Emily in a constant seethe of admiration. Then he shot a thrill through her by solemnly musing: "I wonder how long it will be before we build our own little home, Emily."

She choked with bliss at the thought and squeezed his arm hard. It was such a hard arm, too. Stephen was wonderfully strong for such a brainy man.

They sat enchantedly watching the slow, swift work of the winged home-weaver, finding and fetching its own warp and woof, and needling it on the tree-loom with its own beak. They found in this ecstatic industry an emblem of their own ambition, a reproof of their own delay.

"With even smaller capital, and a salary littler than mine," said Stephen, "that bird is making his home ready for his bride, and when it 's ready, she won't wait a minute. They 'll set up light nestkeeping and trust to Providence. It seems sort of foolish and cowardly for us to go on postponing our happiness, making ourselves miserable for fear we 'll be miserable. What would you say if I asked you to get married now, Emilums? We could rent a little flat about as big as that nest, and I 'm sure we could pick up crumbs enough to

keep from starving. What do you say, Emilums?"

Emilums shivered with fear at the thought, but it was rather that she was afraid of the too great happiness than of the too meager fortune. They talked it over for hours, figuring the price of potatoes and paradise on the back of an envelope, and alternately resolving and recoiling. When he was eager, she was dubious; and when he had convinced her that it was feasible, he found himself in doubt.

The question was still undecided when they noticed that the bird had knocked off work and the street lamps were alight in sky and roadway. It was too late to visit the Gallery now, and they sauntered home through the beseeching twilight, all thronged up with longing and the aching need of one another's companionship.

Kate, being a resident of New York, had never been inside the Metropolitan Gallery, and she was easily duped as to the educational value of Emily's afternoon among masterpieces. Emily was delayed in leaving on Monday, and she missed Tuesday's train, and something happened Wednesday. Thursday Stephen brought great and fearful news. His firm had decided to send him abroad to learn the foreign end of their business. He was so excited that he tried to tell everything at once.

"In the first place, the firm feels that its foreign representatives must keep up appearances, so they will increase my salary. And in the second place, the cost of living is so much less abroad that two can live as cheaply as one."

Even Emily could feel that there was some flaw in this logic, but she was seized with a dread of a greater evil

than even the loneliness. All good Americans are taught that the chief industry of foreign countries is wickedness. If any evil is seen in this climate, it is manifestly imported. Fidelity is an exclusively American product that cannot stand transplanting to those noxious regions where vice reigns to the exclusion of every other activity.

Of course, Stephen was the noblest, truest, purest, stanchest, well-meaningest darling on earth, but even Stephen in Paris—well, it was simply impossible. Here was a problem, indeed. It was quite inconceivable that Emily should go home before it was settled. To return to Carthage, leaving Stephen to cross the ocean of virtue all by himself, would be sheer treachery on Emily's part; it would be like abandoning in the hour of need a soul for which she would be eternally responsible.

Those were wild days in the girl's heart. She tried to persuade Stephen to decline to go abroad; to resign rather than go abroad; to starve rather than go abroad. But he pointed out that a man must go where duty calls; a man must make sacrifices for his career; and besides, though Paris was wicked, no doubt, in spots, so was New York wicked in spots, in many spots. Then he painted a picture of unsuspected Manhattan which frightened Emily so that she felt impelled to hasten to Paris as a refuge.

Besides, as Stephen explained, a visit to Paris had educational advantages. The Louvre was bigger even than the Metropolitan Gallery, and if they saw the Louvre it would more than make up for missing the Metropolitan. And a young lady nowadays ought to be able to pronounce French correctly, and

know how to say "ongwee" and "distongay" and "ong bong pong" and things like that.

The upshot of it all was that Emily once more found herself confronting an opportunity for martyrdom with extenuating circumstances. To sacrifice All to save her affianced husband from a future of wickedness was so plainly her holy duty, that she decided to cross the Rubicon under the pleasant alias of the Seine.

She wondered how Kate would take it, so she said one day quite off-handedly:

"Oh, Kate."

"Yes, dear."

"Stephen is thinking of going to Paris. What would you think if I thought of going with him?"

"Instead of going home?"

"Ummm-humm."

"I 'd think you were crazy, and I 'd send for the Lunacy Board to come and put you in a padded cell, before you began to froth at the mouth and bit somebody. You were n't seriously thinking of any such unutterable nonsense, were you?"

"Oh, Stephen and I were talking it over the other day."

"Well, if that 's the best you and your Stephen can find to talk about, you 'd better send him about his business."

The next day Emily told Kate that she and Stephen had gone and got themselves indissolubly welded at the Little Marriage Shop around the Corner. Kate had a glorious temper, and Emily's one comfort during the storm was the realization that the ship sailed the next morning early.

She locked herself in her room to write her mother all about it. But by

the time she had written eighteen pages, she had only told half of Stephen's eminent qualifications as a husband and an adorable son-in-law, and she had not begun to break the news of their marriage and their foreign flight. And the day was so far gone that she would never be able to do the absolutely necessary shopping unless she left the letter to be finished that night.

She had intended to borrow some money from Kate, but she preferred to face Stephen with a pauper's trousseau. She slipped out the back way and spent all of her funds and nearly all her strength, trying to accomplish the impossible. She bought so many exquisite filmy things that she quite forgot to provide herself with heavy cloaks and rugs for Atlantic rigors.

She devoted the remainder of the evening to packing and barely got

aboard with the gangway. She had managed to send a long telegram to her mother, telling her how necessary the step was and how infinitely happy she should be.

The pink thunderbolt prostrated Mrs. Anthon. She pursued her husband all over town by telephone and finally brought him home from a patient in a crisis. When she told him the baleful news, he was stunned, but his sick-room manner had become instinctive with him and he patted his sobbing wife on the back as he mumbled:

"There, there, honey! After all, she 's not dead, is she? I guess the young man is a nice young fellow and he 'll probably be good to her and make her happy. And if he does n't, she can always come home."

"That 's it," Mrs. Anthon wailed.

"They can always come home. That 's why they never come home."

She cried all night, and the next day she was a worn-out old woman. This ultimate blast of storm left her as the autumnal tree is left when some windy night strips it of its final splendors and leaves it bleak and bare.

PART II
BUSY PEOPLE

I

THE same old ocean with the same old waves, infinitely varied in infinite monotony. The same old honeymoon of the same old bridal couple daubed with the same old thick coat of bliss like fresh paint. The same old ridiculous rapture, the same ostrich-like efforts to conceal the utter happiness that everybody made fun of and ought to have envied.

That was the beginning of the nest-building of Mrs. Emily Anthon MacLeod, who jumped whenever she heard her new name, and had never seen how it looked even on a visiting card. Of course the hateful old passenger list had to go and get it all wrong: "Mr. S.

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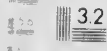
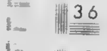

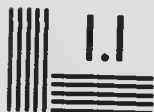

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MacLuders, Mrs. MacLuders." And it looked a trifle tame next to "Prince Marczali and valet, Princess Marczali and two maids."

The princess was an American girl, too, and she had accomplished the ambition of every ambitious American girl, but when Emily got a look at the prince and took a look at Stephen, she decided that she would not swap husbands with the princess for all the valets and maids in the world as a bonus.

Most of the passengers found the voyage stupidly uneventful, but Stephen and Emily found it incessantly exciting. It was the first trip abroad for both of them, and it was the first wedding journey for both of them. Getting really acquainted was so important that Emily kept postponing the completion of that long, long letter to her mother.

She had brought it with her, in order to write it at her oceanic leisure, but day followed day in the dateless transatlantic fashion, until land was sighted and the writing-rooms were suddenly crowded with eager writers. The boat that brought on the pilot would take off the mail.

Emily had barely time to scribble a hasty note to her mother, promising a real letter as soon as she was safely on land. Stephen's mother and father were both long since dead and he had never seen Emily's parents. The famished keenness of their longing for news never occurred to him. Unconsciously he abetted Emily's unwitting cruelty.

Part of Kate's bitterness had been due to an instinctive foreknowledge that if Emily married, Kate would be left to break the news to the family and invent

elaborate explanations to zealously inquiring friends, while Emily blithely put off till the morrow all that she should have done yesterday.

Mrs. Anthon was just recuperating from Emily's telegram, when Kate's letter came to confirm the evil tidings. There followed the age-long period of the voyage across, the age-long period of the letter's return. And at that she received only a hastily jotted series of rapturous exclamations—a letter made up chiefly of underlining and exclamation points with an allusion to the beautiful home she and Stephen were planning.

The new use of the old word was an unexpected arrow in the mother's heart. "She is planning a home with him!" she brooded. "She has forgotten that she has left a home here. A new home! A new home!"

After this her heart was so benumbed and so acquainted with neglect that she did not resent the pitiful substitutes for letters that followed, the outrageous ready-made postal cards with photographs of scenes, and just room enough to crowd in a line, or a hasty and usually anonymous phrase: "Is n't this lovely! Love from both." "Here is where we dined to-night." "Wish you were with us. Love." "Is n't this quaint? We are lunching on the sidewalk! Love."

Emily was so hurried with the myriad novelties of her first Paris, that several days passed before she remembered that she had a brother there. Then she found that she had forgotten to bring his address. She must write for it in the next letter. All she recalled was that it was *roo* "the 15th of September" or the "31st of February" or some date.

Days passed, weeks passed. One Sunday afternoon she and Stephen visited the Luxembourg. They were moving along with elbows interlocked, poring over the catalogue a long while, and then glancing briefly at a picture or a statue. They liked best the paintings with a dramatic emotion or a story, pictures with a libretto. They had turned away contemptuously from an epoch-making attempt to translate the translucence of sunlight into opaque pigment, when Emily's nails nipped Stephen's elbow, and she whispered: "Look! I do believe that 's my brother Frank."

They walked round the stranger as if he were a statue, while he was studying the Monet as if it were a religious text. A certain eccentricity of garb and a quaint Parisian experiment in whiskers on his chin only partly dis-

guised the Americanism of him. The Anthon features were evident, and Emily, tiptoeing up behind him, murmured over his shoulder: "Bawn joor, Franswa."

The man turned, stared at her puzzledly a moment, recognized at once that she was beautiful and gradually that she was his sister, and promptly wrapped his arms about her with a smack that frightened two guardians into thinking that the Mona Lisa thief had broken into the Luxembourg. They recognized that it was simply a matter of some artist saluting a living masterpiece, and tapping their noses with their forefingers returned to their own business.

It was Frank's turn to be struck by one of the pink thunderbolts Emily usually wielded.

"Emily!" he cried. "Well, what on

earth—you in Paris? Is mother with you? How is she? What you doing here? How well you 're looking. I 'm proud to own you."

"Oh, but you don't own me any more." And she introduced her proprietor. The men shook hands with that shyness savages feel,—that delicacy which leads many not-so-barbaric tribes to make it a rule for relations-in-law never to address or look at one another.

Emily began a glib epic of her adventures and the three strolled blindly past master-works, talking of Emily's marvelous fate. Frank checked them before Whistler's portrait of his mother.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

"Such a dear old lady!" said Emily.

"Do you know I rather like it," said Stephen, as if his opinion mattered. "It is n't good art, of course, because

it 's so very simple and it is n't fussy at all. I bet he finished it in one sitting."

"As a matter of fact, he painted it out a hundred times," said Frank.

"How tired his poor mother must have grown," said Emily. "It seems rather cruel to have kept the poor old lady up."

"Cruel?" Frank exclaimed, "to make an immortal portrait of your mother! Do you suppose she was n't blissfully happy and proud to think her son cared to devote his best art and his tireless labor to showing the rest of the world just how she looked, his mother? If I could only paint our mother, and spread on canvas her poor, tired, sweet face and her blessed folded hands and the tender mood of her soul,—I would n't ask any more."

"Why don't you try?" Emily suggested brilliantly.

"I 've tried numberless times, but I can't come anywhere near a likeness. There 's no photograph of her taken for the last fifteen or twenty years. She was always camera-shy. And I can't seem to get anything like a resemblance."

"I should think a man could hardly help that," said Stephen.

"If you were a painter, you 'd understand," said Frank. "You 'd recognize your own mother at a glance among a million women, would n't you?"

"Among all the other angels in heaven," Stephen murmured.

"Describe her features to me," Frank challenged.

"Well, she was a wonderfully sweet little woman with gray hair and a wonderfully tender voice."

"We can't paint the voice. Describe her features."

"Well, her face was n't exactly beautiful any more, and yet it was—very beautiful. She had er—her eyes were —er—"

"Yes, her eyes were—"

"Well, they were dark."

"Black?"

"No, not exactly black."

"Brown?"

"Well, I should n't exactly call them brown either."

"Blue?"

"No, not blue—exactly. No, not blue at all, yet something on the blue order with a suggestion of deep brown and—well, I can't say exactly."

"And her nose?"

"Her nose was—was—how can I describe a nose exactly?"

"I 've got to paint it exactly. Was it large or small?"

"Neither."

"Aquiline, Grecian, thick, thin, long, short?"

"I give up. I can see her perfectly till you tell me to describe her, then she sort of—er—vanishes. It 's a shameful thing to confess, but—"

"Every man is like that. And I 'm like that when I try to paint my mother. I 've a great longing to save that blessed face from oblivion, but I 'll never be able to till I see her."

"Oh, how glorious!" said Emily. "Do go home and visit her this minute."

"I can't quite do that. It takes so long, and I have a big mural painting I 've contracted to finish, and—oh, it 's quite impossible for me to leave. But if mother could come over here—"

"Splendid!" cried Emily. "We 'll just make her come! She 's never been abroad, and the ocean trip would do her worlds of good, and she 'd simply dote

on Paris. I 'll write her and tell her she just must come this very minute."

The upshot of this parley was that Mrs. Anthon received a letter with a French stamp, the first letter from her son in what seemed a whole forever. Along with it came a gurglingly happy letter from the runaway child, urging her mother to put on her bonnet and her mits, and her father to pick up his silk hat and his medicine bag, and step right over to see them in their new home; they really must not postpone learning the unequaled charms and beauties of Paris and Stephen, especially Stephen.

The old couple read the two letters and stared at each other in stupor, and each said: "You'd better go. I can't."

The doctor shook his head with finality. He had come to feel that if he left

Carthage for a day, the whole town would perish in helpless agony. It was manifestly impossible that he should ever have a vacation till his last one. The thought of being left alone by his wife for a protracted period appalled him, but he tried to look overjoyed and he insisted that of all things on earth what he most wanted was a portrait of his wife. To have it painted by their famous son was beyond his dreams.

But Mrs. Anthon declined to be lured.

"Me leave you here all by yourself for Goodness knows how long!" she sniffed. "Me ride all that ways on a train and spend a week alone on a wabbly boat and then go trapesing round amongst a lot of foreigners! Why, I can hardly go down town and do my marketing in Carthage without getting run over by a delivery wagon. Can you see me in France? I 'd be sick and get

lost and never be heard of again. May-be that 's what you 're working for."

"It 's your portrait I want."

"My portrait! Do you suppose I want anybody ever to know what I look like? I quit having my pictures taken ages ago. Don't imagine I 'm going to cross the sea to have one done now—and in colors, too! And the very idea of that dear child Frank wasting his time and his genius trying to paint a homely old crone like me, when he could be painting something pretty. I 'm too weak and old even to pack up my things. I 'd never get there. I 'm weak and afraid. I 'm a tired-out old woman,—and besides, I have nothing to wear."

This last sounded familiar to the doctor. "Good Lord!" he growled. "Nothing to wear! I bet that when Judgment Day comes round, and Gabriel blows his horn, you 'll reach over

into my grave and wake me up and say, 'Time to get up, Paw; you 're wanted'; and I 'll jump up and reach for my trousers and medicine case, and you 'll say, 'No, this time you 're wanted in Heaven'; and I 'll say, 'Well, come along'; and you 'll say, 'Merciful Goodness, I can't be seen by all those angels in these old clothes. I can't go to Heaven, I have nothing to wear.' "

They talked the matter over, each urging the other to the luxury of a foreign trip, and each dreading the idea of travel as much as a deep-rooted tree would fear it. At the last the doctor growled: "If any visiting is done, I guess it 's the children's place to take the trip. If they walked home, it would n't be as far as you 've walked, carrying them in your arms and running on their errands. I guess you 're

right, Mother. Here we are, and here we 'd better stay, until—"

But there was no need of mentioning by name the great, the dark Until.

II

THE summer brooded over Carthage long and heavily. The sky was like the lid of a chafing-dish, the earth like the pan thereof, and people simmered between in their own fat.

"The climate of Carthage," the doctor used to say, "averages up to just about perfect. It 's the coldest place under Heaven in winter, and in the summer it 's the hottest place this side of—the Other Place."

Mrs. Anthon somehow gasped through the stinging days and the suffocating nights. Then autumn came, with its savory, fruitful airs, its first frost, and its repentant Indian summer. But

there is no Indian summer for weary old mothers, and the incessant lapse of leaves too weak to cling to the branches filled her with a deep dread.

Then the winter fell upon the town and froze it till it rang, and having chilled it through and through, kept it close muffled in snow.

No child came home; rarely did one write, and then briefly. What notes were sent breathed affection and devotion, but they were poor substitutes for the visible, tangible, kissable, talkable children, of whom she possessed now only the photographs staring from wall and mantel. They might as well have been relics of dead children.

She devoted much toil and all her money to Christmas presents. She remembered all of the children, though she had little cash to spare. She made

many presents with her own hands, and had learned well what would please each of them.

Their presents to her were spasmodic, usually late in arriving, and always accompanied with apologies for being a trifle homely. Other people required such pretentious gifts. Mothers must take the will for the donation.

Shortly after the New Year had erected one more milestone on the downward slope, there was a mighty flurry in the house. One of the children actually announced a visit. It was Jim.

Now Jim was Dr. Anthon's inconsolable grief. He had chosen to be a physician, and the old doctor's heart had rejoiced to think that he should be able to take into partnership with him one of his own sons, a close-kinned soul whom he could train to the needs and whims of staple patients of lifelong

standing, a son to whom he could whisper the pitiful and dreadful secrets a physician acquires.

The doctor had cheerfully encouraged Jim to spend years and years and years acquiring his education, in the knowledge that when the boy was ready, he could settle down at home, live with the family, and enter at once into a practice that would save him from the preliminary starvation-plus-idleness test of a young doctor's nerves. But American children do not often accept their father's harness, nor willingly occupy adjoining stalls. James Anthon, M.D., just returned from Vienna, found Carthage a world he disdained to conquer. He moved out to Denver, and permitted his father to support him through a prolonged starvation period there. And then, as usual, when patients began to ring his bell intentionally, and he had

begun to take in enough to have begun to pay back what he had borrowed, he fell a victim to an epidemic to which even doctors are not immune.

He sent home her photograph instead of an instalment on account, and eloquently explained that, having taken unto himself a wife, he must really borrow a little more. And now the doctor had an added absentee to support. How they ever manage it, these small-town parents maintaining expensive offspring in remote cities, is akin to the miracle of the loaves and fishes.

But Jim prospered. Now and then he sent home a little money, oftener a large promise, and the old doctor got what joy he could out of both. That old doctor could have found a little sunlight in a third subcellar on a winter midnight. Jim became a specialist—none of your all-round family upholsterers

like his father. He devoted his life to the ear exclusively, and he wrote his father that if he had been able to confine himself to the right ear or the left, instead of having to generalize on both, he might really have accomplished something.

It was this Jim that telegraphed. this extraordinarily famous aurist, whose name was ringing in all deaf people's ears. Jim sent word that he was coming home. It was not to stay, not even for a visit, but for a stop-off. A big convention of all the aural aurochs in the world was to be held in Chicago to look into the ears of the nation. Jim was to read a paper on a minute subsection of one of the premonitory symptoms of titinnitus aurum, or bells in the belfry. On his way to Chicago, he purposed to drop off the train, and spend a day or three in his dear old home. His

wife and children would not be able to come with him, he said, as the children all had the earache.

Two or three days' visit after six or eight years' absence was a small payment on the debt he owed, but if he had shot by on an aëroplane, his mother would have taken it as a blessed tribute of affection.

She sent for the old darky, and rattled the telegram before him.

"You 're a prophet, Uncle Ned. You 're a prophet. Go get that table-leaf up from the cellar at once."

Uncle Ned shouted and wheezed with pride, and circumambulated his way to and from the cellar, helped pull the groaning table apart, and restore the leaf to its ancient resting-place.

Mrs. Anthon would not tell him who was coming, except that it was not Miss Emily, nor Miss Kate, nor Master

Frankie, nor Master Tommy. As that left only Master Jamie, he guessed Jamie; but she refused to tell him. He must wait and see.

The day of the visit came. The table was bedecked, Jim's chair brought in from the Siberia of the attic, and the best dinner Hannah could spoil was ordered. But no Jim. The next day no Jim. The next day a telegram. He had been detained by important consultations so late that he had barely time to make Chicago. He had arranged to pay his visit on his way back. Nothing should prevent him. The leaf remained in the table on probation.

Mrs. Anthon heard Uncle Ned muttering to Hannah that his bones told him something. He would not say what it was, but he believed in his bones, be-because his bones had never fooled him yet.

The Anthons searched the Chicago journals, and they found a brief allusion to the fact that among other papers read at the convention were those of Doctors Braley, Wetmore, Author, Sergeant, Tenniel, etc. Their wonderful son was evidently the man in the typographical disguise. The injustice and inaccuracy of the press was loudly denounced in at least one home that week.

Two days passed, and Jim failed to appear. Then a telegram came. This also was from Denver and from Jim. But Mrs. Anthon did not rattle it before Uncle Ned. If there was any rattle, it was a dry something in her heart. Jim had been called back to Denver by a vitally important consultation, and had had to leave the convention immediately after reading his paper, which had been received with dignified silence, showing

what a profound impression it had produced.

Mrs. Anthon sent for Uncle Ned, and with Hannah's aid they wrenched the table ajar again, took away the leaf, and closed the boards like a coffin. Uncle Ned's feet clumped down the cellar stairs with the leaf bumping after.

And Mrs. Anthon looked bewilderedly about the dining-room, and made a sudden hurried rush to the stairs. She hobbled up them slowly, shaking her head, while Hannah, clinging to the banister-post, kept calling up after her:

"You must n't cry like that, Miss' Anthon. Shan't I make you some nice tea?"

III

BETWEEN Tom Anthon, tilting perilously backward in his swivel-chair, and the client, explaining eagerly forward across the leaf of the desk, an office boy interpolated a sheaf of letters.

The lawyer riffled them carelessly. They were all typewritten and had all been opened by a secretary except one in an unofficial envelope, addressed in an unmasculine hand and marked "Personal." This letter halted the lawyer's eyes an instant and his frown of intense attention was mellowed by a hint of lenity.

Neither the sex of the handwriting nor its effect on the lawyer escaped the client, whose very gesture had been

frozen in midair by the arrival of the letters. He ventured a careless impertinence.

"A letter from a lady!" He said it as one might murmur, "Aha!"

The lawyer flicked him with a glance like the snap of a whip; then, as a gentler rebuke, he held out the envelope for inspection. The client realized a certain dignity in the writing and stammered:

"An old-fashioned hand, is n't it? Nice old lady client, eh?"

"My mother."

The soft, soft word seemed an evocation; and the spirit of the room was changed instantly, as if a venerable woman had entered it by mistake. The client felt almost an impulse to rise and bow. He contented himself with:

"Lucky man, to be getting letters

from your mother at your age! Mine died when I was a child."

The lawyer pressed his advantage with a youthful brag:

"My father is living, too."

The client's shaken head implied both elegy and envy.

"No wonder they call you 'Lucky Anthon.' You must take great comfort in them."

The lawyer flushed like a witness under a fire of cross-examination.

"I ought to. I do, of course. But I 'm so infernally busy protecting you malefactors of great wealth that I—well, you see, they live so far away. They don't like New York. They hate to travel. Father 's a doctor—he 's afraid to leave his patients for five minutes. I have n't had time to get back home for years. About all I do is to send them presents on Christmases and

on their birthdays—when I don't forget. When is my mother's next birthday? I must look it up."

He jotted a query on the slant of his calendar and put the letter in his pocket, patting it first as if it were her hand. Then he resumed his office face and voice: "As you were saying—"

The client forgot his own business for the luxury of reproach:

"A memorandum to look up your mother's birthday! You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I am."

"Why, if either of my parents were living—"

"Oh, no, you would n't. You think you would, but you would n't. My letters home begin with apologies for neglect and end with vows to reform; but this deadly grind, this eternal scramble—"

The telephone bell broke in: "Long-distance wants you." Lucky Anthon had a brief chat with another lawyer seated in a swivel-chair a thousand miles away. He bade the astral visitor hold the wire, while he took up a second telephone on his desk and pursued a New York client all over town until he brought him to earth at an automobile road-inn, forty miles off. A hurried consultation in telephonese with this man; a bit of triangular converse from mouthpiece to mouthpiece, and Anthon had arranged a journey to Boston on "the midnight."

Then he turned to the client at his desk side and resumed the discussion of an abstruse problem in higher legal strategy, incessantly interrupted by the nagging telephone, by telegrams, pardon-begging clerks, excuse-me-one-moment partners, stenographers summoned

to take dictations, bookkeepers to look up figures, and what-not, whom-not.

Tom Anthon's brain had subdivided itself into a syndicate of workers and his mind was like a telephone exchange. In such a maelstrom how could his mother's letter fail to be swept out of his mind?

When he left for the afternoon it was to dash to a conference; when he rode uptown it was in the limousine office of a railroad juggler. His dinner at the club was a mere automatic process while his mind was busy matching wits with one of the lawyers of one of his multitudinous adversaries. He had planned to go to the theater or the opera for relaxation, but he was shunted on toward midnight by a dozen matters and people that could not wait.

He just made the train and crawling into his berth declared his office hours

ended. He shut his brain to thought as if his skull were a roll-top desk and he were pulling down and locking his forehead. This was his salvation—that he could usually adjourn his mental congress when he reached his bed—usually, but not always.

The next morning he thought of his mother's letter as he filled his eyes with soap in the primeval conditions of the sleeping-car's washroom. At breakfast he thought of it again. He could not find it in his pocket. He remembered that he had hastily changed suits before he took the train. He resolved to read it as soon as he got back. He made a memorandum to that effect—and blushed at the necessity; but the memorandum, as timid and meek as the letter i[illegible] or its author, seemed unab[illegible] as[illegible] its rights. There was need of a m[illegible]oran-dum to recall the memorandum.

Anthon thought of the letter in courtrooms, at board meetings and in flying taxicabs. It floated through his mind at the oddest moments; but it always came inopportunely and was frightened away.

A week had passed before he put on the same coat again. He found the letter by chance in the pocket where it had lain in cold storage. He apologized to it and caressed it again. As a final atonement he gave it precedence over the morning papers. He propped it against the news-sheet propped against the water bottle and he kept his eyes on it. Though the headlines above it brandished black flags of battle, murder and court decisions, he kept his eyes on the thin little scrawling lines crisscrossing the paper. The writing was shaky and so frail that the very ink seemed gray.

"My darling boy," it began, and he

looked past it into a mirror—which answered with a mirror's repartee. His mother's darling boy had been a man for years and years, had been married and widowered. Other marriages had orphaned him of his children and his hair was sketched with gray lines.

He tried to recall the fat-cheeked, curl-scrolled face that had once pouted back at him from looking-glasses; but this long-distance telescopy was too much for him. He remembered how that remote self had depended on the writer of this letter—depended on her utterly for everything, from buttoning up of mornings to tucking in of nights. And now he was here, a scarred gladiator in the arena. He had traveled far, changed much.

IV

HE felt the swift wing-brush of a wish to run home and climb into his mother's lap. The very thought ridiculed itself to death. The picture of his huge, lank figure sprawled across the knees of the dismayed and venerable little woman who was his mother made an intolerable grotesque.

But the letter—a long one for her:

My Darling Boy:

Now that I am able to sit up again, I am writing to you first off. I do hope you have n't worried and fretted over me these past four weeks. I had been feeling right poorly for some time and then one morning I could n't get up. I told your father and he was all upset. You know he never would treat any of his own family. He looked right worried and called for Doctor Pusey to come over. Doctor Pusey said I should stay in bed and

take care of myself or I 'd be down sick. It 's a good thing I did, for I might have been real sick. I was in bed for a month as it was, scarcely able to lift my head and suffering considerable pain.

I thought I 'd best not write you children, because it would just worry you and you all have so many things to worry you without fretting yourself over my ailments. I was real sick, though, and your father was going to telegraph to Chicago for some of the big doctors; but I would n't let him. He was right rundown himself, what with sitting up nights with me, and an epidemic of measles in the public school.

Anthon's face was a craven plea of guilty. His mother had been ill, perhaps near death. She had lain abed for a month without a line from him. Yet it was she that apologized for not having written! Anthon cursed himself for an ingrate and read on:

A day or two ago I took a turn for the better. I 'm just about what you 'd call well now. Yesterday I was able to sit up in my rocker for quite a spell and it did n't tire me much. And to-day I 'm so much better I had Hannah bring me some note-

paper and set the ink bottle on the sewing machine close by, and get me a book to write on. And what book do you suppose she brought me? It was your old geography, honey. I've been looking through it; and your name is written in the front as bold as a lion's and you'd marked the book all up, lining the pictures round with a lead pencil and coloring some of them with crayons. I used to think you would be the artist when you grew up, instead of Frankie. Have you heard anything from him or Emily and how they're getting along in Paris. The poor things are so busy I can't expect them to write. But I'd like to know if they're well. Emily is so careless about wrapping up. Is Kate well? Do you ever see her?

But I was starting to write you about your geography book. It's just like me to wander. I remember how proud I was of you—almost as proud as I am now of the famous lawyer that folks tell me is my son!

Seems like it was only yesterday you were bringing the book to me to pronounce the hard words. You used to follow me all over the house or call to me from upstairs: "Mama! say, mama, what's the pronounsation of"—whatever it was.

While I looked over the pages and saw the terrible words they gave you poor little chicks to memorize, I gave a kind of jump. I thought I heard you calling me—as you did once: "Say,

mama, what 's the kreek pronounsation of B-e-l-u-c-h-i-s-t-a-n?" And when I told you, you said: "Who was Bellew and why did he kiss her?" I could hear it just as plain as if you had been right by; and I listened to hear your little feet on the stairs, or to hear the banister whistle as you came sliding down to show me the word.

And then I lost sight of the book and all, and a couple of tears came spattering down on the geography. I 've been right poorly, you know, and kind of weak still; and my eyes always had a sort of trick of tearing up when I think of you children.

I thought, instead of sitting here making a baby of myself over my boy's old schoolbooks, I 'd best be writing you a few lines to keep you from worrying about me. You really must n't think anything of my being sick, for I 'll be able to go down to breakfast most likely to-morrow, or to dinner, the doctor says; so you can see I 'm all right.

It 's nice to be able to sit here in the bay window and look out in the yard where you children used to romp. It 's terrible quiet now, specially with the snow still lingering on in spots; but I guess it won't be much longer. Your father says he thinks the winter's back is about broke by now. Soon the spring thaws will set in and the trees will be budding out; and before long the birds will be settled down once more. It 's nearly a year, and it seems ten now since Emily went to New York and never

came home. Poor child, I wonder if her husband is still good to her and if the spring is nice in Paris like it is here.

How you children used to love the first sight of spring, and how you used to come stampeding in, all covered with mud and yelling like Comantchies —or however you spell it; anyway, you 'd sing out, "How long before dinner 's ready? I 'm hungry!" One after another you 'd storm in and houl, "I 'm hungry!" and then one after another you grew up and went away; and now it 's my turn to be hungry—hungry for my children; hungry all the time!

About the only thing I can do nowadays is just to sit round and remember. Of course I 'm awfully proud of every one of my chicks and so grateful for your success, but it 's a terrible thing to have you all so far away. This old house used to be so crowded and so noisy I had to hold my head to keep it from splitting; and now the house is so empty and so silent I have to hold my heart to keep it from breaking open.

Sometimes the house seems haunted—all full of ghosts, little ghosts, calling to me. Sometimes at night I sit up in bed, thinking I hear one of you calling—and before I 'm awake I answer, "Yes, honey," and the room is full of light. And then I 'm awake—and there 's no child—and it 's all dark.

Last night I heard you scream in pain—you were so frightened, and you were being chased by a big

frothy-mouthed dog and I was running to help you. I reached you and took you in my arms and put you behind me. I was going to grab the dog and hold him till you got away. Then I woke up—and it was the whistle of that train that goes through here at four o'clock every morning.

I was trembling so I could hardly make myself believe that I was in bed and that you were a grown-up man two thousand miles away. I was glad it was a dream; and yet I was sorry, too, for after all I had held Little Boy You in my arms—and they were aching empty for you.

Of course I don't believe in dreams, unless it is that they go by contraries. Still, I hope you have n't been in any trouble—have you? Let me know—won't you? Dreams are so real. And I always know that after that train whistles there 's a whole black hour before daybreak. In the winter it 's longer yet and so cold and white when the day comes.

My mind is really cheerfuller than this letter sounds. Mostly I remember the pleasant things about your childhood in this old house. And it 's funny how often I hear you shout, "Mama, what 's the kreek pronounsation of B-e-l-u-c-h-i-s-t-a-n?" You howled every letter down the stairway and I called back the right way to say it; and you said: "Who was Bellew and why did he kiss her?"

I remember I told your father about it when he came home that day; and he laughed till the neighbors must have thought he had a fit. And I couldn't tell you how often we've told each other that story—that one and the one about Frank saying he was hurt so bad he ought to have a dollar. We always laugh; and then we say: "Those were mighty smart children of ours. Too bad they had to grow up!"

Back of all this pen-prattle, Lucky Anthon felt grim tragedy. To him his mother was such a figure as King Lear deserted by his children.

And the vision of the wild old monarch on the cliff roaring at fate through his wind-blown beard was no more epic to him than the mirage of the lorn little mother in her rocking-chair, just sitting round and remembering her far-off grownups back into babyhood.

Anthon did not for a moment realize how common, how innumerably ancient, how inevitably future a type it is—this

mother left at home by the brood issued from her loins and no longer needful of her breasts.

All over the world, all across history, the finished veterans can be found—the deserted mothers, lonelying for their children upon their laps again. But Anthon did not think of this starry multitude; he thought only of his own one; and his whole soul yearned and repented within him.

He read the rest of the letter through a mist. It was full of little gossips and of tender inquiries as to his health, warnings not to work too hard, to be conservative in the matter of underwear and to take good care of his precious self.

And throbbing between the lines was the craving for a word of greeting or a crumb of news from him or Kate or any of her children.

There was a postscript, of course—written in the space she had left blank at th top of the first page:

> I wish you could come home sometime. Your father and I would be awful glad to see you. But, of course, you 're so busy with important things. Anyway, you children must n't worry about us; we 're all right.

That was all—a meek little sigh of perennial resignation, and no more; but it resounded through Anthon's heart like a wail of despair. He loathed himself for a traitor to the fundamental duties of life. What on earth was important compared with a mother's right to keep the children she had borne and sheltered? Or, at least, to see them now and again?

V

WITH a sort of ferocity, Anthon thrust away from the table, left his breakfast unfinished and strode to the telephone, called up his sister and vented on her the wrath he felt for himself.

"That you, Kate? Say! When did you write mother last?"

"I don't remember, Tom. It was a good while ago. Why?"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I am; but, you see, the children have been ill."

"So has mother."

"She has? Oh, Tom, that 's terrible! How is she now?"

"She 's better, she says; but you can't

believe her at all when she writes about her own ills."

"I know; and she 's not so young as she used to be."

"She 's still having birthdays, I suppose; when 's her next one?"

"The—let me see; the sixth, I think."

"No!"

"Yes, that 's it; the sixth. When is the sixth?"

"Day before yesterday!"

"Oh, good heavens! So it was. Is n't that terrible?"

"It 's outrageous. Too late even to telegraph her. Say, Kate, why don't you run out and visit her?"

"I can't leave the children. Why don't you go, Tom?"

"I 'm so infernally busy. That Pycroft case is coming up any day. Why does n't Jim ever go home? He lives out that way."

"Yes; but he always says he can't leave his patients. And his wife does n't get along very well with her mother-in-law, you know."

"I won't have my mother called a mother-in-law. Besides, Jim's wife is a —well, you know what she is."

"I know—I never could understand Jim's liking her."

"It 's a burning shame, Kate. Here we are, a big family, all alive—none of us in jail or the poorhouse: and mother and father have to stick out there alone, year in and year out."

"What can we do? Dad won't leave his patients. Mother won't leave him."

"Well, I 'm going to reform. As soon as I get this Pycroft suit off my hands I 'm going out there."

"You 've been saying that for ten years, Tom."

"I mean it this time."

"You 've been saying that for ten years, too."

"Well, can't we do something about her birthday, at least?"

"You might telegraph her we just found that the presents had n't been sent."

"That 's a good idea."

"I 'll blame it on— Hold the wire till I close the door. Hello! I started to tell you a good scheme—I 'll blame it on Martha. I 'll say that I gave her the presents to express and she forgot."

"Fine!"

"You get what you want to buy for mother and send it up here, and I 'll see that it is shipped at once."

"Can't you buy me something to send? I never know what mother wants."

"But, Tom, I can't get downtown in this storm."

"You 've got to, Kate. Mother 's gone through worse than snow for you."

"Well, all right. How much shall I spend for you?"

"Oh, whatever is right. I 'm rather hard up just now."

"That 's another thing you 've said for the past ten years."

"I know, and it 's always been true. The more I make, the less I have. Well, get whatever strikes you as the right thing. I don't care what it costs. In fact you might splurge a little."

"That 's the way to talk. Why don't you come round to see me?"

"I 've been meaning to, Kate; but I 've been so frightfully—"

"Yes, so have I. Well, good-by, Tom."

"Good-by, Kate."

PART III

THE LONELY ONE

I

THE snow had grown old upon the streets and yards of Carthage. There was no uniformed force to cart it away. People dug grooves in it along their own walks and stumbled or sleighed through the rest of it.

Now a new snow had fallen on the old, filling up the grooves; and the voice of the snow-shovel was loud in the town. In front of the Anthon home Uncle Ned was working with caution and resting with extravagance. He belonged to the black-and-white sketch the landscape was. He was growing to look more and more like an old grizzled ape with that same wistful look about the mouth. In

winter it was safe to say that Uncle Ned was wistful for a live coal.

He heard the front door open and rather divined than saw Doctor Anthon feeling his way down the slippery steps, like a bather venturing into cold water. With a mighty flurry, the darky completed a path to the carriage block, where the old doctor's old white horse stood fetlock-deep in snow and would no more have moved from his allotted post than Casabianca.

"Right smaht o' snow this mawnin', Doctah."

"Yes, it is, Uncle Ned. I hope you 'll get the path cleared before the next storm comes."

The old darky whooped with laughter. He was so notoriously lazy that he was proud of it. Nothing flattered him like an allusion to his unreliability.

The doctor never failed to have his lit-

tle joke on the subject. Pleased as ever with its usual reception, he set his medicine case in the sleigh, unwrapped the lines from the whipstock, climbed in with elaborate care, fixed the laprobe about him: then pushed on the lines and remarked "Click, click!" As the old white horse moved off at a fumble-footed jog, the doctor leaned back to wave his hand in farewell to his wife. He could not see so far as her window: but he knew that she would be there in her rocking-chair. And she waved back at him. She could not see him either; but, seeing a blurring motion and hearing a familiar rumble, she knew that the sleigh had moved off and that he must have waved to her as he had done infallibly for close on fifty years.

He was chuckling to himself as conceitedly as any young jackanapes. On his calendar he had found that morning

a memorandum that it was his wife's birthday. He planned to surprise her —nay, to amaze her by remembering it with a gift.

Unfortunately he neglected to take the memorandum along; and his genius for forgetting effaced all thought of it from his mind before the sleigh had gone two blocks.

He did not remember it again for five days, when his wife showed him the gorgeous presents from the New York chapter of the children.

"See what Tom and Kate have sent me for my birthday!" she cried, dancing like a child.

A mingling of guilt and jealousy moved him to grumble in a low voice:

"Pretty late sending 'em, seems to me."

"Better late than never," she bridled, with a meaning glare. "And, besides, it

wasn't their fault. See—Kate says that Martha—she's one of their hired girls—was given the package to express and forgot all about it."

The physician's diagnosis was cynical: "You don't believe that, do you?"

"Well, anyway, it was nice of them to take the trouble to think it up. They've got enough to worry them without trying to keep track of my birthdays! Lord knows they've been common enough."

She made an unheard-of luxury of the remembrances from her son and her daughter. They brightened her prison like flowers thrown through iron bars.

For the winter was a siege to her. She no longer dared to buffet the winds and plod the drifts. Day in, day out, her world was within doors. She plied about the house, but always brought up in the harbor of the old rocking-chair.

Her mind did not stagnate, but she read forever—read good books, too. She had been a fountain of ambition for power and learning and substantial achievement, but these had found their outlet through her children. Her soul was like a hidden spring whose waters are piped to far cities.

The children she had conceived and carried under her heart, and borne to the day, and nursed over her heart, and tended, guarded, consoled, cajoled, taught, punished, rewarded, adored and served—the children for whom she had done everything, from the most menial task to the most inspired—had left her, one by one. They had fled from the old house as if it were a prison; and if they ever felt homesickness they exercised a most admirable self-control.

For her each going away from home had been another travail, another sever-

ing of a cord fastened to her own veins. Some of her children were themselves fathers and mothers; but none the less they were still and forever flesh of her flesh, heart of her heart.

She ached for them as they say a shoulder aches for its amputated arm, with an intolerable incompleteness.

She thought she would die if the winter outside did not end. The winter within her soul she knew was come to stay, but two winters at once were unendurable.

And then spring came, with its ecstasy of torment; and her anguish was bitterer yet. She would have had the winter back again; for spring came teasingly in, like a pretty, pouting child that edges slowly forward, then darts away, only to sidle a little closer—and be off once more.

At last, spring was everywhere—that

old returning flame, that old refurbishing of the world to a brand-new unused beauty, that old creation miracle all afresh; but, though spring could return to her landscape, she could not go out to meet it half-way or answer its incantations. She could just play spectator, dim-eyed and envious, like an old actress in a stage-box seeing her best rôles played by an upstart.

II

IN front of her window grew a tree—a grave and reverend tree. All winter it had been a stark and gloomy skeleton of bole and bough. Suddenly one morning it was all spotted over with little buds. From these, by some sleight-of-hand, the wizard Spring brought forth uncoiling tendrils; and they flipped out the most ridiculous toy leaves, which by-and-by, as it were surreptitiously, became real leaves. And soon—almost unbeknown—the old tree was a huge green cathedral, with intricate aisles and choirs and chapels, where birds held service from matins to vespers.

Everywhere else was the same magi-

cianship. Ugly heaps of dead wire were becoming lilac bushes. The shriveled husks in the tulip bed were stirring with a strange yeast. The yellow blotches left by the retreating snow were thatching over with a glistening green.

Everything that had been dry and bald and sharp was growing supple, clothed upon and gracefully flexile; but no renewing luster burnished her hair, no suppleness brought youth again to her members or made dewy violets of her eyes. She sat by the window, a witness.

Her whole being wished for a personal April in her veins; her heart supplicated a portion of the universal miracle. She felt bitter that the Almighty Power lavishing such infinite youth could not have sprinkled her with a few drops of the benison; but all she said was:

"Father, I guess spring is here for

sure. The yard needs cleaning something terrible."

"So it does. We must set Uncle Ned to work."

She superintended the enormous task from her window, opening it now and then to call out some suggestion.

From her eyry she watched the calendar of the birds unrolling in due rotation. Surely that bluebird leaping into the reopening arena was the same azure herald that had run on ahead of how many pageants! And she would have sworn that she remembered that premature robin. He flaunted the same rusty waistcoat on the same aldermanic paunch and drew down the corners of his mouth with the same disgust as he went prospecting about the soggy, unkempt lawn.

Then the birds came pouring in as if the town were another Oklahoma opened

on signal. A winged horde of homesteaders swept down on the silent trees and eaves, and the air was alive with claim-staking, claim-jumping, mob justice, lynching, race war, class hatred—and the milder activities of flirtation and romance.

The old tree by the window was once more chosen by a young couple. They disdained to rent the ready-made mansion of a former season and built afresh on another bough, taking their material where they found it and climbing up and down aërial ladders from dawn to dusk. The man of the family busied himself chiefly as critic and supervisor. His squaw did the heavy labor.

By-and-by the loose straws of the neighborhood were a nest. with a very solemn-looking matron almost always at home. In the few intervals of her absence, Mrs. Anthon could see a cluster

of round shapes, very large for jewels, very small for eggs.

The young husband won her respect by his fidelity and his gallantry in bringing his lady her meals. This seemed to be his one excuse for existence, his one industry—birds not having yet reached the social state where one goes to a restaurant or telephones and orders in his meals already predigested.

The bride in this Anthon tree absorbed an amazing amount of provender and consumed appalling quantities of bird spaghetti, which her man brought her looped up in his beak conveniently for pushing down her gullet. Meanwhile she, too, had not been idle; for she was pretending to be an oven and she was keeping as warm as she could for the sake of the hardshell children beneath her. She could not give them blood or milk as other mothers do; she

could only be a furnace to them—while her husband was her most ardent stoker.

The consequence of this mode of living, as the watcher at the window expected, but found no less absorbing, was the eventual presence of several more gullets to stoke. Now the *paterfamilias* was busier than ever. He plainly felt his importance; and he gracefully concealed his undoubted disappointment at the grotesque little monstrosities his wife had educed from those exquisite jewels he had bought her. As for the mother, she was unspeakably conceited, and with no little reason; for had she not contributed to the song of the world a number of additions, and demonstrated that there was not a bad egg in the lot? And she doubtless hoped—if birds are ever foolish-wise enough to hope!—that they would turn out a credit to the family.

She was plainly determined that while they were under her care they should not lack for food, warmth or protection. To her great relief, and their father's, they grew their own clothes; but their bringing-up required endless attention, numberless battles, alarms, quarrels. And there must have been much fatigue and harrowing anxiety.

Mrs. Anthon could not but see the closeness of the parallel with her own case. She, too, had been an instrument for the continuance of her species. She, too, had been urged on to every endurance and sacrifice by some inner and outer compulsion of instinct. She, too, had been amazed and enraptured by the marvelous things she had given the world—little animals that would grow to be human beings like herself if protected and fed.

She had protected and fed them and

now they were of full stature, well and honorable and prospering. She rejoiced that such success had been granted to her private miracles. Other women had seen their children die of malnutrition or illness or accident—run over by wagons or trains, or drowned. Other women had seen their children taken away to prisons. None of these horrors had marred her brood. She felt that, after all, she had been blessed beyond her deserts and she rebuked herself for complaining of her loneliness. She bent her head to murmur a prayer of gratitude.

Her prayer was cut short by the mad clamorous panic of all the birds in the neighborhood. Birds went from tree to tree as if hurled from slings. They rocked the branches with their excitement. Everywhere birds

seen, with heads up and beaks scissoring as they barked for help.

[illegible] leaned out to find the cause of the excitement. She saw her old cat [illegible]ling up the tree, lost among the leaves [illegible] and searching— [illegible] tried to conceal [illegible] Tom and he had grown [illegible] lazy to purr, but spring [illegible] the pulse of the old [illegible] than he thought he was a [illegible] jungle. Such attitudinizing, [illegible] voluptuous sense of power, such [illegible] dramatic villainy! He was [illegible] that he frightened him[illegible] and [illegible]oking back to see if his [illegible] [illegible] about to spring on [illegible] [illegible]d the twisted streets of that tree as [illegible] he were a man-eater raiding a village in Bengal. He was not very much afraid of the birds whetting their beaks

on the branches and shooting themselves in his direction. And then he heard the sharp, shrill tones of his mistress in most unusual wrath:

"Tom! Come out of there! What do you mean by— Tom! you Thomas! Come right to me. You come away from there this instant!"

He wavered mutinously. He felt two natures struggling within him. All the ravening pride of the *genus felis* wrestled with the effete acquirements of the house cat. Habit won, as usual. The disguised tiger reverted to old Tom and slid clutchingly down the tree. Too bitterly cowed even to strike back at the emboldened fowl whizzing like shrapnel about his lowered head, he slunk through a cellar window and hid his blushes in the coalhole, meditating on the evils of these degenerate times.

The birds, ignoring the superavian

power that had intervened miraculously, congratulated themselves upon a brilliant victory and returned to the works of peace. They said no prayers of thanks; they made no sacrifices, set up no votive tablets, established no holiday. If they drew any lesson from the campaign at all it was that cats would weaken if yelled at loudly and charged at with enough appearance of sincerity.

It never occurred to them to resolve that, since the prospect of a cat eating their young had so wrung their hearts, they would never eat anybody's else young. They did not become vegetarians, rather than harrow up the souls of sensitive grasshoppers, and hysterical earthworms. They ate all of them they could find, or kidnapped them to feed their young withal.

No more did Mrs. Anthon moralize on the event. She did not care for insect

melody and she did not know that earthworms have a dual nature and are doubly amorous. She simply rejoiced with the gladness humans feel when they have rescued a songbird from the great silence; and she resolved to make sure that Tom Beelzebub was locked up indoors till the tenants of that nest had raised their babies to full birdhood. She would be their police.

It had seemed as if all the birds in the world had chosen Carthage for this year's estivation. But there were birds enough to fit out many another Northern spring and in a certain garden in the outer rim of Paris there was also a tree also with a bird honeymoon in it.

Near a window overlooking that garden a far-flown young American wife sat day after day and dreamed of Carthaginian springs and of future springs. She watched her birds with a

strange sense of kinship, a sympathetic anxiety from her own nest. Emily did not gad about Paris these days. She never went out at all, but just waited for her wonderful Stephen to come home and for the coming home of a more wonderful Stephen Second—she hoped it would be another Stephen, though he wanted—or said he wanted, a Junior Emilums.

She meant to write to her mother and tell her the great and unheard-of miracle-to-be; but she had a greater genius for postponing tasks now than ever. And she decided to save the news for a glorious cablegram.

For once Emily's neglect was unwittingly kind, and her mother's loneliness was not shot through with the terror she would have felt, knowing that her little girl was marching into the valley of the greater agony, and among strangers on

the other side of the world. That knowledge might have shod her old feet with resolution for the long journey she had counted impossible.

III

THE Chicago papers reach Carthage in the late forenoon and the inhabitants depend upon them as their telescopes to the great outer universe. Doctor Anthon read the Carthage morning sheet to find out who was on "the sick list" or what the town council had decided about repairing the crossings on Main Street. Mrs. Anthon read it to see who was at whose party last night. She rarely glanced at the metropolitan journals.

That noon, as she was retailing to her husband the exciting Waterloo of the birds and Napoleon Tom, he listened with only half an ear, his attention riveted rather on the news from the

larger world. He turned a page surreptitiously and gasped:

"Land of Goshen! Here 's our boy's picture!"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"What has he done now?"

For a moment the mother's heart was clutched with an anguish lest some great misfortune had fastened on her child. She stared at the portrait, leaning hard on her husband's shoulder. Darby and Joan would hardly have known this mature gentleman for their child if the portrait had not been labeled.

With trembling forefinger the father ran among the headlines searching for what shocking scandal might have involved their pride. His name was not among them as a distinguished murderer, embezzler or divorcé. At last they ran him down.

"Here it is: 'President Appoints New Yorker to Vacancy on Supreme Bench.'" With quivering lips and a heart that beat as if he had run hard a long, the father read how this ultim. . laurel for an American lawyer had been laid upon the brow of the eminent member of the bar known among his friends and rivals as "Lucky Anthon."

The parents of all this grandeur sat back and stared at each other. Their first emotion was a thrill of joy at the joy this would mean to their child himself.

"He always said, you know," the mother laughed—"he always said that for a lawyer the supreme bench was what the college of cardinals is to a priest. And now he 's there!"

"And he 's my son!" the old doctor cried.

"Your son!" the mother stormed,

with an almost scandalous implication. "He 's all mine! You wanted him to be a doctor. I made you send him to the law school."

"Well, I paid his expenses anyway," the doctor grumbled, retreating to the usual meekness of an American husband.

"Yes, but he 's his mother's own boy!" she repeated with eyes flashing like an exultant girl's.

Their rapture was interrupted by the telephone. A neighbor who took the same Chicago paper, was howling congratulations and basking in the radiance. The mother repeated the conversation as soon as she could release herself from the telephone:

"It 's just like her. She took most of the credit to herself: 'I always said he would be a great man some day,' she said; 'and it shows what Carthage can

do when she tries.' As if this old town had anything to do with it. The glory belongs entirely to the boy himself."

"And to his mother," the husband added, as if he laid a posy at her feet.

The telephone rang again; and the doctor saw a sudden flush overrun his wife's cheek as she answered some unexpected question guiltily.

"Why did n't we tell you? Er—why, you see—er—of course, we knew it long ago; but—er—those things—are so confidential—the President did n't want anybody to—he wanted to announce it first himself—the President did."

She sank into her chair in confusion. "What do you suppose she had the impudence to insinuate?—that we did n't know about it ourselves until we saw it in the paper! The idea!"

"Well, of course," the doctor mumbled, bashful before the truth—"of

course, as a matter of fact, we did n't."

"Well, what of it?"

Perhaps, in view of the small share he had been allotted in the son's soul, the father felt justified in venturing a criticism:

"He might have telegraphed."

The mother rounded on him like a leopardess whose cub has been threatened:

"Don't you suppose that a Supreme Justice of the United States has more important things to think of than sending telegrams to a couple of old fogies like us?"

"It does n't matter about me—I have no feelings to hurt; but he might have thought of his mother."

"He does think of her. Did n't he send me a perfectly beautiful birthday present?"

"Five days late."

They spatted like a pair of sulky children; and the mother of an associate justice of the United States Supreme Court swept out of the room with a supreme contempt for the mere village physician who dared to criticize her master work.

Once upstairs, however, in the old rocker, which squealed so lonely a tune and had seen so many lonely hours, the truth of the neglect came down on her like a bludgeon. She did not blame her boy—her heart always issued him plenary indulgences in advance; but she blamed the mechanism of a world where the mother must endure the bitterest pains and dangers of her children, in order that they may find their raptures and their triumphs elsewhere. The thorns for her—for others the roses.

Her sad eyes roved from the new nest of the new family to the deserted hut

of last year's birds. Like a warning legend, a signboard, a symbol, it hung within full view of the fresher habitation —and no bird heeded it.

Yet just one bird-generation ago it was builded with equal frenzy by a like young couple: it was the cradle of a brood of fledglings, too, watched through a precarious childhood to the time of flight by a mother and father equally fond and fanatic.

From this same window how many hours she had watched over the destinies of that little family! How well she remembered that big day when the first of the sprawling youngsters had gripped the sill of the nest with anxious fingers and looked forth longingly upon the world; had teetered there and slumped back, afraid to adventure; had staggered again to the great jumping-off place and regarded the perilous sea of

air with terror, yet with desire—and finally, with a now-or-never, do-or-die gulp, had stepped off into space. Somehow instinct and air pressure and long grass had broken its fall, and the awkward aviator arrived on earth without disaster.

What a cataclysm it had been to that father and mother and the sympathetic neighbors! What mad shrieks and chatters of advice and dashes to the rescue—what appeals and wailings and warnings! How that bird mother and father must have longed for hands and arms to lift their prodigal with!

Mrs. Anthony had watched the desperate lunges and tumbles of the homesick flyaway. She had gone out in the yard to help; but the chick was afraid of her and the parents menaced her very eyes with their beaks. To escape her, the little bird had managed even to hoist him-

self up to a sapling and from that to swoop to another. And then she lost him—and never saw him again.

The parents continued to feed the remainder of the flock, but another day saw their second child depart. In the lonely nest there remained one only infant. Its parents' ministrations plainly did not suffice. It was more conservative and waited for abundant strength. For two days it waved its wings up and down as if training for a great event, and then it sailed away. The nest was empty—empty forever after. The parents sailed away, too. It was only humans that hung about a deserted nest!

That was a year ago, just about the time her own last fledgling, Emily, had gazed into the world too deep and too long and—flitted with unreturning wings. And here, just a few boughs beyond the ruins of a once busy home.

this other home was full of life and devotion, of parental care and filial trust.

Mrs. Anthon shook her head over the impending desolation of this little Troy. She thrust up the window-sash, leaned out on the ledge and mused upon the future—knew how it would mimic the past. Her heart called out to the mother bird, though her lips hardly moved:

"Don't love your children too much, little bird. They 'll fly away. They 'll leave you. They 're only waiting till their wings are strong enough. That 's all they 're waiting for. That 's all you 're feeding them for. They 'll leave you; they will. The day is coming. Your children will leave you as mine left me. Poor little mother, you 've kept them all warm and dry, and kept the rain and the wind from them—and fed them so lovingly! You 'd give your life for them; but they 'll fly away.

Don't love them too much—they 'll fly off. They 'll never come home. They 'll forget the way back. They 'll forget you. Poor little mother, you 'll lose them soon. They 'll all fly away—all—all fly away!"

IV

THE whole afternoon the mother nursed her lonely grief by the window. Her husband had his patients, his errands of importance, helping children into the world and keeping olders from slipping out of it. He was a man sent for, begged for, needed. His work was unending.

She had been a fruitful mother while she could, and now she was without career or ambition. She looked out across that part of the town she could see from her window. Every roof was bereaved of children. Other towns got them--called away the bravest and the most ambitious. Other mothers were in her plight.

She could not blame her children for leaving. She had left her own home and her own home town when her husband left his. She had deserted her parents. They had deserted theirs—and they theirs—on back into the days when the nation was a wilderness, beyond the ocean into foreign countries, where forever backward the procession could be traced—children always leaving home, leaving home, leaving home. That was human history; and that eternal serial of heartache and farewell was the slow spelling of the word "progress" across the map of the world.

The word "progress" was poor consolation to the victims of it. Mrs. Anthon took no comfort in giving her own heart as one more red brick in the endless pavement men march on to unending ambition.

History meant nothing real to her. This new accession to the supreme court of the supreme republic meant nothing to her. His views on constitutional interpretations meant nothing to her. She could not have understood one of her own child's briefs or decisions. All she felt was that her boy was far away—farther away than ever now; that she meant nothing to him; she was not worth a telegram in the hour of his glory. He had forgotten that without her he would never have been at all; without her he would have died a thousand times. She did not blame him; she blamed herself, because somehow she had failed to be important to him always.

The shame was so bitter that she would not reveal it to her own husband, much less to the neighbors. She lied

glibly and nobly to all who asked her if she had heard the news from her son himself.

The ordeal was too much. A fever invaded her veins, her forehead burned, her heart fluttered like a bird in a cat's clutch. If she could have cried it would have helped her. Tears would have blessed her parched eyes like a shower upon a desert; but the tears would not come.

Her husband sent her to bed, got medicines for her, wanted to sit up with her. She would have none of his medicines or of him. His father heart was hurt nearly as deeply as hers; but, manlike, he was all for rebuking their neglectful son. She drove him to his own room and lay supine and unimaginably useless. She felt as useless and cast away as an old broomhandle in the world's back yard.

It was late when sleep arrived upon her hot eyelids—but it was a false sleep, a usurper, full of nightmares and all too vivid torments, whence she struggled to waken—and woke only to wish herself asleep again.

Deep in the abysm of the night, true slumber fell about her and her griefs were erased from her benumbed soul. After a time, when she was a little rested, dreams began to throng about her once more; but they were beautiful dreams.

She was a young mother again, mending things for little children to wear through again. The old dead nest of a house was repeopled with her young. They laughed, sang, hooted, quarreled, fought, shrieked, banged the piano, broke the needle in the sewing machine, fell down and wailed, got up and giggled.

Wherever she moved, they clung to

her skirts, sprawled in her way, demanded her services, fought for her lap, battled over who loved her best. The silent house was fairly shaken with the chaos of voices. "I 'm hungry! Can't I have a piece of bread and jam? How do you spell —— What 's the pronounsation of —— How many times does seventy-six go into fifty-eight? Mama, make Frank let go of my hair! Mama, Emily took my chewing-gum! Mama, he hit me! Kate hit me first! I did not! You did so! Mama, can I go skating, swimming, to the circus, to the strawberry festival, sleigh-riding, ball game, picnic—"

Among the children was one who bore the least possible resemblance to a justice of the Supreme Court. She missed him suddenly from the riot. She wondered where he was. She heard a wild outcry. It was his voice. He was in

danger. She ran, eager to give her life to save him from any harm; and, as she ran, she cried:

"Yes, honey! I'm coming! Don't be afraid!"

Abruptly she was awake. Her eyes saw nothing but blackness all about. Her shivering fingers found the bed. She made out a little night-light breathing fitfully behind the cover of the sewing machine. The window-casements were filled with the ink of utter gloom.

She realized that once more the whistle of the four-o'clock express had pierced her sleep, shuttled into and interwoven with her dream.

Her children were vanished from her. Her little Tower of Babel was cursed with annihilation. She was only an old woman, alone; and that mute black hour before dawn loomed between her and the light.

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SHE fell back shivering upon her pillow, her lean fingers twitching at the covers and her heart abandoned to abject desolation. Neither sleep nor tears brought mercy to her staring eyes; she was the shattered victim of the Juggernaut of Time.

She said to herself, with acrid irony: "I am the mother of a supreme justice; and this is the justice of the world. My crime is that I was a mother; my punishment is exile on this desert island in this lonely sea!"

There was a faint murmur, hardly more than a shuffling of the silence. It grew less remote, less vague. It became

a rumble of wheels, a thudding of horse's hoofs.

"The milkman is early this morning," she thought. The rumble was a clatter. It turned into the street before her house. A man cried: "Whoa!" The noise stopped. A carriage door opened. Footsteps quickened along the walk, stamped up the steps. The doorbell was pulled; the still house rang with alarm.

"Somebody for the doctor," she thought. "Too bad they can't let him sleep."

After an age of delay she heard him strike a match in his room, saw a sliver of light under her door, heard him hastily slipping into his clothes, lighting the gas in the hall, stumbling drowsily down the steps, unlocking the door.

She heard his voice and another man's. There seemed to be some excite-

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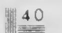

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ment. Probably some young father begging her husband to come at once. The voices were hurrying up the stairs. That was strange! There was a knock at her door.

"What is it?" she called.

"Open the door!" her husband demanded.

"What 's the matter?" she gasped as she pushed her feet into her slippers and her arms into a wrapper.

"Open the door!"

She groped through the dark and turned the key; flung open the door anxiously. A tall stranger rushed at her, caught her in his arms and cried:

"Mother! Mother!"

Lips covered her cheeks with kisses and, finding her lips, smothered her questions. Before she could speak, she knew that this strange, violent person was one of the associate justices of the

Supreme Court of the United States. He told her so himself and added:

"As soon as I knew it for sure, I jumped on the first train to bring you the news myself. I hope you have n't heard it. Have you?"

For all her panic of joy, she remembered to be this overgrown child's mother, and to say what he so wanted to hear: "No. I never dreamed of it. I can't believe it!"

And her frowsy husband, grinning like an overgrown lout, for once had tact enough to perjure himself like a gentleman, and gasp:

"Supreme Court! Associate Justice! The President appointed you! Mother, did you hear that!"

Nothing would do but that the prodigal magistrate should light the gas in his mother's room and make her crawl under cover. Then he stuffed the pil-

lows about her, and sat on the edge of the bed and told her the whole story, more or less as she had read it.

"I was so afraid I would n't succeed," he explained, returning to childhood again in the presence of his forebears. "I did n't dare write you about it. Then, when the news came from the President himself, I started to telegraph you. I wrote a dozen telegrams and tore them all up. Finally I said: 'Good Lord! this is something I 've got to tell her myself!' I was pretty tired anyway; so I just threw a few things into a trunk, hopped into a taxicab and barely caught the train. I 've been gig-gling like a baby all the way. The por-ter thought I was crazy. But I wanted to surprise you; and I did—did n't I? —did n't I, Mother?"

She only squeezed his hand in both of hers for reply and one or two tears came

out to see what was going on. They shone like smiles in her adoring eyes. He ran on boyishly:

"It 's a shame to wake you up at this hour, but I could n't wait for a later train. I 've come to stay for a week or two and just visit with you. And then I 'm going to bundle you and dad up and take you to Washington for the big reception the President is going to give me. I told him all about you when we were talking over the appointment. I told him that you were the most wonderful mother in the world and you had always said I 'd get to the supreme bench some day; and he said: 'We 'll have to see if we can't make her a prophetess. You 're lucky to have her alive!' That 's what he said. You 'll come—won't you? You 've got to! You will—won't you?"

She stared at him as if he were a mi-

rage. She clung to him as if he were salvation. Her eyes were drenched but her lips were happy. Yet all she said was:

"Oh, my blessed little boy, I could never go so far."

"Oh, yes, you could," he insisted. "And I 'm going to get all the children there for a family reunion. Anybody that does n't give bonds to come will be sent for by a United States marshal. They 'll all be there, I promise you that. I'll extradite that scamp Emily for you. And when I 'm on the Supreme Bench, I 'm going to treat any child who does not repay his mother's love in full and with compound interest as a defaulter of the first degree, and a home-wrecker of the worst sort. And I 'm going to sentence myself first. You glorious, beautiful mother, you 'll promise to be there, won't you? You 've got to!

Has n't she, Dad? Is n't she beautiful? My mother!"

For answer, she simply clutched his hand and shook it with a strange fierceness; and she shook all over, all through, until the tears were flung from her eyelids to his cheek. More tears took their place. They came gushing and flooding; and she bent to her son's broad shoulder and sobbed.

Her tears were not the only ones shed; but they seemed to make the room glad and to sweeten the air like a May rain scattering its largess on a drooping rose-tree.

. . . .

That is all. This has not been much of a story to read—not much plot, not much adventure; and yet, if you who read it should be moved to remember piously your mother—if she is dead; or if she lives, if you were impelled to sit

down and write her a letter or send her a long telegram saying, "I am well, I am thinking of you and I want you to know how much I love you!" or, above all, if you should be persuaded to go home and see her—why, then, this story would have given more real joy than perhaps any other story ever written.

THE END

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