

**CIHM
Microfiche
Series
(Monographs)**

**ICMH
Collection de
microfiches
(monographies)**



Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions / Institut canadien de microreproductions historiques

© 1997

Technical and Bibliographic Notes / Notes techniques et bibliographiques

The Institute has attempted to obtain the best original copy available for filming. Features of this copy which may be bibliographically unique, which may alter any of the images in the reproduction, or which may significantly change the usual method of filming are checked below.

- Coloured covers / Couverture de couleur
- Covers damaged / Couverture endommagée
- Covers restored and/or laminated / Couverture restaurée et/ou pelliculée
- Cover title missing / Le titre de couverture manque
- Coloured maps / Cartes géographiques en couleur
- Coloured ink (i.e. other than blue or black) / Encre de couleur (i.e. autre que bleue ou noire)
- Coloured plates and/or illustrations / Planches et/ou illustrations en couleur
- Bound with other material / Relié avec d'autres documents
- Only edition available / Seule édition disponible
- Tight binding may cause shadows or distortion along interior margin / La reliure serrée peut causer de l'ombre ou de la distorsion le long de la marge intérieure.
- Blank leaves added during restorations may appear within the text. Whenever possible, these have been omitted from filming / Il se peut que certaines pages blanches ajoutées lors d'une restauration apparaissent dans le texte, mais, lorsque cela était possible, ces pages n'ont pas été filmées.
- Additional comments / Commentaires supplémentaires:

L'Institut a microfilmé le meilleur exemplaire qu'il lui a été possible de se procurer. Les détails de cet exemplaire qui sont peut-être uniques du point de vue bibliographique, qui peuvent modifier une image reproduite, ou qui peuvent exiger une modification dans la méthode normale de filmage sont indiqués ci-dessous.

- Coloured pages / Pages de couleur
- Pages damaged / Pages endommagées
- Pages restored and/or laminated / Pages restaurées et/ou pelliculées
- Pages discoloured, stained or foxed / Pages décolorées, tachetées ou piquées
- Pages detached / Pages détachées
- Showthrough / Transparence
- Quality of print varies / Qualité inégale de l'impression
- Includes supplementary material / Comprend du matériel supplémentaire
- Pages wholly or partially obscured by errata slips, tissues, etc., have been refilmed to ensure the best possible image / Les pages totalement ou partiellement obscurcies par un feuillet d'errata, une pelure, etc., ont été filmées à nouveau de façon à obtenir la meilleure image possible.
- Opposing pages with varying colouration or discolourations are filmed twice to ensure the best possible image / Les pages s'opposant ayant des colorations variables ou des décolorations sont filmées deux fois afin d'obtenir la meilleure image possible.

This item is filmed at the reduction ratio checked below /
Ce document est filmé au taux de réduction indiqué ci-dessous.

	10x		14x		18x		22x		26x		30x	
						✓						
	12x		16x		20x		24x		28x		32x	

The copy filmed here has been reproduced thanks to the generosity of:

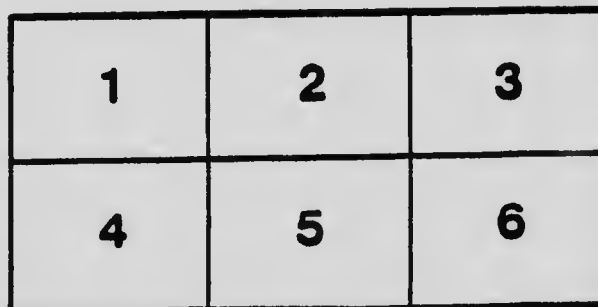
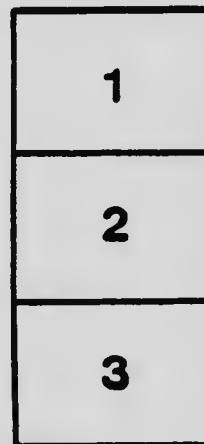
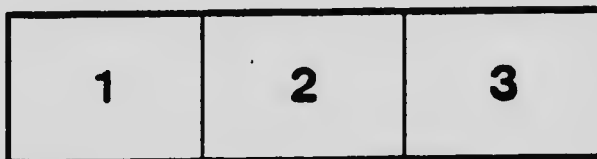
National Library of Canada

The images appearing here are the best quality possible considering the condition and legibility of the original copy and in keeping with the filming contract specifications.

Original copies in printed paper covers are filmed beginning with the front cover and ending on the last page with a printed or illustrated impression, or the back cover when appropriate. All other original copies are filmed beginning on the first page with a printed or illustrated impression, and ending on the last page with a printed or illustrated impression.

The last recorded frame on each microfiche shall contain the symbol \rightarrow (meaning "CONTINUED"), or the symbol ∇ (meaning "END"), whichever applies.

Maps, plates, charts, etc., may be filmed at different reduction ratios. Those too large to be entirely included in one exposure are filmed beginning in the upper left hand corner, left to right and top to bottom, as many frames as required. The following diagrams illustrate the method:



L'exemplaire filmé fut reproduit grâce à la générosité de:

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Les images suivantes ont été reproduites avec le plus grand soin, compte tenu de la condition et de la netteté de l'exemplaire filmé, et en conformité avec les conditions du contrat de filmage.

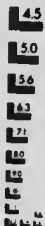
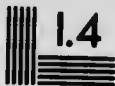
Les exemplaires originaux dont la couverture en papier est imprimée sont filmés en commençant par le premier plat et en terminant soit par la dernière page qui comporte une empreinte d'impression ou d'illustration, soit par le second plat, selon la cas. Tous les autres exemplaires originaux sont filmés en commençant par la première page qui comporte une empreinte d'impression ou d'illustration et en terminant par la dernière page qui comporte une telle empreinte.

Un des symboles suivants apparaîtra sur la dernière image de chaque microfiche, selon le cas: le symbole \rightarrow signifie "A SUIVRE", le symbole ∇ signifie "FIN".

Les cartes, planches, tableaux, etc., peuvent être filmés à des taux de réduction différents. Lorsque le document est trop grand pour être reproduit en un seul cliché, il est filmé à partir de l'angle supérieur gauche, de gauche à droite, et de haut en bas, en prenant le nombre d'images nécessaires. Les diagrammes suivants illustrent la méthode.

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax



HE GOT NO FURTHER, FOR MARY WAS AT THE DOOR. [Page 217.]

SAMARITAN MARY

BY
SUMNER LOCKE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
JAMES O. CHAPIN

TORONTO
McCLELLAND, GOODCHILD & STEWART
LIMITED

P55

COPYRIGHT, 1916,
BY
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

Published February, 1916

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

09602045

SAMARITAN MARY

CHAPTER I

"COUNT your many blessings," said Mary Set-
tler, as she swung round from the stove with a
dilapidated stocking thrust over her hand.

"Count them . . . one . . . by . . . one," she
continued, poking her fingers through holes in the
toe at the black and yellow cat on the kitchen
settee, who, with a number of sleepy kittens snug-
gling against her, seemed loth to count anything
more a blessing or otherwise.

"It's a wonder to me she never fell clean through
this ventilated bit of hosiery altogether," the good
woman went on. "That's one of the blessings, old
cat Hannah-Ellen, and the others have come on me
like a crop of early chilblains. Nothing like a crop
of chilblains or a pair of new boots that's been too
familiar to be comfortable to keep you from worry-
ing about anything else! . . . And they're what I
call blessings . . . you get me? Blessings that
come down in showers and nobody looking out for
them and feeling them like hailstones till they finds
them to be the reverse."

SAMARITAN MARY

She looked at the stockings again. "Now from what I can make out, this business of a rampageous horse running away with a vegetable cart, and a girl on top like a bobbing five-cents air-ball-give-away-with-the-extra-coupon, and coming down in the dirt of the road as sudden as a punched balloon, is . . . that it's a blessing for her, same time as it is for me. One for Miss Spring Roper of Ladybird Farm, as fell off Jerry Grab's cart, and two for Mary Settler—that's me, by the precise way I'm saying it. Two for me . . . my land! Haven't I been wishin' good and hard to get a handful of trouble to deal with like this ever since Mrs. Casey—five years come Thanksgiving since that poor soul died in my arms—and only Benjamin with his operation on his nose to count as anything since. Some folks would feel it uncommon hard to have nothing to do in the service of humanity, and I'm among that same lot. . . . Barring havin' somebody's baby in the house, Hannah-Ellen, and that occurring the once in twelve months to make it a proper deal at all . . . there's not much to keep a hungry heart alive. You know that, old cat; you got an installment of four or five at one sitting . . . count your blessings, I say. . . . I'm surprised at you, Hannah-Ellen!"

She pulled the stockings off her hands and observed them quizzically.

"Seems like I'll have to be borrowin' a pair of shoes for that Benjamin o' the yard's for her if she is of your mind to get up in the morning, and wanted to travel home to her ma, more like a Christian, with a hair-stuffed cushion under her, 'stead of the vegetables she straddled out on. Well, we'll have to get her clothes somehow . . . and I've got that on me hands too, praise be. . . . I've picked a few things off the road, lame dogs run over by motor machinery . . . and tramps with life stories as long as from here to Boston . . . but a nicer-looking, act-like-a-lady-and-do-it-good-and-easy kinder creature I ain't yet had in my house. Maybe Clara Hopkins will look in tonight and loan us. . . ."

She looked up to see a happy, grinning, full, ripe face through the kitchen door. It was "Benjamin o' the yard."

"Say, is Clara Hopkins comin' across?" he asked Mary.

Mary tossed the dishwater down the sink and looked at him with a fresh expression.

"'Course Clara is comin'!"

"She didn't say she was!"

"She don't have need to say."

"What's she . . . after?"

"Maybe to see what's happenin' down our place. You're mighty curious about Clara. S'pose she's heard about the accident."

"How could she hear? She's on'y gettin' back from work."

"She don't have need to get back from work to hear we got part of the accident here. Clara can hear things much further than you think, Benjamin."

The boy grinned and scratched one ear. "Say, is she goin' to stop a bit, Mary?"

"More'n likely! Was you thinkin' of gettin' cleaned up?"

"Yep. Gimme the bowl. I got no soap up the shed, Mary."

The woman handed him a piece of yellow scented soap from the side of the sink. There was a decided twinkle in her eyes.

"Anybody would think you was makin' a meal off your bath lately, Benjamin, the way you git rid of soap and water. I 'most surely admit you're lookin' better on it."

"I don't hev need to look better on it if I do make a meal outter it, Mary. What's this you give me?"

He held up the cake of soap.

"It's some of my best I uses when I'm expectin' somebody special. You try it."

"Hev you used it today, Mary?" He was a bit dubious about how far Mary was getting him.

"I'm not expectin' anybody as I know on that would encourage me to waste that expensive soap, Benjamin."

"Not Clara? You sed you was expectin' her."

"I said I knew she was comin'. That ain't anybody special—leastways not to me."

The boy backed from the door and took the bowl and the soap to the tank. He was busy there for quite a long time, and when Mary looked up the yard he had gone into the shed where he slept, and had shut the door.

She was still looking through the kitchen door, when Clara Hopkins came into the yard.

Clara was a thin used-up woman, perhaps a good many years younger than Mary Settler, but she took no advantage of that fact. Her movements were direct, her words hammered out rather than repeated when she was worked up in argument. The nature of a creature, man, woman, child, bird, or beast, came to her in a flash, and she spared no opinion good or bad when she thought that it ought to have an airing. On the other hand, Mary Settler was slower to gauge exact worth because she accepted folk for what of them came to the surface, knowing truly that to err is pitifully human and to forgive—a satisfaction to the soul.

The elder woman's bosom surged, often restless

and disturbed, because of the mighty tempest rising to drag pity and sympathy from the roots of her heart. Man and beast, bird and flower, all called up in Mary Settler the same emotion of passionate and protective tenderness a mother gives her child. Benjamin o' the yard once remarked to a neighbor that "Mary Settler wouldn't leave a wheel-barrer out of a cold night; and as to them chickens and poultry, you'd think they was real human the way they takes advantage of her!"

"Come right in, Clara," said Mary, walking from the door and concerning herself for a minute with the turning of the washing at the stove. "Just a minute while I move these things off the chair. There's a chicken that got run over be the old horse, hidin' in them bits of flannel there; and seein' it's half blind be the way it was born, it wouldn't be kinder fair to let you sit down, not meanin' to harm it unknowin'ly."

"I'll take the rocker," said Clara, making signs of a lengthy visit.

"Mind Hannah-Ellen then. She's somewhere about with this year's kittens. I 'lowed she could bring them in because a strange dog has been hangin' about with his nose inspectin' trouble. There's a chair now. Set down and rest. I'll be needin' your services perhaps sooner or later, so just you rest yourself while things is quiet."

"I hear you got Spring Roper of Ladybird; and Miss Hetty, she took the gentleman as was also concerned in the accident."

"Miss Hetty, she 'most got the whole funeral right in her front yard, I'm thinkin'. Land, Clara, you should've seen that horse tearin' about the place for all the world like a bad storm in my barnyard."

"Well, it's considerable of a chore to Miss Hetty to have that ellergint young gentleman in her parlor and all her lilac bushes cluttered about. She won't get over it in a hurry either, and yet her the only person to really see the accident! Some folks ain't thankful for nothin'. And the ellergint young gentleman come from the city I believe—though Miss Hetty, she can't get much outter him, an' he ain't up to answerin' questions through happenin' to fall clean on the top of his head for all the world like as if he was mendin' the roof and somebody pushed him overboard. My! it must hev been a sight. . . ."

Mary bustled around the kitchen. She found things to do in every corner. She vanished up the passage for a moment, opened the bedroom door, and took a peep at the girl lying in her white bed; then she shut the door quietly and came back and attended to the sick chicken.

"Speakin' my mind out, Clara, you know as much as I can tell you maybe, as you've had an

interview with the district, and me been tied here with on'y Benjamin and Hannah-Ellen to help over the mistakes, but . . . if Spring's manner of gettin' along behind that horse wasn't a first-class, front-seat, pass-out-check-and-come-in-when-you-please kind of entertainment, then I muster been havin' a spell of second sight without knowin' it. Maybe I wasn't lookin' the right way to be comfortable in my mind, and seen less than Miss Hetty, who never misses as much as a fly on the window screen."

"Funny things always happen when I'm away workin'," said Clara.

"But you gets most of the news, Clara, you bein' anxious and ready for anything that comes aiong."

"What was Spring Roper doin' on Jerry Grab's vegetable cart? I ain't got that correct so far."

Mary embedded the sick chicken into the depths of the flannel and went once more to take a look in the bedroom.

"There was that horse, Clara," she said when she returned. "It was springin' along as if it was made of rubber. It was shakin' the head off itself like as if it was goin' to spit out all its teeth. Sheer spite it was, and the boy hettin' up things something fearful and that bit of a lamb slidin' and slippin' this way and that on top o' the greengrocery till I thought I'd hear her inside rattle all out of place.

Then she comes gently and suddenly over the tail-board, hangin' there a minit or two, and trying to keep her toes, bumpin' the ground long enough to be certain she'd got that far. It didn't take her long to discover she'd come to mother earth when she let go with her hands. You'd have thought a cyclone had started right in her face and clean shoved her backwards."

"Could she speak to you, Mary? What did she say?"

"First thing she says when I get her into bed with all them bits of wrecked clothes out of sight, is: 'Oh, Mother, I didn't mean to do it.' The poor lamb, as if any of it was ever intended to be meant."

"It was an auto comin' right in the face of the vegetable cart set the horse rampagin'!" said Clara. "Spring muster hopped off in time."

"Thank the Lord for that. She can count it a blessin' same as I do."

"Don't see where you count it a blessin', Mary," Clara ventured, "seein' you wasn't on the cart when it all happened."

"I count it a blessin' bein' right there behind when she fell off," said Mary. "It was mighty encouragin' to hear her say, all cuddled up over my heart that was workin' like a engine under me every-day dress: 'Oh, Mother, I didn't mean to do it.'"

"'Course, Mary, I don't suppose she did mean to do it."

"'I wasn't that part touched me most, Clara. It was the 'Oh, Mother!' cry from her that was encouragin'."

CHAPTER II

“ ‘It would be something worth knowing,’ I says, ‘if you were to tell us just where you were thinking of going when you started out on the top of all them vegetables?’ ”

Mary continued her story with a zest to which Clara Hopkins’ exclamations added interest every moment.

“ ‘I wanted to go . . . to the city,’ she says, slowlike and trying to hide something.”

“ ‘The city was it?’ I got out. ‘You might have been reaching for any part of the United States.’ Reminds me, Clara, of the boy that wanted to see the wheels go over a flat-headed tack he put on the railroad. They said afterwards that he knew more about that tack than any mortal livin’ soul, an’ it was a pity his information wasn’t more use to him, seeing the experience he had and what he went through.”

Mary crossed the kitchen to adjust the clothes by the stove.

“ ‘We’re the Ropers,’ she says to me. ‘Way down past Bird Town. Mother and all of us work Ladybird Farm. It’s awfully hard, and the mort-

gage is most depressing.' Now think of that, Clara. The Ropers originally come of something with a bit more color in the blood than any in these parts. I could see that be the turn of Spring's ankles and wrists even when she was turning a cyclone stunt in the middle of the road. They've been makin' a world of trouble on themselves ever since Graham P. died—the Ropers—tryin' to make ends meet. Now I never heard that ends *did* meet. Not their kind of ends anyhow. Too many ways of finishin' off to be an end at all; besides I always says that if there are ends you can't make them into anything else however long you try. An end's an end, and it's a finish, and a finish is a full stop, and a full stop ain't always convenient when there's a family growin' up and can't wait or stop growin' jes' because there's nothing in the food closet. I've got me own notions about Spring. It was her Aunt Susannah that scared to the tail of that trouble. She was runnin' away from somethin'."

Taking one frayed stocking from the line Mary hoisted it over her hand again.

"Would you be wearin' your best stockin's be any chance, Clara, or on'y your everyday worsted ones?" she asked.

"I changed them this very day, Mary, thinkin' the weather might be sensible to something thinner," Clara replied.

"Then let us have them off you this minute!"
Mary's air of mild and abstract interest vanished instantly.

"I can give them a run through this water, 'cos Spring might be recovering sooner or later and likely to want to hit it for her ma and Bird Town. You peel off, Clara, and I'll serve you a pair of mine. They can't harm you, though they do make a younger leg than mine itch something terrible . . . unless there's a scare of rheumatism in the blood."

Clara Hopkins talked like a trip-hammer all the time she was changing her footgear.

"Graham P. Roper was the man killed in the Pynes Steel Works that time. I remember; I was working up that way. The company give Mrs. Roper a check to start them in the farm. They don't seem to make a shake outter things. . . ."

"Still I expects Mrs. Roper was thankful enuff to get started at all, seeing there's not much left of a man after he's been through what Graham P. managed to fall into. The check was about as much as could be hoped for, I should say. Sentiment don't come into these business affairs, and it's all in a day if a man gets caught up in the machinery. A few hundred dollars is a real good thing and always welcome when there's children to be fed and housed, and maybe it's hard to part with a man

sudden like that, but . . . a lump of dollars right off an accident does a heap towards restoring things, and gives young stomachs a chance to bear up in the trouble. Now if one of the family had been caught up in that machinery same time as Graham P., Mrs. Roper might have been justified in asking for more, but seeing that it was only Graham P. and only *one* accident it would be sort of over-grabbin' to think about a double check. I knew a woman, down Chicago way, had her son fall overboard into something terrible hot he was meddling with in the name of work, and they only made it good to her in a couple of dozen cans of ham and turkey and mixed fish, the same being a memoranda of the occasion and not much consolation seeing there was no proper organized funeral. . . ."

Clara was replacing her stockings by a pair of thick woolen ones belonging to Mary.

"I must confess," Mary interrupted, intent on her own thoughts, "that the Aunt Susannah business nearly got me beat. It appears she is more of a relation of Graham P.'s than of his children. A kinder second aunt, his mother's side, not removed far enuff to be out of any little thing that happens, and no one really to blame for it. Spring's got a cause against her because she's that tidy about a place . . . well, you know the sort, Clara? You'd

be afraid to have a cold in your head in her house. As far as I can make out Spring is a kinder promise to her ever since she was ten. Now Mrs. Roper has sort of postponed that promise every year till Aunt Susannah has got up a complaint about it. Seven dollars a month lost through it too."

The stockings coiled on the line like two limp black wriggling reptiles, as Mary threw them over it. She worked them into something like their proper shape while she went on talking.

"I asks Spring . . . did Aunt Susannah used to carry a parcel of bills handy in case her mother was out with the store account?"

"Once she gave mother five dollars towards Thanksgiving,' says the lamb. 'Mother had asked her to come to dinner with us. We had a splendid lot of fun' . . . Got that, Clara?"

"'Aunt Susannah was real nice,' Spring tells me, 'and ate as much as anyone. It pleased mother, who's quite proud of her cakes and mincemeat.'"

"Seems like, Clara . . . she's one of the kind that like to know what she eats has been paid for. . . . Her conscience ought to have been setting down easy that dinner if it never has since. And that seven dollars a month. . . . Spring tells me she was to attend her Aunt Susannah well, and not speak the very first thing that came into her head. . . . Now listen to that, will you? Makes me fair

mac . . . to think there's critters in this world, like that Aunt Susannah, stopping a baby using her tongue much as she pleases. What chance has a girl, or a woman, or a man, or a monkey, if it comes to that, if there's a bridle put on them always? I mean to keep Spring Roper under my own observations-- even if I have to call on Aunt Susannah about supplying the seven dollars regular, without the services rendered."

Clara eased her feet in the changed gear.

"Miss Hetty," she said, "she won't be doing much for the ellergint young gentleman. She let Doc Harkins have it all his own and never as much as offered to wash any of the accident off of him."

"I expect, though, she won't have to borrrer proper clothing same as I'm doing for Spring Roper, seeing he come from the city and maybe has a valise tucked away safely in the auto."

"A brown leather one it was." Clara hit on the mark easily. "Miss Hetty was mighty curious when they brought it in for all the world as if she was expecting a summer boarder. Doc Harkins wouldn't allow on nothing being touched till the city gentleman was fit to calc'late where he was and what his real name was."

"They got Doc Harkins then? My! I had a feelin' the profession would come into it. Spring don't like a girl to come into ordinary doings.

Nothing less than an ellergint young gentleman as you say, and an auto . . . and a brown leather valise, maybe with his initials on, Clara?"

"Q. L. P. I helped Miss Hetty rub the dirt off a bit and we discovered them."

"That was good of you, Clara, though Miss Hetty used to be handy with the duster once upon a time and never needed any help of that sort. Still, as you say, Q. L. P. on the brown leather is significant enuff. And . . . the profession int it as well will cost something. What you might call going some into the liabilities of finance; which reminds me, Clara . . . that if Spring is reasonable to stop abed a day or so and give her bruises a chance to rub off, I'll be needin' you to step up a spell with your book about Lord and Lady Tremendous while I go to see her ma down Ladybird Farm."

"I could come around Saturday," said Clara, rising to depart and stumbling a bit in the awkwardness of a too-well-filled boot. "Lor', Mary," she went on, "these stockings of yours fills my boots so that my feet are kinder out of focus with 'em. I'll have to go slow a bit . . . suppose I couldn't have a peep at Spring Roper . . . just a minute. . . ." But Mary was tying on her bonnet behind the kitchen door.

"Miss Roper'll be delighted to see you Saturday,

Clara. Just now I'll call Benjamin to mind her a time while I walk up the road with you. We'll take a turn up past Miss Hetty's. I got that brown leather gentleman setting down like a bee in my mind, now that I know the ins and outs of the case."

She shouted up the yard for Benjamin, who came with a boiled look, due to overdoses of soap and hot water, about his face, and moving slowly as a crawfish.

CHAPTER III

LATE that night Mary Settler returned at the head of a procession of neighboring men with the "ellergint young gentleman" on a borrowed stretcher.

"It would be kind of comfortable for Q. L. P. to wake up tomorrow and know he could lie in for a week or so, and no bother to us," she said back over her shoulder. "Miss Hetty, she do take a deal of trouble with visitors, an' maybe it's natural she wants to make it cleanin' day for her parlor tomorrow. Praise be, I turned out my front room only yesterday, and he don't need be disturbed for a bit. Miss Hetty was likely to feel it terrible, her havin' to let the dust lie, when she's been used to a thorough clean-out once a week—even if she don't have need to use the parlor at all."

The man who had driven his own car clean through the heart of Miss Hetty's lilac bushes, wakened to find himself stripped of his clothes, and of almost any satisfactory reason. Instead of the gray overall suit and necessary equipment of a long distance motorist, he was now wearing a

shirt which was neither comfortable nor agreeable to his sensitive skin. The color of it was neither gray, nor blue, nor red, nor yellow, but had a chameleon effect when he held up one arm and let the light fall on it. Altogether it was a mean sort of garment with only one way of attaining a certain purpose, that purpose being to go just as far as its meanness allowed and not by any manner of persuasion, further.

However, he soon turned his attention from himself to his surroundings, and in a short time brought back his searching eyes to where they had started. He could make nothing of the place at all, and started to examine the different parts of his anatomy just in case they might also prove foreign to him. But everything seemed in place, except that there were certain discomforts whenever he lifted an arm too far or attempted any sort of movement whatever with his back or lower limbs.

Something he wanted to remember escaped him altogether. There had been a smashup, he knew that. A beastly-looking horse and cart had suddenly rounded the corner, madly bearing down upon him, before he could alter the course or the speed of the car. He remembered nothing whatever about an apology or what came afterwards. Now he was in a shaded room that looked very depressing. And somewhere in the corner of his mind

there was a 'bogie' telling him that he would have to stay there for some days, if not weeks.

Through a horizontal bar of vacancy just below the window shade which had been pulled down, and tied so that it could in no way escape its full duty, a shaft of bright yellow light cut in a direct, broad line to the floor. Nearer his bed and on the other side of the room a sulky darkness gave him no help whatever.

The sheets round his body were almost stiff with freshness and the faint smell of things newly laundered finished any calculations he was trying to make.

Towards one deep corner, buried in the darkness somewhere, a bluebottle-fly started to sing its way to the shaft of light under the window blind. Humming there in a revolving circle it struck the taut material of the blind, and the snap of wings and body came again and again to him, not altogether pleasantly.

Later on, through the closed door someone started a long refrain of modulated talking, which never seemed to alter, no, decrease, nor get any louder. It was Mary in the kitchen.

"She was just the sort of human creature I was expectin' after knowin' Spring for a night. One of the kind that wears big eyes in her head and hardly uses 'em at all 'cept to stare at you when

she don't seem to know what to say. Didn't take me long to just make out the size of things and which way they was goin', whether it was jump, or fall, or be pushed, and reckonin' on her havin' had a baby mostly once a year 'ntil the Lord signified to Graham P. to pass right along be means of the machinery in the steel works, which sort of hurried him, I can't see that she could hev done more'n she did."

This came to the man lying in the parlor, rather indefinitely, and though he could not make much out of it he felt stirred to get up and see for himself just what kind of a person it was who possessed such unqualified opinions. When he moved his foot, however, he felt a peculiar twitching in one knee, and sitting up was altogether a misery. Something like a burning needle traveled down the length of his spine and he lay down again with some relief.

". . . 'Course I told her, gentle-like, I'd got Spring fixed up all easy and peaceful, and her not to worry, but I could see that she was one o' them kind that keeps a tidy eye right on you all the time she's makin' believe and you thinkin' you got her fast and sure, but dreckly she's done her day's work, and there's nobody around to interrupt the deluge, you can bet your boots and stockings, Clara, she'd be makin' a horrible mess of her piller that night."

The woman's voice went on in the same strain,

never increasing, never diminishing, but always the same modulated rhythmical hum. The snatches of conversation floated to the man; but he got nothing more out of it than he had gained of the knowledge of his surroundings. When he had considered the chameleon shirt again, the dark objectionable pieces of furniture about him, the fly, and the insistent humming of the voices somewhere not very far off, he swore quietly.

This gave him some very direct evidence about himself. He was no longer a benumbed creature of circumstances. He was a living, breathing, unhappy man with a fierce resentment of some trick which had been played him by fate. He was strongly antagonistic to his present environment and to the humming sounds which came so repeatedly, and which only muddled his brain.

Then gradually his comprehension widened as if light were creeping on him, slowly, like the almost imperceptible creeping of dawn on a night sky.

He was in bed, wrecked up in some way, but just why, or how, he could not determine. An entanglement of strange faces and happenings wavered in and out of his brain. The faces must belong to the people concerned in the thing that had happened to him, he decided. Had he been part of a railroad accident? He knew that he had had some kind of a fall, but that was very indefi-

nite. He wondered if he should call out, and to whom?

He thought that if he could manage to think of something to say, he might call out loud enough to stop that ceaseless flow of talk in the kitchen.

It was getting horribly on his nerves and it was not the kind of thing at all he had been used to. Mentally he felt himself on a level with someone who had managed to bungle hopelessly into the servants' quarter of a private house, and it didn't suit him at all to be lying there apparently at the mercy of domestics and other people to whom he might have to say thank you for some benefits he had not yet discovered. With a flushed face he turned the thing over in his mind and tried to catch a little more of the conversation.

Mary Settler had evidently been through a whole volume of adventures which had pleased her that day and she was not stopping until her friend, Clara Hopkins, had taken a mental trip in the same direction.

“. . . I could just about see that this couple of dollars paid regular once a month was going to make a heap of difference to the thickness of the bread she was feeding the bunch of children on. None of your scraping, Clara, for her. I guess she'd think as much of a good-living stomach as she would of a good-living young man, and she'd

break up something tremendous if one of them bright-faced children had to be refused a second help of the breakfast-food, now advertised at twenty below cost."

Then to the young man came the harsh beating of words from Clara Hopkins' vocal organs.

"Suppose she was hitting up some, on account of you having all the pleasures and the bother of minding Spring after the accident. Did she say she could stop a spell?"

Mary took her full time again. "I don't mind sayin', Clara, that she had me sized up first go as a sort of interferin' person with my mind set on makin' a good deal of trouble outter the Aunt Susannah business, and until I come to the part of the deal where I kinder signed on as towel-flapper to Spring, she didn't seem to lo e none of the scare in her eyes. . . . What's eight or ten dollars a month more or less?"

"Eight or ten dollars? Why, Mary, you had it that Spring was to get seven a month . . . the way you make things reach out beats me. . . ."

"Well, Clara, I'd as soon make it eight or ten dollars less my own side of the day ledger, than have that Spring lamb double it under the extra weight of her Aunt Susannah, and her not even to speak, 'cept she gets the kick first of all to say it's her turn. There's some folks in this world who

don't mind taking another person's place in the corridor car the very first minit that person sees fit to walk out of it, leaving not so much as a newspaper or a twenty-five-cent novel to mark it as a claim if that person wants to come back again. Now I'm that person from yesterday, and I'm sitting tight just where that Aunt Susannah vacated when she expected that bit of a thing to step up, and play any tune she likes to rag, on account of her loosening the button of her bank account by that one hole. Sure as you're sitting there, Clara Hopkins, she vacated her auntship . . . and I'm going to travel a piece with the Graham P. lot and see something she's kinder missed."

What happened then even Clara Hopkins could not tell. She strained her ears and eyes as far as she could after the flying feet of Mary, who had dashed away from the kitchen at the sound of a sudden crash in the front room and some rather excited masculine shouting.

Clara was pleased that at last she heard the 'el-lergint gentleman' remark: "As there was no bell handy I had to fling the footstool at the door!"

Mary was then picking up the fragments and dislocated legs of the small wooden stool which had stood near his bed, and made quite a ragged tear in the paint of the parlor door. After a momentary pause her voice came down the passage.

"I dunno that a bell's so mighty handy. It might have gone clean through the panel of the door, and no knowin' who's walking down the other side of it."

Mary then adjusted the shade a little and the light filtered in. While the fly escaped somewhere behind the curtains, she took observations of the young man.

"I'd be ever so much obliged," began Quilter Lancelot Pendren, "if you would kindly tell me just what I'm supposed to be doing here?"

Mary cleared her throat for action.

"You're lyin' in my front parlor for a period of your holiday or whatever else you like to call it, and till such time as you'll learn again the proper use of your own legs. To all appearances you was born in a set of lilac bushes just a bit up the corner of the road. Up till now nobody was any the wiser but that the Q. L. P. on your valise might surely belong to you. Miss Hetty, her as owned the lilac bushes—same as the priviledge of havin' the accident right at her very front door—had you down for a thorough clean-out today; and that meaning that she never likes to put off her duty to her parlor, be as much as a hour, I took it upon my shoulders to remove you here be the assistance of Benjamin o' the yard and Hulky Smith, both good farm-helps, and not a cent worse off for knowin' it."

She stopped to pinch the quilt a little. To her eye there was nothing like a loose upper sheet so that the person lying beneath it did not find too much tightness a strain in trying to turn about.

"But what am I doing here at all? I know I started out to go somewhere, but . . ."

"That's a fact! Sure as my head you started out to go somewhere, but where you might hev got to isn't really for us to say. Mighty certain it wasn't a place you'd hev needed the things in that brown valise, seein' the speed you muster got up at that corner where the greengrocery department had you crowded." She pointed to the brown bag. "Miss Hetty wanted it that we take a note of the contents; but I'm not good digesting surprises, and these times there might be anything from dogs to explosions shipped in cases like that."

"You mean in my bag?"

"I do. Doc now he's sensible. He clean sat on Liz Hetty same as she was that fly. Said as how you'd maybe pass out any benefits you could spare after you'd been through them yourself. Miss Hetty she's holdin' the automobile against you; which isn't nearly so wrecked to bits as her lilac bushes."

"Ah, you've reminded me! The car! We've got so far."

"Certain. As you say you've got so far; but

what came after that part in your mind's business isn't for us to say. We've only got you down as Q. L. P."

"That's my name, of course. Quilter Lancelot Pendren."

Mary nodded her head calmly.

"We're obliged to you for that. Doc Harkins might like to communicate with your folks."

This made the young man angry immediately.

"Communicate nothing," he said sharply.

"You'd have the whole bunch down on me and I'd be treated as a blessed infant."

Mary again nodded.

"That's what you got to swaller for a week or two, anyway. Doc Harkins now . . ."

"I don't mind what I swallow, but I won't have my people know. It seems as if I've got into a mess and everything's doing Catherine wheels in my head, but I'll get myself out, I guess, as I got myself in. My father would go crazy before he got here if he knew I'd had a smash-up, and my sister . . . she'd probably take to her bed with nerves if she saw me now. Besides there are others to be considered. Women get frightened if they even smell a petrol leak."

"If your father was to go crazy before he got here, it'd be unwise to tell him, maybe, and as to your sister, Mr. Pendren, sir, if she wanted to take

to her bed right here I dunno where we'd put her, 'less we turned Benjamin in with the horse."

Mary's humor turned things a bit in the right direction, and the young man laughed quietly.

"I wish you could tell me . . . tell me—there's something I can't break through."

"I'd leave it if I was you," said Mary. "You done enuff breakin' through when you spilled into Liz Hetty's lilac bushes."

"Perhaps it will all come presently. I'm just a bit off my wheels, I can see, and it won't do to force things."

"You was clean off your wheels, sir, that's the trouble. If you'd stuck to them, according to opinions, it's likely you might have sailed right along to Miss Hetty's best bedroom where you could have taken things easier than you did in the garden."

Pendren could not help smiling.

"Are you the nurse or . . . or the boss of this establishment?" he asked.

"I'm both and the whole lot in one, sir, whichever you like to call up first. My name's Settler, a good strong name—hearty and encouragin' to fix your mind on if there's anything you want doin'. Mary Settler, and what I can't do with my hands, I generally makes up with me tongue. Now, what's your order, sir, seein' you've rung the bell which is only an ordinary wooden praying stool."

SAMARITAN MARY

31

"I'd like to get into some of my own clothes which are in the bag there, though for the life of me I can't remember . . . Oh, damn!" he went on, "perhaps we'll know more about everything when we open the bag."

He ran his hands over his face a couple of times as if seeking to brush away unpleasant memories and reinstate better ones.

Mary brought the bag. "It's locked," she said.

"Then where the . . . oh, I wish I could get more sense out of my head. Hunt round in my clothes and see if there are any keys. I don't seem to remember even that."

She brought the suit he had been wearing. It had been cleaned of all the garden soil and stain of the accident, but it still looked hopelessly crumpled and rather like a second-hand renovation.

"I can't wear that," he said, disturbed again.

"You can't while you're on your back, sir," said Mary, searching the pockets for the keys. "I guess it will be precisely the thing you'll be needin', like you might want your breakfast, immediately you feel ready to be kicking about again."

"Oh, what a shocking mess I've made of myself."

"No blame to you, sir. It was that rampageous horse."

She brought out a handful of letters, pocket-

books, oddments, and finally the keys from one of the inside pockets of his coat. Then the bag was opened.

A change of underwear, socks, collars, and a pair of gorgeous pyjamas and some handsome scarlet leather bath slippers were in it.

"Looks like a couple of days' delay whatever I was on," he said.

"An' now it's more like a couple of weeks," Mary put in. "You'll be glad of the underwear, and we'll get you into something respectable right away."

Pendren looked irritated and nervous.

"It doesn't tell me what I want to know," he said.

"What was that, sir?"

"What the deuce I came to this part for at all. Something's gone to sleep in my head. Say, Mrs. Settler . . ."

"Plain Mary if you don't mind, sir. I got no claim to Mrs. an' it only reminds me of the mistake I made long ago."

"A mistake? What was it?"

"The mistake of allowin' my mind to go galavantin' on ideas I had no claim on. You'd like Benjamin to come in and help you, wouldn't you? And I don't mind sayin' he'll take a bath before he does. Never saw such a chap. It's on account

of . . . Well, that's maybe his mistake too, but he'll find it out. . . . Mistakes come home to roost same as chickens do. Mine came back through a very small hole in the fence, sneakin' home on tip-toe, one at a time. No matter! I recognize them."

She went out of the room carrying a fly that she had imprisoned in her plump warm hand. The young man lay there wondering. He thought that she was a very interesting kind of person, perhaps more interesting than anyone he had ever met.

Mary returned to Clara, who had sat straining her ears in the kitchen all the time.

By her eyes she expected much; but by the flutter in the older woman's manner she knew that she wasn't going to get any particulars just then.

"Just run up the yard, Clara, and turn that Benjamin out o' the turnips. The Q. L. P., which is Pendren by the last quarter of it, has sort of surprised himself and us by a fresh turn. I'll just strain off a little of this barley and put in a touch of lemon. . . ."

Clara ran into the sunlight with wonderful agility. Mary looked out of the door.

Benjamin never looked more like himself than he did at that moment. Beads of nervous perspiration ran down his hair and neck. With the full sun on him, he might have been some great ground insect that carried a hulking, flat body and strag-

gling crooked legs. He was awkward, genial, and very slow-minded. When he bent to his work he did it in sections and deliberately uncoiled in jerky, distinct movements suggesting the opening of a something made to unbend by arrangement of different little kicking springs. One could almost hear a battery of snaps and jars as Benjamin o' the yard stood to full height. Clara stopped at the edge of the turnip patch.

"Mary wanted me to come . . ." she began.

Benjamin wiped his face by three or four different movements.

"I guess . . . I didn't kinder think . . . you'd come . . . on your own account," he said.

CHAPTER IV

QUILTER LANCELOT PENDREN found himself in the same position on his back in Mary Settler's parlor nearly a week afterwards. He had settled with an exceedingly bad grace into a full-tempered invalid subject to occasional bursts of positively hysterical fury. These Mary dealt with in her own way.

"Nothin' like a real good blow-off once in a while to shake up the liver and give it a chance to feel it's doing something," she said; "I mind the time when Ab Keziah, our preacher, was teachin' the Sunday School class, and making it a great matter when things go contrary-wise, to be 'gentle as the dove,' and gladsome as a young lamb sporting in green pastures! Jest then . . . someone gets up to go to the melodian, to play the hymn for the children to sing: 'Gentle as the zephyr breezes,' and treads sudden-like on Ab's crop of corns which he wasn't expecting. What Ab says then wasn't altogether consistent, seeing he gets worked up something awful . . . but it did the class a heap of good, and done more than anything to mak-

ing the children go home, 'Gentle as the dove,' leavin' Ab more like a raging lion, which nobody minded so long as it was him had the experience."

At the end of the first week Pendren's ill humor had lessened somewhat. He wore cool clothing out of his valise, and Mary saw to it that it was 'rinsed out regular' so that he might have plenty of cool shirts to change in the warm weather. The room had been set out in white covers and his brushes and shaving gear put handy. The rest of the parlor, it is true, looked at variance with these arrangements, as it contained the best of Mary's traditional hopes and ornaments, stored as treasures all her life, but now stacked together on the sofa and chairs in reckless abandonment.

Pendren eked out an existence by trying to imagine what the rest of the house might be like? Whose voice it was that seemed foreign to the things around him? If there were children, or a child even, who sometimes laughed from a room not very far away? And when it would be time to cut the local medico out of things once and for all.

He lay under the spell of Mary Settler's goodness. He wondered if he could suggest payment. Her open countenance was filled with a frank charity which made him afraid to mention the subject,

but daily he worked over these different points, and slept on them. He never remembered sleeping so well before.

The voice that occasionally came to him like a child's was that of Spring Roper lying just a few paces down the passage to the left.

As the days grew in peace and luxury for her, she found herself opening out toward the love and goodheartedness of Mary Settler, as a flower opens to the sun. Mary for her own reasons had kept the knowledge of the young man's proximity from Spring. Mary had certain little ideas in her mind, which, though scarcely formed, gave her a considerable amount of pleasure to think about, and which she confided to Clara Hopkins one late evening.

"Seems like up till lately I ain't been of much consequence, so to speak, Clara. Five years come Thanksgiving, since that poor soul died in me arms, havin' walked more'n she ought to get way from a man who hadn't no notions of how to treat his own beasts, much less a wife. You mind the time Mrs. Casey died, Clara. There ain't been much since, barrin' Benjamin's operation on his nose and Jimmy Pedler's heart which carried him off in a fit of over beer an' recklessness. Can't say as I've ever settled comfortable in me bed a night since, seein' I got kind of used to pickin' up stitches

dropped out of some poor soul's constitution. The Lord gives us all something to do, an' when an odd job happens to be pleasing to the person, it comes like a chill to your bones to be left idle for much of a while.

"Praise be, Clara, it's my luck in, now, to have these two young things under my wing, same time. I'm wonderin' if both ain't sufferin' much the same kind of complaint. Spring wants a job the minit she gets out of bed which is what is making me keep her pinned to the mattress, till I've got me mind made up about her. Q. L. P., which is Pen-dren, seems to want to hurry his business same sort of way, and I don't know if I'm right to encourage any extra special hurry in either of them, seeing the Lord has put them both in my charge for some reason not yet plain."

She brought her voice down a trifle.

"Did it ever hit you, Clara, in the right spot of your reason, that all the books you read comin' and goin' from and to your work, was all took maybe from things in real, human life? How'd the man, writing, know the secret innards of Lady Betsy Clamphoffen's heart if it wasn't that he's met up with the same thing somewhere in the world? You take it from me, Clara, books is made up from what's happening round our very feet, and us fool enough not to see it, till it's put in black and white,

and charged twenty-five cents, or half a dollar, to take it home where perhaps it started."

Clara was taking her turn at the ironing, and one of Spring's ragged slips was being pressed into shape, ready for the needle that Mary had threaded.

"You mean Spring and Mr. Pendren, Mary? You ain't told her about him, have you?"

"Not a word. I want it to be a particular kind of a double surprise for both of them. It's for all the world like your book, as I said—that rampaging horse, and Spring tumbling off of the cart, the auto, and the handsome young man! Where's your sense, Clara? I'm bringing them together like the pages in one chapter. There's a heap of interesting things goin' to happen right in this very house. She don't know as much of him as one of the flies spinning round his window, and he's only dreamin' . . . dreamin' . . . It's some business he can't remember a thing about is on his mind. Comes of landing on your head too sudden. Something that was important got dislodged in that hurry and fell out of his mind when he tumbled on his head. 'Tisn't as if we could go and hunt it up, either. Miss Hetty and me picked up all there was an' . . ."

"Penny Murtle once got hit too sudden on the ground on account of falling off her father's barn

and it took near a year to persuade her she had a head at all. She used to go roun d feeling her face and saying it had no top to it."

"Poor thing. I suppose she recovered."

"Oh, yes, she got over it."

"How'd she get over it?"

"Somebody took her a trip to Broadway and showed her a winder full of hats. She found her head pretty smart and came back with three of them packed in a hamper. Since then she's been all right."

"So she oughter with three heads in a hamper, Clara."

"I was speaking of hats, Mary."

"Wouldn't be any use takin' Q. L. P. all the way to Broadway and showin' him a case of hats, to bring back the piece of himself he's missing," Mary went on. "It's something to do with his father and the rister that takes to her bed every time there's trouble around. Say, Clara, that gets me beat! If there's trouble around why should she take to her bed?"

"Some folks can't help it. They want to be out of the way." Mary stood in the middle of the kitchen, her arms hooked at her hips, and her face filled with wonderment.

"I can't quite get that, Clara, tryin' to get out of the way of trouble when it's comin' straight for

you is only encouragin' it to come on, and make a mess of things generally. What you want to do, is to put up your fists to it. Go clean and hard for it, or walk right through it, and get it under your boots, then when it's down and out, jes' wipe your feet, and scrape your boots on the door iron. That's how I'd serve trouble, but say—this bit that's wearin' Q. L. P. to a frazzle, if we could get that part hitched to the rest of him, he'd be a pretty fair sample of a successful invalid."

"What does Doc say?"

"Doc wants it that he lies quiet for a time; but I see no chance of a calm sea till he gets back his reason for comin' across that accident at all. Now I'm thinkin' about those hats o' Penny Murtle's. Looks like they was the most needed thing to remind her she had a top to her head. If we could think up something and spring it sudden on the gentleman in my parlor, it might just happen his machinery might get a jump and start off same as if it was adjusted by means of a screw and a little oiling."

"I wonder what his business is, Mary."

"Mostly changing his clothes three times a day, and eating his dinner when it ought to be supper, I should say. He's soft goods, Clara, made one width, easy crumpled, and selvedge down both sides. There's silk socks in his bag and . . ."

"How many, Mary? That's the way to work it out."

"There's four pair off him and the ones he accidented in."

Clara looked knowing.

"That means, the business he was on would take him five weeks at least, if he was allowing one pair a week."

Mary considered and shook her head.

"Won't work with only one change of underclothes. S'pose he set out from home with a fresh lot, and this one to change; that allows him a week, and a second week, allowin' the weather don't warm up too much to be uncomfortable."

She strode over to Clara and emphasized her words by laying her hands broad side on the table.

"Clara, I've got it! Q. L. P. is on business that is open to keep him a week or two, or less."

"Did he bring any nightshirt with him, Mary?"

Mary backed to the stove.

"Now we're off the track again. There was one pair of pyjamas, double-striped, with bunches of colored cord across the front jes' like he was playin' the drum in the new town band."

"One pair of pyjamas?" That certainly settled Clara's argument.

"I should calc'late on the one pair lasting him a week or more. What 'd you say, Clara?"

"I guess we're out of this, Mary, neither of us bein' married women."

"Married women don't count as much as a hill o' beans in this, Clara. We've got to find out something satisfactory, or we're not doing our best by Q. L. P."

"Could we ask someone, Mary?"

"Ask 'em what?"

"How long a gentleman as ellergint as any in the top set of New York or Boston allows for one pair of pyjamas to last decent without getting them laundered? Mary . . . p'r'aps Benjamin could tell us."

Mary put up a finger.

"Benjamin couldn't recognize a pair of pyjamas from what them chaps in the wild west shows wears. He's more used to a common, ordinary, old-fashioned nightshirt, or what he's been workin' in be the day."

"Well, we ain't getting any towards knowin' Pendren's business, Mary."

"I got it that Q. L. P. started out in his own auto with something important in his mind because of it requiring all his attention, and no side-trackin', or stoppin' for refreshment by the way."

"But what was the something important, Mary?"

"Oh, keep shut there, Clara, and give me a

chance! I got it that Q. L. P. had a mind to stop as little as he could over the business, and jes' threw careless-like a change of clo'es into his valise 'cos his man wasn't handy to pack."

Clara's eyes sparkled.

"There's something real true in that, Mary."

"Sure as life there is. Now why wasn't his man handy to pack? Because his father was behind him slappin' round with his tongue, and hettin' up something tremendous to get Q. L. P. started."

"But why? What was the business?"

"Q. L. P. dashes for the elevator," Mary went on, as if she were not stopping any side of the finish, "presses the button twice to bring it to the ninth floor, keeps pressin' to make it pull up immediate, steps in with his valise in one hand, and a lump of the elevator in the other, to keep him balanced, quits the ninth floor as if he had put his feet into something that had no bottom to it, slides down like a rush of cold air in a wind flue, steps out again like a flash of lightning, presses the button to send the elevator back to the shed, and rushes blind for the auto house. He stows his valise under the seat, hitches up the electric meter, not waitin' to kiss anybody good-by, or even to wave his handkerchief; and inside two minutes he's . . . right in front of things. Then . . ."

Suddenly she paused and caught Clara's eye. It

was another fixed query there that made her falter.

"Seems like there oughter be a woman in it, Clara, to be exactly right,—still——"

"Mary, perhaps he was settin' out to get married."

Clara thought that Mary's solutions suggested such a possibility.

"With five pairs of silk socks, and one pair of pyjamas, and as handsome a pair of red bath slippers as would go on anyone's feet without objecting to being walked on?"

"Bath slippers? You didn't mention them before, Mary. That's a clean case of his expecting to stop over a fortnight. Whatever it was, his business meant him to stop a couple of weeks, Mary. I can see that."

Mary passed over this. "More like he was out to hunt down a man. If there's been women in it, he'd be sure to carry a difference in colored shirts and some extra wrist cuffs to tidy up when he hadn't time to change all his clothes. Look here, Clara, it all points the one way same as a finger-board on the subway. There was mortal hurry for Q. L. P., or he was going to miss something for sure. He was going . . . to . . . hunt . . . a man . . . down."

"In a pair of bath slippers and five pairs of silk socks? I don't agree to that, Mary."

"Well, I'll agree on me own! Listen to me, Clara. Five pair of socks just about does the trick if it's a man he's chasing. Why five pairs? Because he's going good and hard and needs a change pretty regular or his feet would sweat him to blisters."

"But he don't use his feet in an auto."

"He was calc'lating, maybe, on the breakdown of the auto and was ready to take his walking ticket any minit. Whatever got in his way, Q. L. P. was ready to run clean through it, like Liz Hetty's lilac bushes."

"He didn't mean to run clean through them, Mary. More like," Clara hushed her voice, "he did mean to run through somebody who'd done him a harm, or his father."

"That sounds real good. We're a parcel of private sheriffs, I should say." Mary agreed by a flash of her eyes and went on quickly.

"Now the person he's after must 'v been handling the till too easy, or workin' the confidence trick on somebody belonging to the family. Whatever it is, it's a serious business concern, for that young man is business from his brains to his toes. Land, Clara, the way he kicks the bedclothes off him when he's thorough mad! Oh, he's business all right, though he's that good-looking he might be travelin' two trunks and a bag o' golf sticks!"

"You think he's hunting a man, Mary?"

"That's the color of it, Clara."

"And he ain't likely to be appreciatin' an interruption!"

"I wouldn't put it past him to scent something out of the way, special and worth hanging around for, if he was to see Spring passing his door."

"You think that Spring 'd stop him chasing business as important as you've just said?"

"I think she'd stop him if he had that same business by the tail of its shirt, and extra good material in the making, to give him a long chance. She's picking up color and flesh every day, poor lamb. Once he catches sight of Spring . . ."

Clara held up the frayed shirtwaist she had been ironing as a warning to Mary.

"Look at that! If he catches sight of her in that, he won't be forgetting his business for long. Ain't she got nothing better in her trunks? Her mother told Benjamin she'd be sending along her best dress and a set of underclothes."

"I been thinkin', Clara." Mary's eyes softened from the story to something nearer her heart.

"I been thinkin', there's the fruit money . . ."

"That fruit money's been stretched longer and longer every week. You'd think it was a roll of bills as long as from here to Jake Helder's store!"

Mary said nothing, for Clara was looking right

at her and there were certain lights of suspicion in her eyes.

"I've known three lots of folks have a peck at that little bit of profit in the last two months," Clara said. "Sure to goodness, Mary, it ain't elastic. What's left of it wouldn't buy more'n a pair of stockin's, double-heeled and extra thick knees, I should say."

"Well, there's always Hek Dean to loan me a little till next crop of potatoes, Clara. You don't count your blessings as you should."

Clara looked defiant.

"My blessings don't come outter givin' up everything but the clo'es on my back, as yours do, Mary. And if Hek Dean loans you any money it will be on the property, and everybody knows that Hek has had his eyes on this piece since you made it anything at all."

"Havin' his eye on my property won't hurt nobody, or me," said Mary. "He's fair nice to me always when I mention a bit of business to him."

Clara shot her head forward and held up one hand.

"Mary, say . . . you been having a deal with Hek already? I can see something kind of unsettled in your eyes now."

Mary blew an imaginary speck of dust from a cup of milk she was preparing for Spring as a

nightcap. There really was no need for the action except as a means of avoiding Clara's eyes. Clara had an uncomfortable way of getting folks into a corner, when she thought that a corner was the proper place for them.

Mary was not ready to face her for a minute or two.

"I ain't had business with Hek for quite a year, and that's a fact," she said.

She placed a fringed napkin on a small tray and put the cup of milk ready with a cracker.

"That means you've had business with him already anyhow, and him holdin' a bill over your head, I suppose, if you ain't paid it back."

"Hek and me understands each other, Clara. That reminds me I must find time to run over tomorrow if things'll let me. Hek's girl as married Mack Spinney ought to be up to her time now and a hand needed with the baby. Say, Clara, do you think she'll take it well? She's uncommon fretful over a bit of a burnt finger, times."

Clara tied on her cape and took up her hat irritably.

"Cora Spinney's not the kind to find it any better whether it's a burnt finger, or a baby. I'll come over Saturday, Mary, and read to Spring. Good night."

Mary went to the door with her. Her eyes were

steadier now and she arranged Clara's cape with trembling fingers.

"You do be 'n a mortal hurry some nights, Clara."

"I got things on me mind that needs a long sleep off," said Clara.

"If you're not too busy next week, I'd be glad of a hand makin' up that piece of colored muslin I got from the store. Spring won't be easy much longer on the flat of her back, and I'm scared some that Q. L. P. might discover her just as she is, which is hardly decent, she's that much out of things."

"When did you get that piece of colored muslin, Mary? I never heard of it before."

There was ice in Clara's words. Mary folded her hands to keep them still.

"I got it up Jake Hedy's store. It was the last of the roll—and only lying there for the dust to settle on. I got it bargain rates and . . ."

"An' you'll be payin' it outter the fruit money wh'ch has all been used long ago settlin' up other people's affairs."

Mary smiled, and the light of the evening sky lit up her face in the doorway.

"Out of that . . . or the potato crop," she said, and Clara walked away without another word.

"It's real nice of Clara to be so mad about the

SAMARITAN MARY

51

property," Mary told herself, and stood some time staring across the fields to where Hek Dean's little house sat squat, and faintly marked by the night lights against the open sky.

CHAPTER V

"CLARA will be over in half an hour," said Mary Settler, fixing on her things to go and call on Mrs. Spinney. "She's bringing her book to read you a piece, and it won't do you a morsel of harm to rest a bit longer, seein' you've been kinder bringing up a family before you've even got the start of one yourself.

"What you don't know about your mother's children ain't yet been found out, and I'm not handing on any information that's merely a bundle of knots for other people to try and unravel. A live wire spittin' up sparks, regular as should be, ain't been doin' duty to the main machinery any less than you've been doin' yours to your mother, I should say; and you can take a couple of weeks off now without wearin' your heart out rubbin' it against your soul in arguments about a waste of time."

"But I must find something to do . . . presently," said Spring.

"You won't be needin' a pair of opera glasses to help you search it out," Mary continued. "When that little job comes along I don't mind sayin' it'll

be just about as nice a lookin' thing as ever suited a girl of your particular kind. You see if it ain't a regular heart to heart, confidential, understanding kinder job! Don't you go worrying your head, anyway. I'd recognize that identical ladylike sort of stunt, in the dark, if it was trying to give us the hide-and-seek dodge. I'm going to bring it to the hitching post, if I've got to go out and carry it in, struggling, in my two hands . . . and remember, it ain't no kind of common chore either. Once Mary Settler's foot goes down on a thing, that thing is as good as trapped. I'm wide awake on it, Lovey, and you hold on to that and put all your chips on me."

She came to the foot of the bed where Spring Roper lay, and lifted a piece of material that had been carefully cut into a simple house frock. The hem at the bottom was neatly turned up, but the tape facing had not been sewn down.

"That's another good and proper reason why you shouldn't be fretting about gettin' out of bed. No high-minded girl would be wanting to wear a thing like that, unfinished."

Spring stretched out two shell-tinted slender arms.

"Oh, is it for me, Mary? Really for me?"

"Well . . ." Mary held it out, "it's not exactly the kinder thing me or Benjamin, or even Clara,

who's figure hasn't gone to ghost's yet a bit, would be thinkin' of wading into."

She left the dress hanging near the foot of the bed and turned to go.

"Sure it's for you, Spring; and if the potatoes is good this year, an' don't need the eye-doctor, which is after all only an ordinary kitchen knife turned once or twice in precisely the same spot, and if there's no heavy trouble with blight or other contagions, it's more than likely Jake Heldy, the storekeeper, will be takin' a trip to town to search out other things suitable to that bit of colored muslin."

She went through the door without saying good-by. It was part of her splendid philosophy that when one said "Good-by" one necessarily meant good-by; and she herself never wished to bring about any such thing when taking temporary leave of a person she desired to see again.

"Good morning or good night don't happen to be such a compromise on one as 'Good-by,'" she said once. "When I've done with Hek Dean, or Jake Heldy, and them both paid off, and nothin' owing to spoil the stamped receipt I'm holdin' against them, then it's good-by good and proper."

Mary Settler had gone off to do her visiting, leaving Spring Roper in the one room across the passage, and the "ellergint gentleman," in the other

across the same passage. She had not mentioned to either of the young people that their rooms were separated only by a stretch of amber sunlight that filtered in through the passage door, and that the only chaperon they were likely to have until Clara Hopkins and her book arrived was a merry and particularly discreet sunbeam.

To forward her own schemes, Mary had not even whispered of the young man's adventure. She knew that the girl would have begged to get out of bed if she had imagined that anyone else was ill in the house also; and Mary was not ready for this. Pendren had been surly and inclined to be feverish and muddled at times, and the doctor had advised no immediate action on Mary's part other than that suggested by Pendren himself.

All the time he had lain there, the man had only one special appeal. His business needed his rapid recovery. It must be understood that when there was the slightest chance of getting himself and the car into anything like running order again, he must not be delayed at any cost.

His head was stupid, he told Mary one day, as she swarmed over the floor with a polishing rag, and made comments from any position she happened to be in, even if it was just under the fringe of his bedcover.

"Wheels," he said, "cursed wheels running

round and round and round in my head. They never seem to stop."

Mary had paused with the floor cloth in hand. Her eyes widened as she came out of the dark from beneath his bed to the splash of light that cut in a bright shaft through the window.

"It's a wonder to me," she said, "that you haven't been clean run over in these two last days. Must be something terrible to have all that traffic spinning round in your head."

It was the same day he had asked her to bring him his pocketbook that he might try to work out a little of the trouble which seemed to be causing the congestion of ideas in his brain.

"It's that piece of business jes' eating your mind like a worm," she went on, searching for the pocketbook and hoping that there might be something in it to give him a trifle of peace.

While she adjusted the room, young Pendren had fidgeted and fussed with shaking fingers among the contents of his pocketbook. There was only his long indrawing of breath and the gradual letting out of it again to break the silence. Mary rummaged about and tried to appear easy, though she was far from it.

"There's nothing here," said Pendren at last. "But I think I've got a grip of something. It all came so suddenly . . ."

"Did he take much money?" Mary took her first plunge, thinking to help him as well as herself. The young man looked steadily at her.

"How did you know?"

"Well, I guessed there was larceny, or embezzlement, in it."

"Ah . . . now we're getting at it. You are putting me right on the track. Now wait a minute. . . ."

Mary felt for once in her life that she could not wait half as long. She had never been so interested in anything in all her life as the arranging of this little plan of hers, and to get it going smoothly needed a clear passage first of all.

Two minutes passed. He struggled to his elbow.

"Say, do you know anybody about these parts of the name of . . . of . . . Roper?"

The woman reeled as if shot. "Name of what?" she said uncertainly.

"Roper. I think I've got it right."

"Better make sure." She was palpitating so much that she thought her heart was rising to choke her.

"Yes. Here it is, in the notebook. Graham P. Roper. That's the man."

"Is it *him* you're after?" Mary nearly screamed; but the calm of her nature brought her voice down to normal.

"Well, I want to get him first of all. He's in it, of course, but I'm not anxious to make a friend of him, you may be sure. Do you know anything about him? Can I get in touch easily without his knowing it?"

Mary spread her hands on her heart. Then she held them up to stop him saying any more.

"Praise be. You can't touch him any kind of way if you was to engage the longest arm of a steam crane and hitch it to a hundred fire ladders. He's beyond that. . . ."

"Then he's dead. Thank goodness!"

"Don't go thanking so easy. Sure, he's dead, and higher up than the power of the law of the land."

"Did he leave any family or a widow?"

"Jest a bunch of hard workers that's . . ."

"Hard workers? Have they got any money?"

Mary considered. She thought that she ought to go slowly.

"They're mostly women folks, I think, but . . ."

"Ah, then we can fight them easily."

He fell back on his bed, gasping, his tension of thought relaxed.

Mary flashed round.

"Depends," she said. "Women is apt to be hefty at times. If it ain't with their fists it's with other things nature's give them. You beware of

nature, young man. It can strike harder sometimes than a man's blows. What's the use, anyway, when Graham P. is dead?"

Pendren paused and spoke slowly. He was rather spent with the excitement.

"Yes . . . you're right. Anyway we'll leave it, meantime, and I'll write to my father later on when I'm . . . I'm easier a bit."

Mary had flown to the kitchen for a refreshing drink to repair the effects of the exertion he had gone through. Her mind was wheeling like a bird over some newly found prey. Any minute she would be able to swoop down and pick up fresh information that would help her work out a solution perhaps to help the family that she had practically taken under her wing.

That night she confided her news to the ever receptive Clara.

"Sure it was a man he was hunting down. Sakes alive, and it was that dear, dead man belonging to the . . . Ropers." She whispered every word and scarcely said the last one.

Clara opened her mouth and turned crimson. She was agitated beyond expression. It was as if she were living in the pages of something she had been lying awake all hours to read. She was afraid to speak.

"You keep shut, Clara," Mary admonished.

"Whatever comes of this trouble, the only way to stop a fight is to push Spring forward into the ring, and let her use her innercent eyes and ways to entangle him. I believe in that sort of thing and it always works if there's good material in the net. You get me, Clara? He'll let the whole bunch off with a very small amount of fist work if he knows Spring through. It's likely too he'll hand out something handsome, 'stead of punches, if he gets in touch with that silver, pool-eyed bit of a thing as is ma to my little lamb. But we must go slow a bit. Shove Spring forward first chance he's feeling like anything out of bed. Land, to think of all this going on in my very house, under my very nose, and me not smelling it until this very day!"

She also pumped the girl a little, very gently.

"Speakin' of your poppa and his ways of tryin' to make good for the early bunch of you, Spring, was he ever be his own right settled in a business, maybe canned meat, or soap, or somethin'—other than the red-hot machinery of the Pynes folks? Might he hev ever left your mother a shade of a while to settle in, say, New York, or thereabouts?"

"He often left us," said Spring. "But he always sent mother the money he got for working away. And he came back again every Saturday night, or Thanksgiving, or Christmas, and we had

a good time then! We were very fond of father, even if he didn't ever make much good at his business. He was clever at teaching us, and he could recite beautiful poetry he'd made up while he was away at his work. Mostly it was about mother. I know quite a lot of it."

Mary nodded slowly. She had gained something out of this, but it was not altogether practical.

"Yes, I know the kind, Lovey. Makes your eyes run from the start of the piece. You get unsettled in your throat and your stomach directly the piece is give out by the preacher and the person sayin' it comes on the stage to bow. So your poppa was a clever head at making words. Well, it reminds me of a parrot my ma had that roamed the kitchen as frequent as the flies, on'y more welcome. Sakes alive, that bird could talk, Spring. He'd fix his eye on the sugar bowl or the cracker box, and he'd start out, express behind you, and you listening with both ears and busy with your eyes on something. When he'd finished talking a good long while, he'd desert. And with him would go a piece of sugar, or something out of a box with no lid on. He was a cute one and no argument. Always talking, talking, talking! And off with something when your back was turned."

Spring's eyes were wide with amazement.

"Why, father wasn't a bit like that! He'd recite

the most perfect pieces, but he wouldn't steal things while he did it."

Mary calmed her.

"Land, Spring, whatever put that into your head? Why, I wouldn't hev thought that about the curious talking bird. You see, he was some absent-minded. It's mostly the case with folks that has a lot to say in somebody else's kitchen. Jes' a mite absent-minded. That's all it is."

Since the incident in Pendren's room, Mary remained quiet. Quilter Lancelot Pendren said no more about his business. The trouble on his mind kept him in a most querulous mood. He was still simmering when Mary went off to visit Hek Dean's daughter, Cora Spinney, and this very action in leaving the house helped the developments Mary had set her heart on considerably, although really Cora Spinney had nothing whatever to do with it.

CHAPTER VI

HALF an hour passed; but Clara Hopkins had not arrived with her book. To Spring, who lay watching a large cantankerous fly on the window shade, it seemed more than half an hour that Mary had been gone to make her call on Cora Spinney.

The house was very still. Up in the fields Benjamin worked at his row and cautioned a weary-eyed horse every now and then.

"Guess you think I'm a kind of near relation owing you money and not in a hurry to pay you back again," he said, slapping the nose of the creature suddenly and playfully. "I'm more of a perfect stranger to you, old hoss, till I've finished here. Shunt! Yussuh!"

The afternoon wore on and the sunbeam stole away from the passage between the two rooms.

Spring Roper began to dream slowly; the fly sang an accompaniment to her dreams. Presently she noticed it, and sat up in bed, stretching out a delicate, entreating hand. The fly hummed and described an invisible circle round and round the room.

"Oh, don't, don't do that!" Spring cried. "You're like me, you can't get out, even though

the door is open. Why don't you go through? Because you're silly like I am. I could get up this minute and go out and work; but I don't, because really I don't want to."

Across the passage the young man heard the full soft voice; but he took it that somebody else would answer the voice, and waited. Only the tap, tap of beating wings on the blind came through the doors.

"I wish you'd stop, fly." The voice came clearer, for the fly was humming in another corner and had stopped slapping the blind. "If I'd gone to my Aunt Susannah now I should have been exactly like you. Beating about and making a fuss. There's always the door; but, isn't it funny, we never use it?"

The fly answered by swooping down on to the cover of the bed, and up into the air again, complaining vituperatively all the time.

"You very nearly went out that time, fly," Spring murmured. "Are you blind, or cowardly? When a person hasn't the courage to do the only thing that's of any use, she must be one or the other."

"Not always!"

The exclamation apparently came from somewhere in the front part of the house, but how, Spring was almost afraid to think. She lay listening breathlessly. The voice had seemed to be a man's, yet the only man she knew of in the place was

Benjamin, and he had only looked at her through the window so far, and had never done more than pull his hat down over his face by way of greeting.

"They might be considering other people," the strange voice which seemed to come out of space, continued.

The young man waited again. The silence began to throb about him and he felt that he had been talking to darkening vacancy. But Spring was only considering. "Of course," she said slowly and nervously. "They might be considering other people . . . but . . . I never thought of that."

The frankness of the tone did not escape young Pendren. He felt for the first time that there was a child in the house, yet withal a child with some considerable reason in her mind. The easy philosophy of her first remarks marked her as a reasoning young thing perhaps a trifle undeveloped. It pleased him to think about her more than anything he had come across for days. Whoever she was, she was not of the type he had imagined an inhabitant of Mary Settler's house would be. He had seen only Benjamin, with his shock of a head and his genial grin, besides Mary herself.

"You see, I was talking to the fly," said Spring when she had located the direction of the voice.

"There was really no need for him . . . for it . . .

to consider anybody but itself. The door *is* open and it *could* have gone out."

A short cough, as if he were clearing his throat, came through the space, then the young man said smartly:

"If the door *is* open and the fly *could* have gone out, why don't you?"

Another interval and again the silence throbbed for both.

The fly had settled in one corner of the room and was no longer taking an active part in proceedings.

"Is your door open?" The question was put so mildly that the young man scarcely heard it.

"Yes, it is, for once, thank goodness." The last word was almost cut off by the sharpness of the tone, and following this Spring heard a weary sigh and some smothered complaint.

"Then it looks as if both of us are as foolish as the fly."

He took her up quickly.

"Oh . . . blow the fly! Look here, I'm tired of this. If you've got anything interesting to read, I wish you'd let me have it. I've never been so bored with myself before. . . ."

"If you could wait a little, Mary Settler will be back, or Clara Hopkins. Clara reads out of a book, the most interesting stories."

"Oh, my. . . ." He smothered the last word advisedly.

Then came Spring's voice carefully attentive.

"Whatever is the matter? Are you very bad?"

"Worse than that. I thought that everybody knew it."

"I didn't, but I guessed it! Mary's the Samaritan, you know; she's always picking people up out of trouble. You must be in trouble or you wouldn't be here."

"Did she pick you up?"

"Yes. I was part of the accident, didn't you know?"

"Is that all? I was the *whole* accident. Didn't you know?"

A dead quiet reigned after this and then there was a shuffling of bare feet. He heard it distinctly, as Spring crossed the floor searching the room for something.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," she called through the door. "There is only one book here and I'm afraid you . . . you wouldn't care for it."

"What is it? Anything will do."

"It's a Bible. I'm afraid I'll have to throw it across because I'm . . . I'm not quite dressed."

The fly started a round of the room again with startling and whirling velocity. Spring waited, leaning against a chair, for she was weak with lying

in bed, and her frame shivered with some nervousness.

"Don't throw it." His tone struck her as final and perhaps a little masterful. "I can wait, thank you."

"Yes. I don't think one ought to throw a Bible," came quietly from Spring as she climbed back to bed.

Later on an idea occurred to her. She had this young man on her mind and it never struck her as anything out of the ordinary that she was in somewhat the same capacity as he was, though he occupied the parlor. It would have been just as natural if the kitchen had also been converted into a temporary hospital. If there had been a dozen people concerned in the affair Spring would have known they were all under Mary Settler's care.

Therefore, she asked no questions as to why there was a man lying an invalid in the room across the passage and was content to try and do her share making him comfortable even though she was thoroughly weak and relying on the good woman herself.

"I'll tell you what I could do if . . . if you'd like it. I know quite a lot of stories. Some of them are quite good enough to be written, I was told."

"And why weren't they?"

"Oh, because they have been in my head and never had a chance to get . . . get anywhere else, I suppose."

"You mean you made them up?"

"Something like that. They come together when I think and then they grow like little pictures, just as quick as those in a photo play."

"Turn on the roll then. I'll use the blind here as a screen."

For fully a minute Spring was silent and Pendren thought that she was having a game with him. But no feminine giggle such as he expected was forthcoming, and the girl said:

"What kind of—of stories do you like? Real life or just . . . just . . . things that couldn't possibly happen?"

"Just at present I'm more interested in real life, if you don't mind. Got any wrecked railroads or deep-sea collisions, or entombed families in your category?"

"That's not *real life*. It's real *death* and perfectly horrid to even think about. I call trees, and bluebirds, wild berries, and children real life."

Spring's voice was certainly chiding. Pendren chuckled at the tone. He had created quite the situation he wanted to. It worked off a little of his superfluous mind-trouble.

"Just one minute," he called. "Let me take that to pieces and see what I can make of it. Real life is—trees, bluebirds, wild berries, and children. That means that the trees shelter the bluebirds, I suppose, and the wild berries are food for the children. I guess the bluebirds get the first chance every time because sometimes there are disastrous results from wild berries. Suppose you turn on the other roll. The things that *couldn't possibly happen*. I'll bet you anything you like I know more about them than anyone in the world."

A crisp little smothered laugh came from Spring.

"I'm sure it's not my way of knowing them. The things that couldn't possibly happen are *dreams*."

"Sometimes nightmares."

"Then they don't count, because they couldn't possibly happen."

"Never mind. Sometimes they give you cold feet all the same."

"My dreams never do."

"Then turn on one of your dreams."

But there was another short pause in the conversation. Spring was weighing things and the balance wasn't even. It would have given her a dreadful feeling if he were to laugh in the middle of one of her greatest dreams.

"I'm afraid . . ." she began, and stopped.

"What of?"

"Afraid you could not understand. I'm ever so serious."

"So am I. Honest Injun."

It was then that Spring got him completely; and the complete victory made her laugh crisply several times before delivering a parting shot.

"Then *that* is one of the things that couldn't possibly happen!"

In the parlor the young man struggled to sit up and managed it much better than he had done formerly. Somehow there was a better incentive to act for himself now, than in the days when there was only Mary Settler's kind face to encourage him. Something had stirred the stagnant atmosphere of his mentality. There was even a breeze whispering quaint new things. The stern man of business was playing with a child, or thought he was, until he knew differently.

"Bully for you!" Leaning forward he shouted the words. "You're the first person to find it out, though. Personally I hate dreams. I'm too practical and solid. Do you know that *I* wouldn't even bother dreaming *who you are* or what you are like; but you've got me curious."

"Then let us play a game of 'Guessing.' Do you know it? You start by asking me a question to which I am bound to answer yes or no. We take

turns and you can't ask the same question twice . . . please begin."

"Right. Are you pretty?"

He waited.

Thinking that she did not hear him, he shouted it louder.

"Are you pretty?"

Distinctly he heard the fly humming again between him and the girl, but nothing else came forth.

"Are you *asleep*?"

Then Spring answered quite quickly.

"No."

"Won't you answer the first question?"

"No."

"Was it a wrong one?"

"Yes."

"It's your turn."

"Just a minute. Pretend we are not playing a minute while I explain. You see you need not answer any question that you can't. If you don't know the answer you keep quiet."

"I see. Well, we'll have another go. Can I start?"

"Yes. Does your name begin with 'A'?"

"Wait a minute. I hadn't asked the *first* question."

"You did. You asked if you could start! Answer me!"

"Does my name begin with 'A'? With 'A' what?"

Spring quietened again. Then she said seriously:

"*Can't* you play fair?"

"Yes. Can you?"

"Of course I can. I know the game."

"You mustn't say all that. You must stick to *yes* or *no*."

"I stopped playing when you never answered my question"

"I beg your pardon but you didn't. Since then you've asked me another. You're not sticking to rule."

The fly in Spring's room hummed louder and stopped altogether. Someone passing in the road shouted, and then the silence cleared out again.

"Shall we start again and try?"

"Yes," from Spring.

"Are you a little girl?"

"Yes. Are you tired of talking to me?"

"Not a bit. I mean . . . no. Is your hair thin and black?"

"No. Is yours?"

"No. Will you tell me your name when we've finished playing?"

"Yes. Will you tell me yours?"

"Yes. Will you also tell me how old you

are, what you look like, and where you come from?"

"Yes. No. Yes. (A short laugh.) Do you want to know anything more?"

"Yes. Shall we stop playing now?"

"Yes, because I've won."

The young man again leaned forward in his bed. He had never run across anything quite so assured before. Somehow too he was conscious that he was being ridiculed by a kind of child that had grown up before her years.

"I can't see why you've won any more than I," he said.

"That's the very reason in my favor," laughed Spring.

"Really. I don't get you again?"

"Well, I'll tell you. The person who finds out the most in the shortest time scores twenty. I scored twenty on your first question."

"You've been using the jigger when I wasn't looking, then."

"I found out all about you and that gave me the twenty."

"I found out all about you and that gave me forty."

"Nonsense. How could you?"

"I found out that you were a little girl, *without* thin black hair, that you were going to tell me your

name, how old you were, and where you came from presently, and that you are very, very pretty. That's six things."

"Oh!"—indignantly from Spring. "I never said a word about being . . . pretty or anything like that."

"That's precisely how I knew. You didn't want to tell a lie and you didn't like to say yes. I fancy I score sixty for that."

"I can score a hundred that way." Her voice was still resentful.

"I found out that you were stupid, inquisitive, unteachable, tiresome, impatient, unfair, and perfectly ridiculous. That's seven."

"You've only left one thing out. Unsquashable."

"I didn't want to squash you"—mildly from Spring.

"So the elephant said to the flea, but he had to sit down all the same. Would you mind killing that fly in your room? It's driving me silly."

A faint sigh floated to him across the passage, then the girl's voice, quaintly resigned:

"I can't, because it has done the one and only thing. It has gone through the door."

CHAPTER VII

"MARK's lost his job, Mary."

The good woman had just touched the rim of the little house across Hek Dean's fields. Cora Spinney sat on the porch watching Mary come across the plowed land and immediately she thought her near enough she hailed her with the news.

Mary Settler scraped her boots on a stone before she went into the low, dust-speckled living-room.

"Jest about time Mark was setting up a new sensation. It's a wonder you ain't been giving him something to think about, Cora, that had lungs of its own to remind him his family had started, and a job wasn't exactly a blood relation that would stick to him when he wanted to treat it bad. What's Hek got to say about it?"

Cora looked tearfully at her.

"Ain't no use making a song to father. He clean finished with Mark, time he got mussed up with Jake Heldy."

"Jake don't hold anything much against Mark, Cora, 'cept that he hadn't a mind of his own when Mark come into the business. I'll talk to Hek. But it won't give Mark a new job, I'm thinkin', and it's

only a guess on my part that it will do anything towards putting food into your mouth so as you can feed that baby you're expecting."

"We owe father ever so much as it is, Mary, and Mark and me wouldn't be the ones to ask more of him, knowing it 'd only set sparks going. We borrowed ever so much on the property long ago, and we been paying it back in rent ever since. If Mark don't happen on something pretty lively there won't be nothing but the road for me and baby."

All this was said in a wearisome whine, and anyone else but Mary Settler would have scorned the tone. Cora Spinney knew it, and it was her chance to wail.

"I dunno what I done to deserve it, either. All through I've stuck to Mark and never as much as a grumble all the time. I tell Deacon Perch only the other night that I'd keep comin' to meeting right up to my time and I ain't missed yet."

"That's considerable in your favor, Cora, but you didn't ought to mix up what you done for the Lord with what the Lord is doin' for you. Now we're all mighty small fish in one water-hole, and there's benefits to go round if they are properly distributed; and you ain't doin' too bad with a baby right off the first year of your marriage, when there's some goes to the end of time and gets no chance. I knew a woman up Mapleboro once that

set by a frilled-muslin soap-box, pretendin' it was a workbasket, year in and year out, and her never get any nearer her heart's desire than five feet of front yard. She kep' up the soap-box till she died, poor thing; and one of the neighbors, cleanin' up a bit, undertook to use it for its right purpose. I never did think that woman had a proper chance, and it was mostly 'hope deferred'; but then she might of had feelings of compensation."

"We ain't paid the store account two months, Mary."

Cora got her grievance forward a little more.

"Thet's bad as can be, Cora, but I should say that, soon as you can get the baby over, things will just stand on their own feet without assistance. Nothing like a baby to promote strict business when the food closet's empty. There was Mrs. Casson now. She was mortal afraid, when her man was smashed up in the railroad business and brought home without any legs, that they were all goin' to starve. Well, she had the baby sudden, and a bit previous to what I would have advised. It was on account of the shock and only half a man returned to her 'stead of a complete article, and all the people in the village up and hands her down enuff food for a month. They took it in turns to see she didn't have nothing to worry over all the time doctors was patching and hemming her man together and while

she was busy with the new baby, and for the next year and a half she only had to open her mouth to put the food in. Well, Casson he dies next fall, and she hurries up things again, and not long after throws a double. Twins it was; and not a neighbor in the place anxious to do a mortal hand's turn. They reckoned she was helping herself to a bigger advantage, and flesh and blood was all against that.

"You never can tell, Cora," Mary said presently. "If it had been twins the first time, the benefits would have been just the same. You keep on believing, and Hek and me will come to some understanding."

"Oh, I believe in you all right, Mary. It's father I'm mortified over. We must get money, unless Mark goes to the city and takes a job there, and what will I do with only meself and the baby?"

Another bogie had disturbed Cora and she started a short sniffing, that suggested a cold in the head more than anything.

"Now look here, Cora," said Mary, with some firmness. "I'm not exactly the whole book of information given away at the matrimonial bureau, but say, what'd you think Hek would be doin' settin' down to his supper over there in a linoleumed parlor all easy and mindful of the blessin's he'd received through being a kind of a cautious man all his life, if he knew you was havin' your first baby good and

hard, with Mark out of a job and a store account as long as your clothes line? If I know anything at all I reckon he'll be along right the very first minit Doctor Harkins touches the porch. I know Hek, if you don't, and if I make a mistake then I'm going to find it out pretty quick."

She was even then getting up to depart and Cora held out a detaining hand.

"Mark won't let me ask father, Mary. He's prideful even if his temper do get him out of work times."

"That's a good spirit, Cora, though a man who gets mad with his boss three times in two months, and is chucked for it, ought to have something more to recommend him. Well, Hek and me will have a little talk. Maybe Mark won't be too prideful to hold his objections out to borrowing from say . . . somebody else—names not mentioned?"

Cora straightened and dried her face.

"It 'd make the baby easier if I knew we had a little cash down, Mary, not even knowin' who's the . . ."

"And nothin' said to . . . to Clara Hopkins or nobody, but just taken for granted it come from Hek?"

"I can say father sent it, Mary."

"Then I'll be getting over the fields. Did you know I got Spring Roper of Ladybird stopping up

my place? Nice little thing with big eyes full of soft light like her mother's. *There's* a pool of water for you! Children for every chair in the house, to say nothing of the benches in the kitchen. Spring come to an unhappy finish last week tryin' to do a trick ride to the depot. I don't blame her and I'm thankful it was me got the chance to show her her error."

"I heered you got the gentleman from the city as well. Miss Hetty, she was mortified at that."

"I must call on Miss Hetty and let her know he's doin' fine. Spring put a high speed into her recovery directly she saw the new dress Clara helped me to make. Bless my soul, to think of you, Cora, with a baby of your own, and me . . . well, it don't come nearly so unsatisfactory when you get the chance to fuss up something you've borrowed. I'll go this way across, and see if I can catch sight of Hek."

Sure as the woman crossed the cultivated patch and turned through the little gate into the yard where an old man was feeding chickens, did she catch sight of Hek!

He was standing there watching her come across the field from Mark Spinney's house.

"Wall, Mary," he said in slow, languid tones. "I guess you've been picking up chips again for some as don't deserve it. Now ain't it jest too bad

of them to get you to come right along to me? I'd be real sorry to refuse you anything, Mary, but Mark Spinney's got his own row to hoe, and I guess I don't help block up his track with benefits he's kinder looking for."

"You ain't going to get the chance to refuse me anything, Hek," said Mary, following him into the kitchen. She stood there a moment looking round her.

"Seems like you ain't got the proper handling of this place, Hek. Who's your 'help' now Cora's taken up with her own private affairs?"

"Miss Hetty, she's taken a sudden fancy to come and do the chores for me; but there ain't much in the way of keeping her here more'n an hour a day, thank the land." He took a chair and then put one for Mary.

But the good Samaritan still remained standing, observing the arrangement of the kitchen.

Miss Hetty, she do be terrible soft with me, Mary, but she's hidin' a scorpion with a living tongue of fire somewhere in her busom. Mostly I keeps out of the house, but that don't seem to suit her neither."

"Miss Hetty ain't had no chance, Hek. I mind the day when she was photographed for somebody she'd been corresponding with regular. He'd been away in the country's wars many a day, and Miss

Hetty she thinks to bring him back to her be jest that fancy picture. Well, Hek, it was that same photograph that did the trick. She's been most sour from that day and nussed up a different notion about that man ever since."

"Maybe, Mary"—Hek took things leisurely. He was evidently debating the story. "She's considerable pleased about somethin' these days." He nodded his head slowly. "She can cook too."

"She can do most things she sets out to. I'm right glad she's come around, Hek. Stops you bein' lonesome like an' takes the edge off of the feelin' you got when Cora married Mark."

"I got no feelin' for Cora, Mary. She sets great store be what she's brought on her own head."

"Sure she does! It wouldn't be *you* nor *me*, Hek, that would think much of a girl that didn't stand up for what she'd taken on, and was ready to face out. She can't set too much on that baby, even if it ain't born regular and up to time. If a woman can't set great and everlastin' store be her first baby, then she can't have no right to be glad about anything."

"Mary, she ain't no right to be setting store be a wrong action. I nussed her from a baby meself and never as much as let her know a thing about an onrighteous and evil doer."

"That's exactly what brought about the trouble,

Hek. You nussed her upside down, or wrong side out, or whatever it is a man like you thinks the correct style. If she'd been mine I'd have turned her out among the hedges and let her learn life from the sermons in the trees and the stones and the common people. You kep' her tied to her hymn-book, Hek, and it was only natural that when something with red blood in him come along, she was going to feel the warmth of it before she accepted your opinions."

"She didn't ought to have brought disgrace on my house, Mary. I'm a clean-livin' man, and a gal with a baby before her time . . ."

"My land, Hek, you do make me wriggle. I'm a kind of a sort of earthworm just travelin' along in the dark, when I think of what Cora done. No woman on this earth, or in any other part, ever had a baby before her time. When a baby has to be born, it jes' *has* to be born, and nothin' made be man, be it government law, or family law, or any manner of law whatever, is goin' to stop it. Jes' suppose you could. Now, what'd the world be doin'? The mortality alone would flood the market and on'y the undertakers be making anything of a livin'. I guess they'd be doin' a big thing in funerals for the poor creatures who'd been robbed of the fruits of their lives after bein' put on this earth for precisely that selfsame reason."

She stopped a moment to wipe her face. The intensity of her feeling was bringing the sweat from every pore. Indignation at suffering and injustice was poured out from her swelling heart. "Cora's *not* having a baby before her time. The precise hour for that dear lamb to arrive, and fill the earth with good will and peace towards men, has been set by the Lord Himself, and you an' me, Hek, ain't got no cause to question whether it's early, or late."

Across the fields the sun had taken a slant and small and great things began to have a face of colored shadow. Mary looked through the door. "We'll just go through that little matter of . . . of my property, Hek, and then I'll be getting back."

Silently the old man rose and searched in a drawer among an assortment of table knives, forks, and spoons. He brought out some yellowish papers to Mary.

"There's . . . interest owing . . . Mary."

"I'm a bit slow, Hek, these times at catching-up."

"I guess then, Mary, that you ain't anxious particular about paying . . . today?" There was a kind of fierce gloating pleasure in his voice.

"Nor . . . tomorrow, Hek," said Mary evenly.

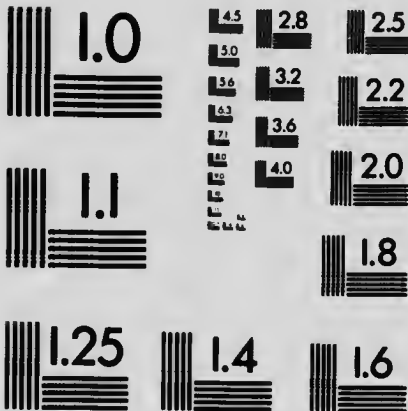
"But I'm particular anxious and breaking my heart most, to take a fresh loan from you, Hek."

"Ah!" It was all the old man said as he smiled across at her.



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

CHAPTER VIII

A BOY brought a message to Benjamin that same afternoon that Clara Hopkins had been "taken with a terrible toothache." This message was passed on in turn to Mary as she crossed her own potato patch on the way to the house.

"Then jes' you hustle a bit, Benjamin, and when you're through here you can take up a bottle of my mixture to Clara. Come in and have a bit of supper first before you sets out."

"I guess I'll get a move on direckly I've cleaned up a bit," said Benjamin; and Mary turned to look at him suddenly.

"You don't need to be cleanin' up for Clara, Benjamin. Last time you was a heap more like the garbage corner of the yard when I sent you up that direction."

Benjamin took it facing front. His great head with the thin streaks of lank hair was held high to the evening glow.

"It wa'n't in that direction. It was oncommon close to Mirandy Bell's place you sent me with the errand. Mirandy ain't Clara Hopkins and that makes a heap of a difference."

"Folks said once you was mighty keen on Mirandy, Benjamin."

A flush of indignation ran from the boy's high forehead to where his shirt divided at the throat.

"Once, Mary, but on'y the once. Since then I got in company that pleases me more."

"I'm real glad of that, Benjamin. Would it be overcurious of me to ask you the proper name of that same company?"

For a moment the boy hesitated, then he wheeled round and pointed with one ground-grubby forefinger.

"Dunno the *proper* name, but it's thet old hoss over thar. He's a sight more entertainin' . . ."

Mary allowed a smile to come over her face. She turned away.

"Ain't much compliment to Clara," she said to herself as she rubbed her feet on the rush mat at the kitchen door. "But I s'pose it's Benjamin's way. So Mirandy Bell's on the path of No Hope and plain sewin' for the rest of her life. Well, I never did quite cotton to breakin' her in for Benjamin, and now I come to think of it . . ."

She had reached the bedroom and found Spring sitting up in the bedcovers quietly stitching up the hem of the new muslin. In the girl's face was something wonderfully vital. Her thin, delicate, shell-colored fingers manipulated the needle in and

out of the hem with a speed of almost anxious anticipation. Two bright eyes like the first stars in a turquoise evening sky twinkled at Mary as she came in, and the sudden flush of an unexplainable position spread over the velvet cheeks and full throat.

Mary had the strength to hold her tongue. It was the most unusual thing for her to do, for she was ever ready to say what she was thinking. Something made her just stand there, looking at Spring, and in the minute the girl took it that the good woman was surprised that she had at last asserted herself to take a hand in things.

Deliberately Spring smiled across the whiteness of the bed and Mary caught the gleam.

"I declare to goodness, Spring, you seem to grow different every hour of the day," she said, although it was not really in her mind to utter such a thing.

A bubbling laugh came from the bed.

"Of course, Mary. I couldn't grow the same, could I? I'd be staying in one kind of position something like the pyramids of Egypt. One has to grow different if one grows at all."

"My word! And you're getting that perky and indifferent to them bruises on your arms and legs, that looked more like you been setting down in several pools of blue-black ink than anything else, that you'll be talkin' of getting out of bed next."

"Tomorrow I'll be getting up, Mary."

"Sure now. There's nobody wants to hurry you, Spring. Another week on the same prescription, to say nothing of the exact kind of recent treatment, and you'd be plump as a plum. Land, when I look at you now, and think of what you was when I carried you in a week ago, it does my heart good. Sure now you wouldn't be better to take another day or so, Spring?"

If for one moment Mary had allowed her face to relax from its seriousness, the whole root of her scheming would have been laid bare to the winds of ridicule. But the good woman with wonderful discrimination kept the light in her eyes as steady as that on a windowpane. Her jaws came together slowly and she waited with the uttermost concern.

"Jes' another day or so, Spring," she said presently and the girl's face bent further over the sewing. "Give yourself time to finish off that bit of sewin' you're so kind as to take on. You can't get up without that's finished."

"It will be quite finished by . . . by tonight," came eagerly from Spring.

Mary smiled.

"Then jest you work as fast as you can, Lovey, if it ain't making the job into a headache as well as a pleasure. You keep right on the tape-line, and

I'll make time tonight to put in the rest of the buttonholes."

"Do . . . do you think you'll really have time, Mary?"

Such a quivering of uncertainty in the voice and such a change of brightness in the anxious eyes!

Mary was leaving the room. "Sure as tomorrow starts at twelve o'clock tonight," she said, going across the passage to her other charge.

"Jes' like doin' a sum on one side of your slate and provin' it to be right on the other," said Mary mentally, when she had taken in certain alterations in Quilter Lancelot Pendren.

"Spring's the piece of arithmetic I been working on for a week, and to prove I got her right, I've only got to turn over the slate, which is the other side of the passage, and take a look at what's doin' in the parlor."

While working this out she was standing watching the young man in the same way as she had observed the girl.

Pendren was intently concerned in looking under his bed, although it was not altogether an easy thing to do from his position on the top of it. He was too taken up trying to balance himself to notice the woman's entrance. She stood there a little longer till he gave up his acrobatic feat of trying to discover something under the couch.

"Damn!" he said roundly.

"That's a bad word, but I should say, Mr. Pendren, that it just about suits the situation. Young man, you got no horse sense to go leaning that way on your anatomy seeing that Doc Harkins can only renovate you temporary. Would it be out of place to inquire jest how much further you would have crawled under that stretcher if I hadn't called you up by wireless, so to speak, in time to save you cracking right in half?"

"I was looking for my boots," said Pendren.

"Going to wear 'em in bed, and go treading on yourself 'cause of no chance to walk anywhere's else?"

"I'm going to get up. I'm sick of playing the . . . infant."

"Oh . . . was it only playing then? Land! to think of that! And us all thinking you down and out, run over by heavy traffic in your own head. . . . I'm real pleased you're beating us to frazzles over that part."

"Oh, I expect to be as weak as a kitten and as stupid as an owl for . . . weeks yet."

"That's good." Mary was off her guard, but she quickly took her stand again and kept things going.

"It does my heart good to hear you admit you're not feelin' like jumping the moon as yet. I ain't

had a chance to know you properly yet. So you'll be getting up tomorrow?"

A little rush of blood made Pendren hesitate. He felt decidedly uncomfortable, but he pulled up smartly.

"I didn't mention tomorrow . . . exactly."

"Then it was my mistake. I'm real sorry." She turned to go out of the room. "I'll get Benjamin to hunt out your clothes in a day or so. Jest you make your mind easy now."

But this didn't suit the young man.

"Perhaps . . . perhaps it might as well be . . . tomorrow," he called out. Mary turned round.

"If you're feeling fit, I don't mind sayin' that it would be the most blessed kind of a day for you to get up."

"Why a blessed kind of a day?" Mary's expression had stirred certain suspicions in his mind.

"For one reason, because it's Sunday," she said and gave him no more time to ask questions.

Later, when everything in the house had been attended to and finished for the night, when the last buttonhole in Spring's new dress had been pressed with an iron, Mary Settler stepped through the door of her house and stood out under the stars. To her it was the time when all thankful souls should pray, and pray in the open where God looked through the blue.

"Dear Lord of Love," she said quietly, and the night wind took it right to the sprinkle of stars, "there's Cora with her baby, an' Miss Hetty over-anxious about Hek Dean; there's Benjamin searching out Clara, who's a head over him in years, an' these two m'sunderstanding things trying to keep a secret close when it's been sticking out a foot all the evening. And there's me, Lord . . . jes' thankful. Bless us every one."

CHAPTER IX

"You are pretty."

Across a strip of turned-up chocolate soil Spring Roper saw the young man upholstered in all manner of bandages, and clad in a badly damaged traveling suit, a silk handkerchief collar, and a pair of handsome red leather bath slippers. He was sitting in a basket-chair indifferently languid, and blinking in the face of the fullest sunshine. She was lying in a twine hammock made in two-colored mesh, and hung under the best flowering apple tree in Mary Settler's garden.

The good woman had arranged everything with a wonderful discrimination, and never for a moment had she allowed these young people to think that she had guessed at their apparent previous knowledge of each other. At an early hour she had got the girl out of bed, and with some carefully hidden concern as to her proper *début*, had brushed out the short masses of curling hair and anointed her with many blessings as she did so. The colored muslin was arranged with the buttons all fastening down the back and a bow of ribbon was perched,

where the belt presumably, but not really, hid up at the left side.

The hammock in two-colored twine, as well as the pretty muslin, had also been part of the scheme in Mary's mind, and it gave her great satisfaction to see the girl lying there.

"More'n ever like a part of Clara's novel, even if the bulk of her do resemble somewhat a passel of onions in a net bag."

Before leaving the garden the woman had given the girl a few instructions just to help things along.

"I don't see, Spring," she said, "as how you can't hand him out jest the kind of female, domestic attentions you've been so keen on delivering your ma's family so long. There's no need for you to encourage him to use his legs, either. Benjamin will be back presently from the Sunday School and we will get that Q. L. P. to bed by sundown."

She was going off, but returned with another load of light remarks.

"Talk bright to him, Spring, lovey. I got the idea today that he's kinder missing his happy home and mother. Don't let him be dull, same time keep down things that might come up to rouse that piece of business he's living under just now, and which don't come too easy on his mind. Play all you

like, and if he wants to admire you for things as ain't your fault, nor your credit—just let him. It will do you both good, but hold on to your own identity jest as long as you can—same as he's been doing by us.

“Certain, Spring, it don't do a flea-bite of harm to let him hear you turning on the high-gear talk; but same time it isn't always wise to hand out information like your mother's first name, or your address, for a bit. Young folks is like to be a bit overanxious when first they meet. That's the trouble afterwards. I mind the time I first hit up in a line of heart throbs myself. I had him guessing all the names under the sun, of flowers, birds, and beasts, and colors, and him never as much as touching the truth of plain Mary. . . . Sakes alive, wasn't he cute, too, when he happened to strike somebody who opened the daylight on the real thing? Says to me that very day, 'You got me guessing, all right, but since you made it Daffodil, you got to stop Daffodil till the cows come home!' . . .”

As if in a mental abstraction the good woman continued her little story in silence. Spring heard no more of the affair now worn threadbare by the years.

After this advice, when Mary Settler had timed the young man's hour of rising (with some valuable and much-needed assistance from Benjamin of

the yard) she found herself short of time to get to the Sunday School meeting.

No sooner had Quilter Lancelot Pendren been disposed of in the basket-chair with an impedimenta of rugs, bandages, footstools, and other invalids' etcetera, than the good woman reminded Benjamin that he was also a bit overdue for the Sunday School.

"It's uncommon queer about that Q. L. P.'s boots," Mary said, not looking too closely at her companion as they trudged the fields and the road. "Seems like I'm getting out of touch with myself these times when I can't remember where I put them. I've a kinder notion I gave them to you to clean up, Benjamin."

"Mebbe you did, seeing I remember the kind of patent leathers they was," said the farm help.

"An' you put them back in the clothes closet same as his other things?"

"Yep."

"Did you turn the key?"

"You did that, Mary."

"Praise be, then, for they must be somewhere hiding. That Q. L. P. will have to content himself with the ellergint bath slippers till I can turn them out."

"Is he in some hurry, Mary?"

"He's got particular business further on, the

nature of which isn't oiled up enough to get itself started. Ain't likely he'll be getting a move on without his boots, though."

This apparently gave her some satisfaction, for her face fell into soft shades and lines of merriment as they went into the Sunday School.

"You *are* pretty."

When Spring had only stared wide-eyed in answer, the young man had repeated himself.

"And you haven't got thin black hair. It is just the most marvelous change of colors in this sunshine. Is it meant to be up or down?"

"I don't know. Mary did it."

Quite at a loss as to how to take this, Pendren looked across the space of mellow sunshine and chocolate soil. It was a decided disadvantage to have to call out so loudly, and to have a full glare of light in his eyes every time he wanted to speak to her. The strip of upturned soil was indeed an annoyance. He wriggled in his chair.

"Mary does pretty well everything," he grumbled. "She put me in this chair with this cursed sun in my face, and insisted on my remaining in my bath slippers at an hour when it is positively indecent. I detest the sun in my face, and I hate, above everything, to slop about in bath slippers."

"But you are not slopping about," said Spring,

to justify Mary. "You are not supposed to even walk, are you?"

"I'm not supposed to do anything but sit here like a goods parcel tied up and labeled 'To be left till called for.' I'm doing a dummy stunt, while somebody else plays my hand. You don't understand that, of course."

He frowned at her because the sun in his eyes made it difficult for him to see even her face properly.

"I know what part of it means. It refers to business, I expect."

"Correct. You tumble, as we say. I'm just sitting here looking pretty in swaddling clothes and bath slippers while somebody else is jumping my claim. Oh, dash that sun!"

"I think it is beautiful."

"So you ought to. It suits you, and it is not in your eyes, though I must admit that to me you look like the center of it. Say . . . about your hair. Will you lift your head a minute?"

Partly in obedience and partly in surprise, Spring did so.

"Just what I thought," Pendren continued. "It's kiddish, and crinkly, and you have scarcely started to grow as yet."

Immediately the girl fell back into her former position in the hammock.

"You mean my hair? It can't be helped. Mother cut it short after I had an illness, not long ago. It's a long time growing. Don't you think it is coming on wonderfully, though?"

She held up a piece that was in the way of her eyes. It had a dozen flickering lights in it, and might have been ruddy gold, amber, or brilliant yellow. He thought that the sun was in his eyes again.

"Oh, yes, I suppose it is 'coming on wonderfully,' as you say, but I'm not an expert on hair-growing. I know more about tulips and gardenias,—though I don't suppose there would be much difference."

"I think there is ever so much difference," said Spring smartly.

"Tulips grow *up* and hair grows down."

He shaded his eyes to take a good look at her.

"What a sharp kid you are! Must have been fed on cutlery and scissors all your life." Spring rippled at this.

"It isn't sharp to say a thing like that. Hair does grow down. It is quite natural."

"Yes . . . I suppose it is quite natural. Yours"—finished Pendren, then turned the subject. "I say, isn't it time you kept your promise?"

"I've forgotten it. Is it about telling you a story? A dream story?"

"I'm inclined to think you told me several yesterday. That was in the invisible game. I was speculating on your height, width, diameter, and circumference, and I find myself more puzzled than ever."

"Why?"

"Because, in that hammock, all bunched up as you are, you look about one-half."

"I'm not then!" Spring's eyes sparkled with mischief. "I'm two halves."

"Got me again. You promised to tell me your name, how old you were, and where you came from, in the guessing game."

"I know I did, but it was *in* the guessing game. This is real life."

"You promised to tell me," he insisted, "all those things, after the game was finished."

"My name is Spring."

"And the rest of it?"

"Glory."

"Ah, Spring Glory; and you look like it. Now for the other things. Age?"

"Seventeen come September."

"What?" He nearly bounded out of his chair.

"With your hair like that . . . and . . . and . . . the guessing game?"

"My hair isn't to blame. I told you it was cut off. The guessing game is quite a

parlor one. Mother plays it with us, nights, in the fall."

Her lip quivered and curled in at one corner; Pendren missed nothing of her emotion. The sensitive man in him spoke then.

"Your mother must be a . . . a brick. . . ."

"She is a most perfect and precious mother. None of us are like her; you never saw such eyes . . . and feet . . . as she has. Oh, Mr. . . . whatever your name is, you would wonder that mother could walk on her feet, they are so sweet and small. It is almost a pity to use them."

Half-sitting up in the hammock the girl swung to the ground. Pendren observed her well-rounded ankle.

"Yes," he said, smiling inwardly. "There ought to be a carriage and a motor to go with those feet."

He was still glimpsing below the hammock, but Spring was unaware that he was thinking of her feet and not her mother's.

"That is part of my dream," she said eagerly. "But . . . Mr. What-ever-they-call-you, how did you guess?"

"Guess what? That your mother should have a carriage to go with her feet? Why, I have seen them."

"Seen mother's feet? Not really. Without her heavy boots on?"

"Without her heavy boots on," repeated Pendren. He was still staring below the hammock.

"It's impossible," she said. "Mother is miles away and you are a stranger."

"Not to your mother's feet. I know them well. I've watched them for quite half an hour at a time."

"You are sure they were mother's?" She was puzzled beyond understanding.

"They were . . . once upon a time!" He added as he sat back in his chair and shut his eyes.

"I'm more puzzled than ever." Spring also fell back into her position in the hammock and the dangling feet were drawn up again.

"Never mind if you are," said Pendren. "You can work it out later. Tell me about what you all guessed in the game with your most precious mother."

"We guessed the most cute and marvelous things. Sometimes we were birds or animals, and sometimes we were just human beings like you and I, yesterday." He took this slowly.

"I'm glad we were human beings yesterday. I was beginning to think I had been a bad-tempered ass."

"I would have guessed that quite easily," said Spring with merriment.

He sat through this, and tried to see if there was any caustic femininity in it; but there was just a wonderful simplicity in her face and somehow it caught him as a child might have, who had taken him by the hand.

"Miss Glory," he said quietly. "Where do you come from?"

"A small farm with chickens and trees and children on it."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, a . . . a mortgage."

The first real break in the conversation came then. Somehow the mortgage darkened the sunlight between them, and the embarrassment was on his side.

"Say, your name *is* Glory, isn't it?"

She sparkled again. "Yes, Spring Glory. It is written 'hat way in the family Bible."

"Oh, that doesn't give me much; but your mother's name? Is that really Glory too? That is what I want to get at."

He was suspecting her of subterfuge because he knew that she thought him curious.

"She is Anna Glory," said Spring, with some trembling uncertainty. The young man put up a rebuking finger.

"Look here. Your eyes tell tales. I don't believe you are telling me the whole truth."

"It is as much truth as anyone could expect who tried to find out real, real things in a guessing game anyway."

She gave a sudden heave in the hammock.

"Oh . . . a bee, a bee! It pricked my wrist!"

He stood up, holding on to his chair.

"Shall I kill it? I feel like killing something . . . where is it?"

Spring was sucking away at the afflicted part like a baby, making a loud noise with her lips. When he spoke to her she ceased this and bore the pain while she advised him not to move.

"Don't, oh don't you try to move, or walk along," she pleaded. "Mary said you must not!"

"Nonsense. I'm coming over to kill that bee. It might return, and I can't bear things of that kind. I don't want it to start eating me."

He took two uncertain steps. They were the first he had taken alone since his accident, and the bath slippers were dragged rather than lifted through the thick upturned chocolate soil. Across the patch was the shortest way to her and he took it slowly. Spring saw him waver, and balance, like a man walking a plank. Behind him was a wake of smoothness in the corrugated earth that he had worked his feet through.

"Sit down! Oh, do sit down, Mr. . . . whatever-your-name-is," called Spring.

"Pendren," he said. "My name's Pendren. I can't sit down in the middle of the patch, can I?"

Another step or two, and he lost one of his slippers, which stuck in the soil and very nearly stayed there altogether.

"Very nearly did it, though," he said, queerly sensitive of a fresh pain in his body.

"I'm coming to meet you." Spring let herself down slowly from the hammock and advanced towards him.

"Go back." The stern tones did not make her falter till he had repeated them. "Go back!" he bellowed, and stood frowning at her in a regular bath of dark clinging soil. Spring drew in her lips again. He thought that she was going to cry, but her lips only quivered nervously.

"I'm . . . I'm quite strong enough."

"I told you to go back," he said roughly. His face was working with suppression of the desire to swear madly at the pain he was suffering.

"Do you think I would allow a girl to help me?" he went on, and muttered some short, sharp words under his breath.

"Please!" came from Spring as she still stood there, near him, in the patch of chocolate soil. The tearing pain in the young man's shoulder made him

lurch forward a trifle and she thought that he was going to faint. Waiting no longer, she jumped the distance between them and caught his arm quickly and firmly. He never spoke as she guided him carefully back to his chair. Beads of perspiration ran down his face. His hair was wet against his forehead and he scarcely knew what she had done, although he was conscious of being safely ensconced in the chair again.

Swiftly and without a word she took her place in the hammock once more. Pendren lay with his eyes shut, but from his lips came a truth he had to admit.

"You beat me every time, Kid . . . but by . . . Jimmy, I've got your measurements correct at last."

CHAPTER X

"ANYTHING doing?" said Clara, shutting the door between the kitchen and the rest of the house.

Mary was sprinkling a bundle of rough dry wearing apparel with cold water. Some of it was the 'change' belonging to Pendren, and the rest of it Spring's scanty underwear.

"You'd think I was qualifying for something here, Clara, if you'd seen things lately. Look at that?" She held up a fragile garment belonging to Spring. "And that——"

She dropped a couple of handkerchiefs and socks, and a man's undervest upon the table. "The way things gets mussed up in the wash is enough prognostications to settle any question. Lock her up, Clara, I'd be as proud as a peacock if my private wardrobe got mixed in with that of a handsome, good-looking, interestin', wealthy gentleman. It's like the shadder of what's comin', round the corner; and if it don't put that Graham P. business right, and rule out the Aunt Susannah for good and all, then I'll change my job."

"Has anything happened?" Clara looked suspicious. "You've got a way, Mary, of getting through a thing before you're round it."

"The shortest way's the quickest and saves your legs," said Mary.

"Tell us about Sunday. Has he seen her?"

"I never knew you so impatient, Clara! I declare you scare me. 'There she was, lyin' in the hammock as innocent as though she had never been born, and not sayin' as much as a word, and him jest sittin' there opposite, with not a word either. It was the sun-shiniest day that ever caught my back garden unawares, an' it was the same with me when I caught the pair of them with not a word left between them. Out of breath you'd have called it. Out of good common English language more like, seein' there wasn't jes' nothin' to describe that situation."

"Spring's lookin' ever so perky, Mary."

"An' Lancelot, as I prefers him, as well. I guess I can't make a cinch of the Quilter part of him. This morning there he was, settin' up jes' as pert as you like and askin' me if he couldn't do something to help us a bit. I'm well acquainted with those symptoms, Clara. I knew a man up—Oh, anywhere, it was—and when he takes to doin' the chores about the place for my mother, which didn't suit his hands, nor his back, nor any part

of him, any more; it suited my mother, who was uncommon particular the way a thing was finished off, well, everybody said there was something doin', up our way."

"He was after you, I guess, Mary?"

"Well, he wasn't exactly trailin' mother, and her with sixteen children, mostly dead at birth, an' a man of her own cutting wood in the yard as lively as a good healthy man could be. Sure he was after something, though . . . it didn't turn out to be me, after all."

She lifted the lid of a large steaming can on the stove and a red, raw lump of corned beef sprang up in the bubbling water. This received a spike from the kitchen-fork and it disappeared like a great greasy whale, harpoon and all. She wrenched the fork out and jammed on the lid again.

"Maybe it might have been I wasn't worth the extra business; or doin' them chores scared him stiff after a bit. I often think Rachel and her sister must have been somethin' uncommon good in the cookin' and house-cleanin' line for Jacob to take on the double time. But that's not what I'm tell'n' you, Clara, so you keep your ears well open, but don't let anything I say get loose once you got it tight."

Clara sat forward, tense with interest.

"You remember, Mary, the time I read you

SAMARITAN MARY

111

about Lady Fitzhumber. She was much the same cut as Spring, only a bit more hefty perhaps in the swing of her tongue. Lady Fitzhumber was in the precise same predicament, Mary."

"Spring ain't in a predicament, Clara?"

"She don't have need. I got eyes and brains and common horse sense. It was Lancelot told me all I wanted when he stopped rememberin' to ask for his boots. A man, Clara, as has urgent, immediate hurry in his business today and forgets to ask for his boots tomorrow has only one kind of mind."

"What is it?"

"It's . . . mind your own business, Clara, and listen some more."

Mary rolled a sheet of golden dough on the table and looked at the clock.

"Must get these into the oven or there'll be trouble in the Amen Corner. Have you ever noticed, Clara, that the brother who keeps up the Amen business good and hard right through the meetin' does a sight more'n anybody else to help sech things along? He's thinkin' all the time and is apt to be wide awake for the finish when he's watchin' the prayer or the hymn. That is what I mean when I say there may be trouble in the Amen Corner if these doughnuts is not to hand. Our stomachs is much the same as the brother watchin'

out an' apt to be ready before things is through. . . . I mind the time when Deacon Heddy had a fit of hay fever and sneezes right through the prayer. Well, Brother Brown was there in the corner turnin' the Amen on half-way be mistake every time Deacon takes a fit, and turnin' it off again when he discovers Deacon still goin' express. He gets so 'mazed presently that he gives it up altogether, and the prayer over, Deacon looks around for the Amen, but nobody anxious or helpin' him a morsel, so he says it himself before he has another fit."

She shut the oven door and turned to Clara, putting up a floury hand.

"Clara, you ain't to guess any when I tell you I'm the whole box o' tricks on that Q. L. P. Yesterday, Benjamin leaves me suddenlike after Sunday School and takes up with Deacon Heddy, who goes right along past your very gate. . . ."

Clara bounced from her chair as if she had been thrown to her feet, but instantly she rescued a sewing needle out of the flare of her skirt and showed it to Mary.

"It's good you found it before you set on it, Clara. Benjamin, as I was saying, goes off. . . ."

"You was tellin' me things on account of Spring and the gentleman," interrupted Clara once more.

"I'd forgot him," said Mary, smiling, "like as

not I'd forget those doughnuts. As I said, I'd the pick of a good walk to myself, and enjoyed it thorough, as it give me the chance to get acquainted with a fresh line of interest in me own thoughts. I hits my back garden jest as usual an' comes on them two like as if I'd kind of been expected. There was Spring sucking the back of her hand like a baby and not a word out of either of them. All the time Lancelot was lookin' up into the sky, for all the world like as if he was dreadin' it might rain before he could get full use of his legs, and perhaps it bothering him some, seein' a man with his trouble might jes' as well have been born a cart without a horse to drag it. But no matter what was wrong with his power to get about be himself, that hitchin' up of his eyes to the heavens wasn't altogether the right place for puttin' a blind on me. I never did trust things to be usual when a man has need to look higher than a girl like Spring for company. Shows there's somethin' below his nose he's avoidin', and why? Because his conscience is right there too and pullin' him to do something he don't want to for some reason. I don't mind sayin', all the same, Clara, that it's the contrary ways of a man like that that counts, an' once he looks Spring properly in the face, it'll take twelve horses and a row of automobiles to get him away from her. And see here. . . ."

She stepped nearer to Clara.

“‘It’s good,’ I says to him; ‘you set quiet and let the sun warm up some natural life in you. If I’d been tied be the legs I’d have found it worse’n a lot of things—havin’ to set still the whole time an’ never as much as a walk down the garden.’

“‘Yes,’ he says, slowlike, tipping one eye a bit to me.

“‘I’ll take you in meself, not waitin’ for Benjamin, as has other jobs on this afternoon,’ I says. ‘Think you can walk a bit, leanin’ on me?’ An’ he gladdens on that, an’ I’m mortal afraid he’s been havin’ another kind of a fit of sickness.

“‘Guess you’re as stiff as a rod, settin’ so long,’ I says, careful to notice his feet was still on the hemp-mat I put under them meself when I went to the meetin’.

“‘Pretty sore,’ he says, an’ loses one of his slippers right off the start. That told me in one second more’n the whole information bureau of Sherlock Holmes and other eye-openers. The slipper turns up wrong side, which to my mind was the precise *right* side for my argument, and on the sole was enough of the damp of that patch Benjamin dug up only the day before to make Lancelot qualify for the all-round, cross-country gold cup prize. I kep’ my information, Clara, and I’m not wondering

SAMARITAN MARY

115

quite so much now why he tried to cross that patch. And . . ." she added, looking hard at Clara, "if that don't start the Graham P. and the Aunt Susannah business running down the sink, then it's not dirty water I'm trying to get rid of."

CHAPTER XI

“MY DEAREST, most beautiful Mother:

“Ever since I ran away I have missed you most dreadfully, but the thought that I have overthrown Aunt Susannah helps me bear it a whole lot. Do you think we ought to apologize to her? I know it was me that ran away, but then as the parent is responsible until the child is twenty-one, perhaps you ought to do it and make the best excuses you can. Do, dear parent! The best thing might be to tell her I am not old enough yet to understand her ways, and by no means the kind of person to be put in charge of the ornaments on her whatnot. Also you had better tell her how subject to colds I am, and how I sneezed until the Liberty statue fell off our bureau once, and broke in three pieces.

“Forgive me, most delicious Mother, for asking you to write the letter, but I can make it up to you presently when Mary gets me the work she says she has in mind for me. It is her opinion that we ought to make some kind of apology to Aunt Susannah. She says it's best not to quarrel with anyone quite so rich, and quite so likely to die any day now.

"Since coming here I've been busy getting 'fatted-up' in bed, same as you 'fat' the chickens when you think they won't be ready in time for Christmas, or Thanksgiving.

"I don't really know if Mary is preparing me for anything like Christmas, or Thanksgiving, in her mind; but there's a young man from the city who came part of the way in his own automobile, and the rest on a stretcher, which Mary had to borrow, and for which she paid the other day out of the fruit money. Why he came on the stretcher was because the accident happened right on top of him just as he got to Miss Elizabeth Hetty's place. You remember Mary telling you that I just escaped that part of the affair by letting go the tail-board of Jerry Grab's cart in time. I could never contradict Mary, but truly, Mother darling, it wasn't that I had anything to do with letting go that tail-board before the crash. Something just *pushed* me off and if I'd had any say in the matter I'd have clung on like the tapes on my petticoats, and never, never have budged an inch. I must tell you this because I don't want you to think I deserve any credit really for remaining out of the accident when the poor young man had no choice.

"Sometimes I rest in a hammock, all red and blue twine, and practice how to get out and in, without showing any more of my stockings than

you do when you wash out the porch, and Zek Barkin passes by the fence with his slow leg dragging after him, poor fellow. Usually when I'm in the hammock, Mr. Pendren sits up as well as he can in a basket-chair, all pillows, and a hemp-mat under his feet. Mary told me today she wants me to watch him, and I've only just discovered that it isn't because she really distrusts him, or that he'd steal the things in the yard—because of course he's a gentleman, and possibly got more than he wants at home—but because she thinks I might turn out good at nursing. We've been discussing that sort of thing lately and seeing the knowledge I have now of children and bed-making and of rubbing Milly's teeth every night till they bite through, and how to use the blue bag on a swelling, or a bee bite, I should just about think I might qualify with a little more experience.

“But experience with the children isn't helping me so far with this young man. You can't do much for a man like we've got here because he's certainly too stupid and doesn't care for you to fuss about him. Why, he couldn't even play the guessing game without stopping every minute to argue or explain something. But then, perhaps he hadn't a fair chance, seeing we were in different parts of the house and had to call out extra loud to make anything of it at all. Then again, I don't

think he need be stupid at all, because he is certainly very clever about some things.

" Evidently he knows something of our family, because he spoke of your beautiful little feet, Mother. That is, he said really wise things about them and called you a 'brick' when I was discussing the subject. Perhaps he passed our porch when you were sending the children off to school in your good, kind way; or else he's watched you washing the step with your back to the road when Zek Barkin didn't happen to be around. I expect I shall find out later on, but I'll take good care not to tell him exactly where we live or what our name is until I find out whether he knows it.

" Mary is a wonderful woman and does more in a day than most people could get into two without going to bed till everybody else is asleep and even the cat and kittens settled. It's a lesson to me.

" And what else do you think? Benjamin of the yard, a really kind-hearted, plain, but hard-working boy helping here, took the horse out yesterday and brought back Mr. Pendren's automobile. It wheeled along quite easily, but the horse had to be the engine or it would never have got here at all. Two or three men about came and had a look at it, and they say it is in quite a bad condition. It will have to be nursed in Jake Heldy's shed, because he keeps everything there, and Mary

for some reason won't have it in the yard. I believes she thinks it might start running over everybody and there has been enough damage done now. All the same, I wonder why she doesn't get rid of the horse. It was Jerry Grab's horse upset things before.

"Clara Hopkins is also a nice kind of woman, very thin and interesting. Sometimes she snaps at Mary as if she meant to bite, but Mary says it's her manner of showing how concerned she is. She hasn't done it to me yet, but Benjamin of the yard got two doses, one on top of the other, the other night. I will remember to keep my hair tied back as you say, dearest, most beautiful Mother. It will be long enough to hold the pins soon, I hope.

"Now Mr. Pendren is calling me. My love to all. Lots of it!

"SPRING GLORY ROPER."

The girl looked up from her writing. The "el-lergint" young gentleman called again.

"Miss Glory! I wish you wouldn't write so much."

"It's only a very little, really. It's to my most beautiful mother."

The sun shone on her uncovered hair as she sat just inside the porch and young Pendren caught a hundred different shades in it. Then he held her

eyes a minute. They possessed a wonderful softness and the thoughts behind them transmitted tiny little flickering lights that ran in and out of the pupils. It was always so when she spoke of her mother.

"You've been talking about that mortgage, I can see," he said. "Now listen to me; what are you doing in this house, and why aren't you away home helping your mother?"

Spring dropped her eyes and her lips quivered.

"I can't help my mother, away home, nearly as much as I . . . as I can if I . . ."

As if she had been called from the kitchen, Mary Settler appeared on the porch.

"You're neglectin' your job, Spring," she said, measuring things mentally. "Run into the parlor and jes' turn the mattress across the winder to air a bit. Mr. Pendren never sleeps so sound as when the bed's had a real good punchin' to make it lie down proper."

She watched till Spring quickly folded away her writing paper and tucked the home-letter into her waist.

Pendren looked horrified.

"Does . . . does Miss Glory always do that . . . do things like that?" he asked.

Mary appeared fogged a moment.

"You're meanin' Spring, I suppose."

"Yes. Does she have to do that sort of thing? I mean with the mattress and all the bother I must be making here?"

"Indeed I wouldn't have her lazy on my hands and be responsible to her mother afterwards," said Mary. "What made you call her Miss Glory?"

Pendren shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm afraid I'm old-fashioned enough, Miss Settler, not to call her by her first name until she gave me leave."

Mary took it calmly. She had been watching the two for some days and any developments were quickly encouraged.

"And you prefer it to be Miss Glory, then?"

"Decidedly. I wish she hadn't to bother with my things. I know I'm a perfect nuisance. Why don't you . . . oh, hang it. I'll get someone down to fix up that car and I'll get along. You've all been just splendid to me, but I ought to be moving."

Mary looked round to see if Spring was returning before she spoke.

"You can't delay too long on that back of yours, young man," she said kindly. "Backs isn't what they was in my time; and you can't get another to take its place if you go cracking up that one."

"Well, I must make a start to get used to doing

things, anyway. I think I might have my boots on, don't you?"

"Havin' your boots on won't get you started anywhere if your back isn't of a mood to comply with 'em. Talkin' of boots, did you bring down a pair when you had that tumble into Miss Hetty's lilac bushes?"

"Why, of course I did. They couldn't have dropped off my feet just because I was smashed up in the middle."

Mary spread wide, gesticulating hands before her.

"I've heard of worse in a railroad accident. There was a woman once lost every stitch she had on her, and when she come to reason she had to get up and walk home in a couple of newspapers somebody had been readin' in the car. It's likely your boots went the same sort of way without you knowin' it."

"But I remember . . . no, I'm hanged if I do remember any boots. Could we ask Miss Hetty if she knows anything about them?"

"I brought every stitch you owned away meself, and I figger it out there weren't boots among the lot."

This was perfectly true, because Benjamin had carried the boots over the next day, having been given them by Miss Hetty.

"Well, isn't there a store about somewhere? Would you be so good as to send up and inquire if they keep my size?"

Mary began to feel warm in the cheeks. However she soon found a way out of it.

"The kind Jake Helder keeps would raise a blister on your toes and your temper in half an hour," she said. "You leave it to me, and if it's boots needed, then it's boots you'll have."

Spring was returning, so she went back to the kitchen, but all the time she kept her nearside ear well towards the door, and every now and then found occasion to go to the porch for some reason or other.

"So," she said mentally once as she dodged about inside, "she's usin' her second name on him to try out. I should say 'Glory' was about as good a name as any to carry things through; though how she came to think of it beats me. Suppose she's havin' a kind of a game on her own. Minds me of the time I surprised somebody meself."

The good woman stirred something in a saucepan slowly and gently to the tune of her own thoughts.

"It's curious that I ever could have made believe me name was Daffodil 'stead of plain Mary. Plain . . . Mary, with the plain things of life right under me very nose to make me remember it. Still I *was* Daffodil for a summer . . . once and . . .

somebody else thought it suited me. Somehow I had a notion all the time it was a misfit."

In the glow of a full day the young man was sitting gazing at Spring.

"I'm afraid I'm a great nuisance to you, Miss Glory," he said.

"Not to me." Spring sparkled a moment, then grew very still.

"Perhaps we are both a good bit of trouble to Mary, but she seems to like it. After all we won't be a bother always and we'll have it all to remember afterwards."

What they would have to remember was not quite clear to the young man, but he let it pass as he did many things, at times.

"But you're a permanency here, aren't you? You don't move on?"

Spring looked slightly depressed.

"I don't want to move on," she said, "but I ought to. You see, it's a kind of business affair, even though it's relatives."

"You mean your moving on, or staying here, is a matter of business, and concerns your relatives? Funny thing it cuts me that way, too. I ought to move on because it is a business affair and concerns my relatives. But I can't, for all that."

Mary crept nearer the kitchen door, but did not show her face.

"It's my Aunt Susannah, or rather my father's Aunt Susannah," Spring explained. "Mother and our family don't want her quite as near as that. We'd prefer her to be our grandfather's aunt if it could be; but you can't put your relations back like that as if they were dusty ornaments on a shelf. Anyway, she promised mother seven dollars a month for me, but I . . . I ran away from it."

"I should think you did. Seven dollars . . . wheuff!!!"

Mary thought it was about time she put her foot on the porch. She had an idea that Spring was going to creep into some very close confidences with the young man and that they might just spoil her schemes as they were ripening beautifully.

"Seven dollars, mind you," Mary took up the young man's disgusted tone. "Why, if you was dressed up a bit extra, Spring, and had white socks on your feet, and your hair left as it is all fussed out with a blue ribbon bow on it, I should say you'd fetch more like seventy dollars in a Fifth Avenue doll department."

The two laughed delightedly.

Mary lingered. "You don't blame Miss Glory, do you, Mr. Pendren, sir, for up and doing what she did, when the best her Aunt Susannah could do

for her was seven dollars per month and speak when you're spoke to, and mind the step every two minutes of the day. I'm proud she had a mind to run away at the tail of Jerry Grab's greengrocery cart, the same being, sir, the one that clean sat on you and your auto, harness, vegetables, and all."

"We're . . . friends in adversity," Pendren said to Spring. "Do you know . . ."

Mary left the porch. It was as well she did, for evidently Quilter Lancelot Pendren had quite forgotten her existence. He leaned as far as the chair would let him, gazing to where the girl sat. For some minutes he went on talking, briskly and earnestly. It was not in Mary to stay any longer.

"Out goes the Aunt Susannah," she remarked complaisantly to herself as she started to cut a prodigious pumpkin.

CHAPTER XII

SPRING went right through her short term of probation as nurse to Mary's patient with little trouble to herself or anybody else. It is true that she was possibly a little "bossy" at times on account of the early training she had had for so long with several small sisters, and which now she applied with youthful ignorance to the young man practically left in her charge.

Quilter Lancelot Pendren took time to recover. It bothered him a good deal that he had made no agreement with Mary Settler to pay for his board. The good woman made it so evident that she regarded him more in the light of a friend staying in her house than a summer boarder that there never had been a chance of discussing the matter of finance.

But that he knew could be settled more easily than his debt to the girl who almost untiringly attended to him, carried his cushions, and sat with him in the long glory of the dying evenings, or in the warmer and more uncomfortable parts of the day.

Pendren had learned from Spring's confidence

that her people had a serious struggle for the means of existence, and became thoroughly uncomfortable about her services for him. Because she was of such fine grain and delicate mold, it distressed him to think that she also was involved in this struggle; but the suggestion that he should pay for her attention seemed like turning her into a kind of servant, and he felt afraid to even speak of it. Touching on the matter lightly one day with Mary Settler, he got the information that a fresh experience was worth everything to Spring after years of head-nurse duties to her mother's children. He did not know that the seven dollars sent to Mrs. Roper, tied up in a piece of a newspaper, together with a jar of cranberry jelly, had already supplied the first installment of Spring's earnings.

Events took a turn one day when Spring was indoors attending to the preparation of a meal. Suddenly annoyed at the fact of the doctor having refused to allow him to try any length of walking by himself, Pendren, who was furiously impatient at waiting for other people to do the things for him that he was itching to do for himself, deliberately disobeyed orders. Gripping his chair with both hands, he rose to his feet and began to make towards the porch.

If he could have done the distance in a short run it might have been an easy matter, but it re-

quired some steady stepping which he wasn't up to, and before he had gone half the distance he went on his knees; then, feeling unhappy and feverish about his venture, started to crawl the rest of the way. In getting to the porch he stumbled and fell with one hand twisted under him. His whole arm suffered a nasty jar, snapped somewhere, and then hung limply as if it had no intention of coming back to its proper position again. Clinging on to the trellis of the porch with his other hand, he tried to work the hurt one, but it flopped horribly and was starting to swell near the root of his thumb.

"Confound my luck!" he said irritably. Spring had just then come out of the house. He looked up as if he had been caught stealing.

With the wounded wrist placed behind him, he met her eyes, and tried to talk as if there was nothing the matter. All the time he was feeling thoroughly sick with the pain.

"I thought that I'd take a turn by myself. I . . . I . . . got on . . . pretty well."

Spring came to him as he stood there clinging to the trellis. With a wonderful quiet in her eyes, she placed her shoulder ready without a word.

"I can manage," said Pendren. "I've got so far. Please let me do the rest."

"Put your left arm round my shoulder." The voice was Spring's, but the authority came from

somewhere back in the generations. Pendren hesitated.

"I'm never going to let you take my weight, Miss Glory. If I can't manage we can call Miss Settler. I don't mind her so much, but you're just a . . . baby."

"Mary's not back from Mrs. Spinney's yet. Put your arm round my shoulder. I'm quite tall enough. We can go slowly."

"Please call Benjamin. I could never allow you to do this."

Then he grew impatient. "Can't you see that I refuse to budge till you do?"

Spring listened to him calmly but she never moved an inch.

"Benjamin has gone out somewhere and there is only me. Now, please. . . ."

"I refuse to allow you." His eyes met hers as she turned away, exasperated. In both faces there was a sudden flashing of temper.

"Not if I drop here as I am, will I let you take my weight," he said. "You beat me once, and I . . . I seem to see you drooping that shoulder ever since. Nice sort of thing for a man with any kind of sense to allow. What sort of a . . . a person . . ."

He was suffering both with the strain of standing so long and with the broken wrist. She saw his

face change. It grew livid about his mouth and sweat started from his hair and trickled down his face.

"Please . . ." began Spring, dropping all authoritative measures. "You can't get up yourself."

He bit on his lower lip. "I can. For Heaven's sake, don't argue! Give me room."

She caught at his arm. "I won't let you. Oh, why won't you be obedient?"

"I told you why before. Please allow me to manage for myself; you're hindering me."

Spring stepped away and turned her back. A little burst of warm temper held her just a moment.

"Very well; and if you fall and do any more damage it will serve you right."

Hardly had she said it than he collapsed behind her and went sprawling from the step to the ground.

"There . . ." It was all she could say as she flew to his side and lifted him to a half-sitting position against her shoulder.

He had almost fainted, and for a time she held him leaning against her. He was incapable of even pulling himself further.

"It . . . it's my fault," she said miserably. "I should never have allowed you to . . ."

"Oh, don't be silly . . . Spring!" He was too weak and hopelessly ill at ease lying there on the

corrugated surface of the yard to regard having called her by her name.

"I'm not silly, I'm just mad with myself."

He began to laugh queerly and the sweat came down his hair again.

"Little idiot," he said, and deliberately, to steady himself, now that he was beginning to recover, put the uninjured arm right round her neck.

"Can you raise yourself carefully if I hold you from the waist?"

"I don't intend to try," he said. She looked horrified.

He was leaning against the step, one arm round her neck, and she had applied to such a position the only meaning possible to her simple mind.

"Listen to me," he said. "I hate to bully you because you have been so much of an angel, and besides you are too sweet and pretty to bully . . . but I can't help it. I have never let a woman have her way over me yet, and if you're going to be the first one then I'm going to die hard . . . fighting."

Much of this was beyond Spring; she was trembling slightly and rather nervous.

"Did you understand that?" he asked, tightening his hold on her neck so that her face was drawn round for him to look right into.

"But . . . I don't want you to die on the

ground," she said with quivering lip and her eyes shaded from his keen scrutiny.

"I'll die wherever I want to. Right here with my arm round your neck, if I like. You are only a very small person, remember, though lately you seem to have grown like a lily in the night. Now we've got that over, suppose you just shunt me on to my side and I'll see if I can't crawl to the house with you alongside, playing mother crab."

"I wonder you can joke when you've hurt yourself so," said Spring brokenly.

"It isn't a joke. You watch me." He dropped his arm from her neck and managed to turn to his knees again; but immediately he started to crawl along, the injured wrist gave under him and he went down flat on his face.

Spring jumped to her feet. She had remained watching him where he had left her kneeling on the ground.

"Your wrist . . . your wrist . . . oh!"

"Yes, it's broken." He had raised himself and was holding it up, looking at it like a miserable dog run over in the road.

"It has been all this time?" Spring could hardly credit it.

He wagged his hand a bit more.

"Yes, it's nearly dead now. Watch it."

"Oh, how dreadful! I'll run into the next field

and see if I can get someone to come and help you."

"You'll have to hurry them, because I've made up my mind now to finish this business myself."

He started to crawl along on his knees and one hand. His back was breaking with pain and the bad wrist seemed to have numbed his whole right arm. Spring darted for the fence and ran some distance across the potato patch to the dividing fence of Hek Dean's land. There was nobody about, and she turned a second to look back to where young Pendren was struggling to get himself up the step. He had succeeded in raising his body to the level of the porch and was wriggling along over it to the open door.

She lingered a moment before climbing through the fence, and in that time Pendren had wormed his way through the door. She knew that he was going right through the passage to his own room. She dashed for the house again, and reached it in time to see him go through the front parlor door. She heard him call out as if he could bear the pain he was in no longer.

He was still on the floor with his head against the stretcher bed when she got to him, but most of his strength had gone and some of his determination.

"Spring . . . for God's sake stand by me. I

beat . . . you, Kid, but it's ever so much easier if . . . I can get my arm round you. . . ."

As he slipped to the ground the girl ran forward; then, considering a moment, she slipped the pillow under him carefully. He worked his left arm up till it reached under the pillow; she stood there watching him.

"That's better," he said quietly, slipping into drowsy unconsciousness. "What a . . . woman you are . . . after all!"

CHAPTER XIII

"I SHOULD jest about say it was time you opened up some information and let your folks have a look at things for .hemselves," said Mary Settler when young Pendren, with his arm in a sling and his back well bolstered, sat once again on the porch.

"How can I? I intended to write my father the day I . . . I broke my wrist. Now if it had only been the left one instead of the right . . ."

"Didn't strike you that Spring had a right and a left hand both goin' idle these days now you're setting up so much and taking the ordinary run of food? My opinion is that that girl can write anything she wants to. You should 've seen the letter she wrote her ma. Sheets of it, and as easy as anything I ever set eyes on. I wasn't so bad meself once, but I was doin' a regular thing in correspondence them days. Kind of setting down to it after a day's work and making pictures in me mind all the way along. I got those letters somewhere about now. Must hunt 'em up jes' to remind me . . . of what I could do once."

Pendren was more interested in this good, kind motherly soul every day, and sometimes he probed

her gently in order to learn more of her history and ways of living.

"Didn't you ever send them, then?" he asked, watching her face.

Mary clattered something she was beating-up in a bowl.

"Sure I sent them. Whatever would be the use of spoiling good, expensive, scented notepaper all for nothing? Oh, I was particular in those days and had perfume in me hair, and on me handkerchief, and notepaper. Mother used to say it would get me into the courts; for even if I was wearin' me shoes through three places at once, and I got down town, it was sure to be scent I came home with, even if it was in the color of a bit of chewing gum that satisfied as long as it lasted. Yes, Mr. Pendren, sir. And it was heliotrope notepaper, no less, for Mary Settler, with a carnation bokay incense about it that scented all my clothes if I left the letters for a day in the clothes-press. Don't suppose though now that there's much of a flavor in 'em, seeing they've laid by many a long year, and I've not bothered about 'em."

"But I thought you said you'd sent them somewhere."

Mary beat harder at the substance in the bowl.

"That didn't stop 'em comin' back when the deal was finished. Perhaps if I hadn't made the mistake

of bein' so particular-like about the color and the scent, and had wrote them on an ordinary piece of paper made rightly for folks with ordinary ideas, I might have done something with 'em. Oh, I suppose I'm mighty proud of them, all the same. I wouldn't have been without them, or the extra fine special feelings I got when everybody else had gone to bed and I was left inventin' a future. Does one go and build a stack like that sometimes, even if it do tumble down, and knock the lid off and let all the good out of it afterwards. You see I didn't know it would tumble down when I was stackin' it. Like Benjamin o' the yard the other day! Kep' piling away at the wood-heap in the shed—stackin' and stackin' and stackin' all in one tremendous heap, more like a fire escape than anything. Presently he puts the last straw on it and kinder breaks the back of the woodpile, and while he's dreamin' about it down comes the whole thing, and him, looking as if he'd been under a month's yard cleanin's. One thing these sky-scrapin' ideas teaches you. It ain't no good building a second time. I never tried."

She passed inside the house just as Spring came out with her hair well tied back and two small shell-colored ears showing just under the waves rippling from her forehead. She had on a fresh muslin dress of palest pink, which deepened her color and gave her hair a warmer tone of bronze.

Pendren, thinking of what Mary Settler had just been telling him and dreaming at the same time of the exquisite expression on the girl's face, watched her till she reached the door.

"Don't come any further," he said.

"I'm not," said Spring. "I'm going to sit on the step, just here, in case you might be needing anything."

"I need something now. Will you write some letters for me if I dictate them very slowly?"

"Why, yes; I'll get my block. Wait a minute."

"You'll find some paper with a heading to it in my bag," he called after her. "There's a fountain pen somewhere also."

Mary stopped the girl as she ran through the house.

"What are you going to do, Spring?"

"Going to write some letters." There was a fine color in the girl's face and her eyes were brilliant.

"I want to get the special paper Mr. Pendren keeps for business, I expect, and his fountain pen."

"Well, if that isn't jes' too smart for anything," said Mary, as the girl dashed away. "She's clean tucked up against his family affairs now. Good thing I reminded him she had a pair of hands going to waste these days. If he can find employment for them at this stage of things, maybe he's likely to find something better for her to do later on. I'll

have to watch the Graham P. business all through, though. It's bound to come out soon now."

During the rest of the morning Mary settled herself near the porch and on several occasions found some reasons to go out and take observations. She thought that this might be the critical moment and the young man might disclose just how far Graham P. Roper was inculpated in the matter he had referred to some time ago. It was a daily puzzle to her that Spring's father had been killed in the Pynes Steel Works and yet was being hunted down presumably in regard to this cash robbery. Pendren had told her so little, yet it weighed so much on her mind that its weight was warping her while she kept the two in her house with no disclosure to either. Things had gone just as she wanted, and there was a fine thread of friendship woven into the daily attention with which Spring supplied the young man, and which he subconsciously returned. This dictating of his letters seemed to Mary a critical undertaking, and she waited near with an anxious ear and her wits ready in the case of an allusion to Graham P. Roper, should it arise. Pendren started right away.

"My dear Father :

(Mary heard that with much foreboding.) "I'm somewhere down on the track of the man."

Pendren paused, and the innocent eyes of Spring Roper met his across the sun shaft in the porch. Mary listened unashamedly. Then to cover her silence a little she started a low, crooning song, half lullaby and half ragtime.

"I've got . . . 'the man . . .'" said Spring, looking up for her next orders.

"I wish you had," said Pendren lightly, his eyes resting on her sweet, earnest face.

"I mean that I have got 'the man' down." Spring was a weeny bit confused.

"Have you? We have been trying to do that for ages. The beggar won't give us the chance. He's too slippery."

He smiled as if to tease her, but Spring's face was deepening to scarlet confusion. Once or twice the corner of her mouth drooped a little lower, and the expression she wore made him continue his fooling.

"Shall . . . shall I write all that about him being too slippery?" she asked simply.

"Oh, no . . . no . . . no, I'm sorry. You see I'm just beginning to pick up my strength, and any little fool-game rather hits me in a safe spot. As soon as I can find a bit of stiffening in my back, and when I can locate my boots . . . I shall take a look at the car and see about getting on with this business."

He leaned a bit forward.

"Do you know, Miss Glory, that although I seem such an ungrateful beggar and take such a deuce of a time to get right, I'm really enjoying being ill quite a heap."

The girl said nothing. She glanced at him a little doubtfully. She never knew how far to believe him. Besides, she was just considering what he had said about getting on.

"Don't open your eyes so wide," said Pendren. "You make me feel as if I'll fall right into the pools of light you carry around in them. What a baby you are!"

Spring took courage again.

"You said I was 'a woman after all' only the other day; now you call me a baby again. You never stick to things."

"Nonsense. I'm a fair nair at sticking to things. I never give in. When did I accuse you of being a woman?"

Spring looked down. She had thought a good deal of the incident in which he had asked her to stand by him, and had said that it would be ever so much easier for him to bear the pain if he could get his arm around her. Of course she knew that he had only said it when he was feeling hopelessly ill and lonely and frightfully faint, but then he had curled up against the pillow almost as if it was a special kind of motherly protection, and she knew

that the words "That's better . . . what a woman you are after all" were not applied to the pillow at all.

"Well," he said, smiling across and waiting. "When did I ever say such a thing. Was I dreaming or . . . guessing?"

"I . . . think you were dreaming," she said, trying to be truthful.

"And tell me, was it one of the things that couldn't possibly happen?"

Suddenly she caught his eyes and smiled till hers nearly closed altogether.

"Not if it was *my* dream," she said.

"And do you dream you are a woman?"

He was getting all round the point just to try and confuse her.

"Sometimes," she said, still looking away from him.

"Then I must apologize for calling you a baby again. I begin to think you are more woman than . . . than anyone else in the world."

He stopped and shut his eyes a moment, as if thinking something out that had just occurred to him.

"We haven't got very far with our letters yet, have we? There are several I ought to get off my mind."

Spring straightened her back.

“ ‘I’ve got . . . on the track of the man.’ Please go right on. We get so confused if you keep stopping.”

“ Then, please, will you turn your back? I can’t collect my thoughts if you keep opening your eyes at me. I feel as if you were going to swallow me.”

The wind rustling through from the front to the back of the house was playing with the loose tendrils of Spring’s hair in a sort of pitch and toss that sent Pendren scorching to his finger-tips to get up and touch them. The gap between her blouse and ears was delicately soft, sweet, and rounded, and he drew in his lips as a hungry man might in sight of food.

“ We’d better start again,” he said, trying to look anywhere but at Spring.

A sudden resolution to give up “ playing the giddy ox,” as he called this delightful trifling to himself, made him set his mind again on the letter to his father.

Mary Settler, in the kitchen, had understood without seeing just about twice as much as these two. Inwardly she was doing a kind of hornpipe at the result of her schemes.

“ If he’d only get on with the track of that man, and hop across it, and cache his trouble somewhere clean the other side, I’d be seeing Spring in orange

flowers and my mother's wedding veil, under a month. Praise be, he's startin' again!"

Pendren began to dictate his letter with more seriousness.

"My dear Father:

"I'm somewhere down on the track of the man . . . but I find that . . . that the beggar died some time ago."

A flicker in Spring's eyes, an opening of her lips seemed to indicate that she was going to say something; but she changed her mind as quickly as the flicker of thought had spun across her eyes, and was silent.

"It appears that there are a bunch of women to deal with, and that their only recommendations are that they are a hard-working lot, able to fight their own battles in their own way," Quilter Lancelot continued. "I don't think we need start pulling on warmer socks on that score. We can touch them in a sort of compromise at any time later. Meantime I am keeping a lookout for anything that might be credited to Blessing and . . ."

Spring swung her first look of real consternation on him.

"You mean a blessing, don't you?"

"No; Blessing is the name of a man. Though

what in thunder he wanted to be called that for beats me."

Mary had wandered out to the porch with a cup of milk for Spring and some equivalent for the young man.

"You'll jes' stop a minute, Mr. Pendren, sir, if you don't mind, and take a sip or two's refreshment," she said. "I'm not so keen on any express, non-stopping kind of business for a man who's nearly been wrecked in his last speedy journey."

Pendren said, "Thank you," and took the cup; then he went on explaining to Spring as Mary stood there.

"All I can say is, Miss Glory, that if I had a name like that I'd take jolly good care not to live beneath it. Instead of a blessing he's more like a *curse* to our family."

Mary took the cup from him.

"If I might put me foot in for one moment, sir, I might jes' suspicion he was a blessin' to somebody and you not know it. It's like havin' a cold, mortal bad, and having to stop in bed with a tremendous pain somewhere when you wouldn't otherwise dare refuse to go and take tea with, well, say, Deacon Heddy or Miss Liz Hetty. That's my way of lookin' at it, sir."

Pendren was too much taken up with his topic now to stop or heed Mary's amiable garrulity. He

went for his subject as though he were smashing an egg.

"Confound him! He's been up against our family for generations!"

"Then he must be wearin' out with things, seein' he's been raging that long." Mary still lingered with the empty cup.

"Wearing out? He'll have a hole through Dad's heart worse than if he'd been chased by a cannon ball. If I could get my hands on Blessing I'd scruff him first and pickle him after."

Spring had never seen this man in his fighting mood, and although she admired the strength behind his voice, and the way he spoke of his father, she trembled inwardly.

"He's been sizing up your dad then, same as if he was carving something he's a grudge against, is that it?"

"He's been raising . . . hell . . . I mean he's been chucking bricks since my grandfather's time, though it was the old chap that started the trouble. You see it's this way——"

He sat forward again, and took relief in opening out on the whole subject.

"Old Blessing was in my grandfather's employ before the works came down to us, that is, to Dawson, G. Pendren, and Son. I'm the last portion of that. You take me? Well, there was some trouble

in grandfather's time about somebody looting the cash box or playing the business false, and this old Blessing raised a war among the men. There weren't such things as strikes in those days, but he managed to churn up enough dirty water to make it uncomfortable for my grandfather. The result was that Blessing was clapped in prison as an inciter of riots or some such ructions, and though it was years ago, we've been fighting the second Blessing, his son, ever since."

"You mean he was annoyed like, and tryin' to get somethin' back on account of . . . of his father bein' put in prison?" said Mary.

"You've got me," answered Pendren. "To continue . . ."

"There's more of it, then? It's a whole chapter or so in the family volume, I should say."

"Yes, and it's likely to be a complete novel before we've finished. You see, the son happens to be some sort of a ninth-rate, out-at-elbow, cur-jawed, long-eared kind of a lawyer-chap, and he's been nosing round for years trying to drop on something likely to upset our firm, and give him a banquet. That's where the trouble comes in. You're getting it, aren't you?"

Mary had been listening as intently as she knew how.

"Land," she said, "we're getting it, as you say!

We'll all be up to our necks in it presently. I can see that."

Young Pendren was too wrapped in his story to notice the sharp edge of her words.

"Well, this chap, Blessing, after digging about, brings up some cock-and-bull yarn about there being a side line in our family who can lay claim to half, or more, of the estate. He reckons he's on the track of the man now, who, if he cares to let him take up the case, can claim the biggest part of our business. Blessing swears that unless we make it good to him to a tune of some thousands, he'll see us through the courts and fight the other chap's chance for nothing."

Quilter Lancelot stopped to swallow down some of the spirit this talk was raising in him. Mary stood there before him more amazed than she cared to feel.

"Of course Dad says he'll see him frizzle first, but he got me to take a run down just to sort of nose a bit for ourselves, find out if this family really exists, or if it is all a put-up game of Blessing's. If the family really exists we've got to fight it, but by . . ."

Almost beyond himself with rage, the young man stopped as he caught a frightened glance from Spring.

"By your bright eyes, Miss Glory," he finished,

pulling himself up and laughing shortly, "we'll take them through every court in the United States of America, before we let them have what's been ours for generations."

Mary was leaning forward as if she thought she might be required any moment to revive the young man if he fell back exhausted with his excitement.

"I don't exactly calc'late to understand any too much of that, Mr. Pendren, sir," she said, "but I guess there's not so much to get cold feet on, after all. I was kinder holding a grudge against somebody who had maybe filled his side pockets from your father's till, right along. Is it that they want to make you part up with some of the shares of the business? Well, that isn't so bad, after all!"

"Bad?" Pendren looked at her as if he would have liked to get up and shake her. "Bad? It's . . . rotten. Would you divide up your potato crops, and your turnip patch, and your house and all, and give over perhaps the biggest share after you'd slaved in it for years, to somebody who just hopped up—on the word of a blackguardly nobody who wanted to get even with you? Would you?"

Mary took this gently. She showed some slight hesitation all the same.

"Well, I guess I'd rather have it that I'd been even with them first of all, Mr. Pendren, sir. If

you're not on a level with folks to start off with, how can you expect them to balance you, afterwards? Certain I'm as fond of my bit of a place, bad seasons or fair, but if anybody hops up now and gives me good reason why it's theirs, and not mine at all, then . . ."

"You'd give it up without a fight. You'd be a fool if you did."

"Maybe I'd be a bigger fool if I didn't, and they took the case to court and I had to walk out prompt, looking altogether a mighty small worm after I'd been trod on—and serve me right."

"Well, we are not going to be trodden on, I can tell you. If there was a cent's worth of truth in the story, I wouldn't mind offering these people a small sum to compensate them for any loss; but they'd have to prove their claim; and we've got enough money to run the thing dry before they could do that. It isn't likely they have enough even to start a fight." He laughed.

Spring ventured to speak for the first time.

"How horrible!" she said. "If money is the strength of it, you ought to be fair and give them what is theirs without a fight."

Young Pendren glared at her. She saw the force behind his mood.

"If it comes to that, nobody on this earth has a right to a thing," he said. "You might as well

ask the President to give up his rank or the great railroad makers to resign their claims because of some rotten socialistic worm. The business is ours." He laughed to ease the situation.

"I'm a beggar to talk, once I get going, but you can't see it my way. If these people would take a small sum, which they might deserve, I wouldn't be so violent about it, but with Blessing to fight for what he can get out of it, our case might be up the spout. Great sharks, I must get up. . . . Miss Settler . . . I'm red hot and all oiled to start sparking. You remember I asked you the other day if there were people about here called . . ."

With wonderful accuracy Mary dropped the cup and saucer on to the floor and raised a shout as if she had been shot.

"Sakes alive!" she yelled, dashing for the kitchen, "I left a syrup tart all this time in the oven, and . . ."

For the moment the two remained listening.

They heard Mary open the stove door and utter another cry.

"Bring me the yard pade, Spring, like a good girl, and we'll jus' hep this tart into the sink."

Spring was beside her in a minute. The syrup tart was certainly bubbling and sparkling in the oven; but it was crisp and golden and wonderfully flaked.

"Why . . . Mary . . . ?" she began, when the woman hushed her up.

"Why? Because that young man will be havin' a fit of something we can't cure if he goes on talkin' any more," Mary said.

the
vin'
kin'

CHAPTER XIV

MARY managed to keep Spring employed inside the house till quite late that evening. When the girl took the tray of supper into the parlor where Pendren had been assisted an hour before, he was inclined to be moody, and scarcely looked at her. More than his recital of the story disturbed him that night when he went to bed. He lay tossing until the morning.

Early next day he pulled his clothes on with his one hand and by pushing a small chair before him gained a place on the porch, where he sat in almost childish temper.

Spring found him there when she took a broom to sweep the porch. Immediately he started talking.

"Miss Glory" . . . the tone was one of a grievance, "I wish you wouldn't use that broom near me!"

"I didn't mean to raise the dust over you," said Spring, her cheeks aflame.

"I didn't mean that. I hate to see you sweeping."

"But it is part of my work. I couldn't live here without doing something. Could you?"

She saw her mistake as soon as she had spoken. Trying to evade it was of no use. The young man was flashing immediately.

"I've had to live here without doing anything for ever so long," he snapped. "But I intend to make some settlement to Mary, you may be sure. It's her beastly goodness that is chloking me, and yours, too. What do you want to make me feel like this for?"

"Like what?" There was a charming simplicity in the way she said it.

"Like . . . this! One minute I want to slap you. Yes, slap you for being so . . . so . . . you. And the next I don't want to do anything of the sort. I'd like somebody to break my head if I did it. How do you think I'm going to repay you for all you've done? Do you see my position? Do you?"

Spring looked at him hopelessly.

"I never understand half you say," she began.

"Thank goodness," said Pendren. "One thing I want to ask you. Will you please consent to my suggesting something that might help you?"

"I don't want help," said Spring.

"I'm glad of that. It . . . it cheers me a whole lot, but there's your immediate future to think of. You've got an angel mother with a whole batch of children, to say nothing of the mortgage on your

mind, and . . . and I feel a positive brute to sit here taking your time and attention, and I can afford to . . . to, well—pay for it. . . .

“Oh, please don’t think I’m trying to be independent and all that tommyrot. I just . . . love it. I mean, the little things you do. I . . . was only thinking last night that I’d be a heap worse off when I was better, than if I remained with only half a back-bone and one serviceable arm for life.”

Out of the midst of his peculiar mood he smiled at her. Spring was biting the top of the broom as it rested on the step. The morning sun was on her hair and in her heart.

“You don’t mean that?” Her eyes held him so that he could only answer foolishly.

“I do . . . honest Injun!”

“You must be fearfully . . . happy here,” she said, looking him right through to see if he wasn’t really playing again.

“I am . . . I’m just beginning to recognize what a fool I’ve been.”

“And how much you appreciate everything and how much you admire Mary and all she does. I don’t think she’d like you to speak of payment. She’s funny like that. She never wants money, she says. She never seems to use any.”

“Certainly not on herself. But I’m sure she’d like to use some on you.”

"She has. She gave me my colored muslin, and the new shoes, and ever so many things I wear at other times."

"Oh, then she *is* keeping you. That's what I want to get at. You see, if she's keeping you there can be no harm in my offering her some money to . . . well, to buy you a few pretty things. Great stars, Spring, I'd just like to run you up to New York, and watch your face, and let you order from the big plate-glass cases as you liked. It would be gorgeous. I can see just what you'd look like in a . . ."

He stopped a moment to take in her whole person.

"I'd put you into the palest shades I could find, the softest materials, silks and lawns, not heavy satins. You'd be the daintiest fairy in crêpe de chine. I know all about crêpe de chine because my sister is great on it. And big hats! Lovely flopping things with berries or buds on them. Must be flopping because everybody would be staring at you so hard you'd be crazy with fright." He was looking quite different now under this new spell.

"I'd take you in taxis so that nobody could make you afraid, and I'd have the biggest stores turn out their goods till there was a pile that would take you a year to go through without wearing the same thing twice. I'd have somebody special to brush

out that lovely crinkly hair of yours and turn the sun spray on it every morning for me to look at. I think I could lie all day looking at your hair, Spring. . . ."

"Would you be turnin' on the refreshments between times jes' to give it the look of the life of an ordinary common human being, Mr. Pendren, sir?"

Mary Settler came into the entertainment as the young man stopped speaking. He saw that his only way of escape from a compromising situation would be to take her question as she had put it.

"My word, Mary," he said briskly, "you'd be in it as well. You'd be just the person to do the brushing. We could have . . ."

"Are you thinkin' of turning Spring into a penny-in-the-slot-walk-right-in-and-see-the-fat-lady-kind-of-affair. I'm not set on her going to the city, 'cept she go in her proper line."

Pendren had gone too far in admitting his concern for Spring to try and get out of acknowledging its consequences in a hurry. Moreover, he was so worked up that he did not want to wade out.

"There is only one rôle she could fill," he said quietly.

"Please tell me; I'm just crazy to know," came from Spring.

"So I will, Miss Impatience," he replied, set-

ting back in his chair and half shutting his eyes on the girl. "There's one thing, though. You don't come into this till you're allowed. I'll have a talk to Mary presently, if she has time."

Mary dodged past him and took up the broom.

"Sakes alive, we'll never get the porch swept at this rate. You go right along and fetch Mr. Pendren his coffee and toast-rolls, Spring. Set a cloth on the tray, a good clean one out of the press."

Spring retreated with tingling nerves and a throbbing, glad heart. If the unexpected was about to happen then it must be of the nature of one of her dreams. In her mind the things he had been saying spun round with marvelous velocity. Surely it meant a lot of money. More than she had ever known, or dreamed of, and it would of course benefit her mother because she would never consent to live dressed so fine unless her family was being dressed likewise.

In what capacity she was to go to New York and live so well she could not think. It was true he meant to pay because he had mentioned it first of all. The whole thing was too new and too much of a far-away vision to dwell on. She attended to his breakfast, and somehow, though she had turned the subject out of her head, it gave her a light-heartedness, fresher than the morning.

Mary gave the porch the touch of a really heavy

hand as she treated young Pendren to a bit of the same thing in another way.

"You got Spring all anxious and thinkin' herself real gold plate all through," she said, and worked the broom quickly. "I'm wonderin' what kind of a situation you've got in your head that will dress her out like a store window at Christmas time. I'm half sorry, Mr. Pendren, sir, to hear you givin' way to such a manner of expressions. Spring don't belong to your set, nor your sister's set, nor to any place you're used to. I'll find myself asking you in a minute to treat her same as you would anybody else you had a respect for."

"I can only treat her as she ought to be treated," said Pendren, and steadied down a bit to consider. "She's a lady born and bred, anybody can see that, and she's come of good old stock, blue blood and brains. That's a certainty. . . ."

"And you were thinkin' of putting her, Mr. Pendren, sir, right in the full light of blue blood and brains in a dress likely to daze her terrible, and make her talk like something out of a book which would scare the tongue of her in twenty-four hours. You were thinkin' of garnishing her out same as a table at Thanksgiving time, and for why, and for what reason, everybody would have to guess." She moved over to him and leaned on the top of the broom.

"Mr. Pendren, sir, if I might come into it a bit nearer, as I'm kind of takin' her mother's place . . . would you be treating Spring honest, traveling her as a decked-out peacock in clothes she hasn't the money to pay for, nor is likely to have this side of a fortunate surprise? Just exactly, sir, what she'd be going as?"

• When he had let himself go in his admiration of Spring, Pendren had not reckoned on having to explain it. He knew he had been foolish to drift into a situation which necessitated Mary's asking questions before he was ready to answer them—before he was sure even of the breadth, depth, quality, or quantity of that admiration.

"I'm anxious she shall have her place with other girls, not half as brainy or pretty. I intended writing to my sister . . ."

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, again, but bringin' your sister into it before she knows anything about Spring don't give anybody a fair show."

"But she can help me."

"She mightn't take to the child same as the rest of us. Spring's got a way of turning a red-hot feelin' into your blood, but same time she jes' might run it in cold if there's woman's jealousy about. What did you exactly mean by helping you, sir?"

Mary's anxiety to get the matter on a sound footing was making her more than usually curious.

"Well, I thought that . . . that my sister might like to have Spring as company and help with the children. She can't manage them a bit."

Mary reared as if a wasp had stung her.

"That's not what I got in my mind for Spring at all, sir. She's had her mother's children ever since she was born herself, and if that wasn't enuff experience till she starts a family of her own, then I'm going to chance it and refuse, sir."

"But she could earn good money." He was slightly flushed and a trifle exasperated at Mary. "She could start that way."

Mary's heart throbbed and bumped as if it were out of place.

"And would I be overcurious, sir, to ask, if she started that way, what kind of a finish might we all be countin' on?"

"Well, you never can tell, but she *might* marry."

"Ah! There's more in that suits my palate. I got as much belief in a girl like Spring marrying as I've got in what they teaches in the Sunday School. She might marry, then. That's settled. I can breathe without breaking my heart now, sir."

Quilter Lancelot Pendren did not altogether like the tone, but he was pleased that she regarded him in a friendly way again.

"Yes. She might marry. Certainly she might. Of course," he said, carefully considering, "dressed

as I picture her, she would turn the heads of a thousand men in New York."

"One would be sufficient," said Mary, "if it so happened she managed to turn him right about facing the way she was looking at him." She took the broom inside the house.

Pendren sat there thinking till Spring brought out his tray.

"I don't see the slightest reason why . . . why she shouldn't marry," he said to himself.

CHAPTER XV

"CORa's b-a-d!"

Mary turned to catch the drawling tones of Mark Spinney as he put a hot, grinning face inside her kitchen door.

"Mercy, what a turn you gave me, Mark," she said quickly.

"Turn off the joy a bit, my man, and let us have all the news to hand."

"There ain't no news. Cora's b-a-d, that's all!"

"Meanin' she's scared somethin' fearful and sent you tumbling over to ask me to come up? I been expecting you an hour, Mark. Suppose you nearly bust your boots running?"

Mr. Spinney lurched across the kitchen and took a chair unbidden.

"Always got a joke handy, ain't you, Mary? Cora's been up since four o'clock, walkin' the place, something turrible. Wanted it that I get Hek to come along. If Hek can't see what's doing with his own gal without me having to hand him out a printed card of invitation . . . I'm not going to ask him why."

Mary threw the fire together with one hand while

she pushed a saucepan simmering to the edge with the other.

"That's no argument," she said. "You should 'er got Hek along. Miss Hetty, too, she's likely to want to come into this. She's most mortified if she's lef' out of things."

"Cora wanted you, Mary. She's done set on Liz Hetty since she took up cooking and baking for Hek. She's got Hek fixed real tight these days, Mary."

"Who, Cora?"

"Neow. Miss Hetty. She's up there twice a day now and turnin' out the place so often Hek can't locate a thing he puts down. Good enuff for Hek, too! Hope he loses his head one of these days. She'll hev it somewhere in her mind, I reckon."

He allowed a long laugh to break from him as he shot his heavy legs forward, and put a dead, evil-smelling pipe between his lips. Mary fussed about and reached for her bonnet and faded cape which always hung behind the kitchen door.

"You get me beat, Mark. Some folks couldn't take things as easy. I was thinkin' of taking a spell up Clara Hopkins' way. She's home now and working only three days a week at her job. I got me mind crammed to breakin' with business these days, but I meant to stand by Cora all along."

"She's talkin' about dying, mostly, the last hour.

Wants it that we get Deacon Heddy and her father to come right along an' fix up that business about her clearin' out."

Mary turned quickly. Her eyes pierced the man's as if she were going to strike him; but she spoke as calmly as ever.

"Ain't that serious, Mark? If a girl wants her father mighty bad, ain't she to have him?"

"I ain't stopping him. He knows what's about. He's got the use of his legs same as the rest of us. Miss Hetty can't stop him walkin', can she?"

"Look here, Mark, Liz Hetty ain't in this at all. It's your business to see Hek's called to Cora if she's scared and askin' for him."

"Oh, she's sc-a-r-ed all right." A subtle expression spread over his face and he took his pipe from his lips to smile. "She's been scared all day yesterday. I had to stop home and clean up the place. Cora's awful careless and easy-goin' with things of late."

"And ain't it your place same as hers, Mark? You ain't working, and she's doing double shift with the baby coming and the house as well. You come right along with me now. Who'd you leave with Cora?"

"Mirandy Bell, she's stopping a piece while I come for you."

Mary threw up her hands.

"Mirandy Bell? Land o' liberty! She's about as useful at a time like this as you are, Mark."

The man took it hardly.

"I got up at five o'clock."

"An' Cora, four o'clock, with the scare of death in her, and not even her father called in to comfort her. Suppose Doc Harkins is getting along right now. We must hurry, Mark."

"I give over hurrying, Mary. Twice I got half-way here and Cora called me back again. What's a chap to do?"

"Do?" Mary looked right through him. "Anything he can at a time like this. You step along, Mark, and I'll be with you in a quarter of a minute. I got to fix things here before . . ."

"I hear you got a bunch of interesting folks stopping?"

"I've got something more interesting presently to talk to you about, Mark. Hustle now."

She went out to the porch and spoke to Spring. The girl was sitting there with a little piece of sewing between her fingers and her eyes wide with wonderment.

Pendren worked a pen in his left hand slowly. On his knee there was balanced a pad of note-paper and he was practicing how to write with his left hand.

"I got a call up Cora Spinney's place," said

Mary. "If I don't get back quick I'll send Clara to look after you a spell. There's a chicken in the stew-pot, Spring, and mind you see it don't stick to the bottom. Mr. Pendren, sir, you'll excuse me while I trot out to see what I can do for a poor soul that's only got a lump of wood for a man, and green wood at that, which isn't sort of encouraging jes' at present."

Pendren started to speak, but she rattled on:

"Benjamin's up the yard, and if you should be requiring anything immediate just you holler out."

"There won't be anything immediate," said Spring with a little happy flush.

"Miss Glory is so capable," said Pendren, sending a swift glance in the girl's direction. "You might get this letter away for me, if you don't mind. I've managed perfectly well with my left hand."

Mary took the letter. "Look at that," she said, smiling at him. "I do love a man that tries. If that lump of green wood in my kitchen," she added, lowering her voice, "would only do something that's well-nigh impossible, I'd think a heap more of him. But there . . . I must push him along. Cora's getting cold feet about herself with no one but Mirandy Bell to do as much as a word for her."

She bustled off, and Mark Spinney took a short

cut somewhere while she herself deliberately set out towards the next field. She meant to pay a call on Hek Dean as she went past his house. Mark's duties had to be undertaken by somebody, even if they were of the sort that called up all manner of trouble.

Spring watched the short, bulky figure climb through the fence and splash through the sandy patches to Hek Dean's land. With a wonderful glow in her eyes she turned to Pendren.

"I wish she'd bring the baby back with her don't you?"

He held her eyes a moment.

"I thought that you'd had enough of that sort of thing to last you the rest of your life?"

"Enough of babies—dear, little, cuddley things?" She seemed amazed at him. "I could never love anything in all my life as I love our last baby. Sometimes I see her at nights and I feel her little velvety arms creeping about my neck. . . ."

Her glad expression changed; tears trembled at the edge of her eyes, and one tumbled down and damped the sewing she had in her hand.

"I'll hate it if you cry," said Pendren.

Spring mopped her face with the sewing.

"After all, it isn't a thing to cry about, is it? I haven't lost them for good and all. I'll be back some day, won't I? Oh, Mr. Pendren, you're so

good and so . . . rich. . . ." Stumblingly she said it, like a nervous child. "You could arrange anything . . . anything, couldn't you?"

He put down the pen and sat foward.

"You've only got to say it. I'll buy the whole family for you if you want it." In his face there was a sudden glow. He felt himself trembling on the edge of the precipice that he had avoided that very morning. The cover he usually had over his knees was pushed aside. He made an attempt to stand on his feet alone again.

Spring did not notice it. She was trembling with excitement.

"It would be just lovely if . . . if you really could," she said, half smiling. ". . . But of course they are not in the shops like the things you spoke of this morning. If they were . . ."

Her face beamed and he took two or three steps towards her.

"If they were . . . mother would be the most expensive, of course. Or Elsa. Elsa has the most glorious hair—nothing like mine, and ever so much real gold running through it. Prue—would, of course, be really quite expensive, though she is thinner than the rest of us. Her voice is just perfectly heavenly. You would wonder that she could have it all in her body."

While she rattled on, flushed and happy, the

young man gained her chair, slipped to the ground and sat contentedly at her feet.

"If I was putting a price on our family, Mr. Pendren," Spring hesitated, "and it was really be bought like that, I think I should have to stand at a reserve . . . isn't it? You know, you make the value out first of all and won't take a cent under. Would that scare you if you really considered . . . buying an expensive family like ours?"

Full in his face she laughed, for he had turned towards her and was looking right into her eyes.

"Nothing in the world would scare me if . . . if it meant . . ." He stopped, nervous, then he went on again. "I say, they must be the most wonderful lot of children ever built. Couldn't we go and see them? I'm just aching to hear Elsa sing and the rest of it."

"You'd go crazy in ten minutes over Christine if you care for girls at all. She's perfectly lovely and sweet all the time. Have you ever seen anybody talk with her eyes, Mr. Pendren?"

"No, but I've heard them quite often," he answered, watching the dark-rimmed iris of her own.

"Well, Christine never has to open her lips, mother says. If you want to punish her she's saying she is *ever* so sorry long before she has stopped crying enough to speak."

Pendren grew hot. "Who ever wanted to punish a child like that?" he asked almost fiercely, still watching the eyes near him.

"Why, nobody ever wanted to punish her; but sometimes, perhaps——"

"I'd break my heart if anybody put a finger on her," he went on, deliberately supporting his tired back by resting his shoulder against the girl's knee. "I'd kill the man who made her unhappy, and I'd hang for murder and be pleased to do it."

Spring dropped her eyes.

"Why, you are talking as if you knew Christine all the time!" she said. "Are you only making-up so as to please me?"

"I never make-up to you," he said. "Don't look away so often; I can't understand you so well when you turn your head. Of course I know Christine and the whole lot of them. Mother, Elsa, Christine, Prue. I've only got to look into your face, and while you are talking I see them all dancing round merrily. It's as good as being at home with them all."

"It couldn't be as good as being there. You've no idea what mother is like. . . ." Suddenly she stopped. A brightness enveloped her face and she turned eyes in which the sunlight danced towards him.

"Is that what you meant when you said . . .

said, once, that you'd seen mother's beautiful little feet? You mean just through looking in my eyes.'

"Something like that. Didn't you know that you were the whole family, Elsa, Prue, and Christine in one."

"But mother . . . you spoke as if you really had seen her!"

"I said I had been watching her feet for half an hour at a time. Well, I was watching you in the hammock that day. You are just your mother over again, don't you see?"

Evidently she did not quite, but something else disturbed her.

"Do you know you've been most comforting to me today, Mr. Pendren, and you've been awfully nice, explaining things. Well, there's an awful story on my mind. Not so much of a story as it is a kind of . . . covered-up sin."

"Something you've told me, I'll wager."

"No, something I've never told you."

He leaned more against her knee. "Oh, come now, we're not playing at confessions. I hate that kind of thing. Let us talk about the family. What do you want me to do? Ask what you like. You know I am really ever so much in your debt."

Spring folded the sewing because it was almost impossible to do anything else with it.

"And don't wriggle your hands so." He caught

hold of one of her hands and did not let it go again. The action did not even disturb her.

"Look here," he went on earnestly. "When you said just now that I was so good and so rich and that I could arrange anything, what did you mean?"

"I meant . . . that you could really help me to make some money. Oh, it will have to be lots and lots! There are so many of us, and the mortgage, and . . ."

"Now we are talking. I want to help you. Wasn't I suggesting the very thing this morning? Now suppose I write to my sister and ask her to have you with her. She's a trifle particular over the children, but . . ."

"Oh, would there be children? I'd love that kind of work."

"Well, Mary doesn't think you ought to take it on any more; but you see, if my sister took an interest in you, which she will certainly do if I ask her, she might even promote you to something better."

"It sounds ever so good. When could I go?"

"You could go with me. I shall be returning very shortly now, and I could write first of all."

"And please could you send a first installment of the money to mother immediately I begin."

The young man considered.

"Well, that could be arranged, certainly; but I'm afraid it would require something like a lump sum down to make any difference to the mortgage. Now suppose I run down presently in the auto. I'm having it fixed right away. I could take you with me and then we could do my little bit of business and return to New York in a day."

The plans made the girl vibrate with something she had never experienced before.

"Is it going to be a very big fight," she asked. "I mean, the business with the Blessing in it?"

"Dear child," he cornered the other hand that had strayed to her throat, "there's no blessing in it at all. It's a beastly business altogether, I can tell you. But I don't want to discuss it. I get hot and mad, and I never, never want to get that way when I'm with you again."

"That's awfully nice of you, and perhaps you'll make it right for those poor wretched people who you speak of fighting. I don't believe you'd be mean enough to keep anything from them that was really theirs."

The young man hesitated, then replied:

"It's not so much to me as to my father. Oh, you don't know how he has worked and . . . anyway, whatever I do, you may be quite certain that I'm fighting for Dad and not myself."

"That's just what makes you so . . . splendid,"

came from Spring. "You do try so hard. Why, you managed to write those letters with your left hand, and you did get right along to the parlor the other day with your bad wrist . . . oh, you've done it again—— You've . . ."

He laughed loudly. "Yes, I've done it again; but I didn't crawl this time. I walked boldly. I wondered you didn't start making a fuss long ago. It's been such a relief to do something really for myself."

Spring's eyes dulled a trifle.

"You're getting quite strong again, and I suppose I should really be thankful."

"I can't tell you how thankful I am. Aren't you?"

"Of course, in a way; but then . . ." Her face turned to his like a sensitive child's.

"It's been perfectly lovely, Mr. Pendren."

"It's been . . ." He withheld the words, and just stood up carefully, still holding her hands, and looking down into the beautiful depths of her eyes. Without finishing what he had been going to say, he drew backwards slowly and took his chair. Spring never knew what that restraint had been to him, and her heart palpitated with something like childish fear as she observed his face.

CHAPTER XVI

HE remained silent and gloomily thoughtful for a while; then Spring brought out his tray.

"I haven't told you all my name, Mr. Pendren," she said, sighing as she got the confession off her mind.

"I don't care." He was decidedly brusque and hardly said "Thank you" as she placed the tray on his knee.

"I thought that you might like to know the rest of it and mother's as well."

"Please do not talk to me for a little, Spring. I'm . . . I'm dreadfully bad-tempered at present."

She moved away immediately. Then he called her almost roughly.

"That doesn't mean you should go. Why don't you . . ."

"If I stayed I should only be talking." So simply she said it that he felt ashamed.

"Talk all you want to!" he sighed impatiently.

"So your name's not Glory?"

"Oh, yes, it is; but it's something else as well. I'm Spring Glory and mother is Anna Glory, but we're . . ."

He put up a finger. "Do you know I've got an idea we haven't been treating each other quite fairly. You've kept things from me, and I've certainly kept them from you. Suppose we leave it at that for the present. If you turn on the confidence tap now I've got to do the same . . . and I don't feel like it. No, I'm hanged if I do. Little girl, would you mind awfully if I told you to go inside and not come out again till I call?"

"Of course I won't mind. And about the other, I just wanted to have it clear I was sorry to have been cheating you."

He forgot the tray on his knees and leaned back and closed his eyes.

"Looks like we've all been cheating. My goodness . . . if she only knew."

He put the tray away from him, and all the afternoon lay there thinking. That she had withheld her full name never occurred to him as anything but a childish freak. They never had started being serious till lately . . . lately. It came to him then that affairs generally were more than serious with him. The business concerning the firm and his father was turned aside for something he could not get rid of.

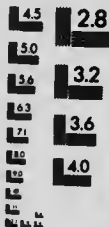
The important thing to do seemed to bring a certain amount of happiness right to this child's feet.

He found himself considering her family with something like a new enthusiasm, and how their for-



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



4.5
5.0
5.6
6.3
7.1
8.0
9.0
10
11.2
12.5



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

tunes could be bettered. He counted the family over in his mind. If Elsa could sing, she might be fully seven; and Christine, who never spoke but with her eyes . . . well, she might be anything, but surely within the age limit when spanking was not prohibited. Then there was Prue, with the glorious hair. He wondered how many years of growth it took to make hair as wonderful as Spring had described it. And last of all . . . there was Spring herself. She was nearly seventeen, he had heard that once, and she seemed to carry the responsibilities of the whole crowd on her small shapely shoulders.

Out of the sum total of all this he could not make very much; but it was sufficient to tell him that any sum his sister paid for service to her children would not cover much of the expense of such a family, even leaving out the ones he knew that the girl had never mentioned. Oh, yes, there was a baby . . . something with velvety arms that cuddled into your neck. He had never had such an experience; but the thought of it made him wriggle as if a worm had crawled over him. Anything as soft as that really made him nervous. Gradually his mind came round to Spring and her pure soul again.

So her name was not only Spring Glory. There was really a romance in the whole thing.

He was smiling to himself at the thought when

somebody passed him to go up the steps. It was Benjamin, who with stentorian breaths was making for the kitchen where Spring was singing softly as she worked. At first Pendren was struck by the boy's immense shadow cutting off the sunlight, then by the noise of his breathing, and then by the smile widening as he went by.

Pendren said something about the weather, and Benjamin just answered him, and continued to go up the steps. He seemed in a hurry to get inside the house. Usually he stopped and said a few words about the country or the automobile or the long talk of accident, or about Mary Settler, or himself; but today. . . .

Pendren began to feel distinctly as if he had really been in the way when Benjamin had passed.

"Confound him. Perhaps he hasn't had his dinner, or . . ."

On top of his reflections concerning Spring came the thought that perhaps Benjamin had come in to take advantage of Mary's absence by having a word or two with the girl. Perhaps Spring liked to have Benjamin to talk to her. He was a good fellow, although a little uncouth.

Pendren sat up and called to Spring. She looked out the door a moment afterwards.

"I can't come now," she said. "I'm talking to Benjamin."

He took it as any man might have.

"Serves me right," he reflected grimly. "I sent her away and I'm suffering for it. Suffering. Stars and stripes! I could be jealous about her, and I haven't the slightest right. Oh, hang everything! I wish I'd never come here."

He got up and walked slowly to the door from the porch, entering. Benjamin was talking, and Spring was answering him as she might have answered one of her baby sisters. Pendren, gripping the door, like a thief, listened.

Benjamin was talking. "'Course it's caring, Miss Spring. I'm just about caring as much as anybody, though mostly I stops in the yard when I'm bursting to get down in the kitchen. Mary mightn't believe it, but she will presently. A chap without a . . . girl might as well be a bottle of 'fiz' without a cork. There's nothin' in him less she's right there to keep him in his place; and if my place's the yard then why couldn't we work the place good and hard, with me takin' on every bit of the outside work. I guess there ain't so much difference between us, after all."

Pendren shut his left hand tightly and leaned against the wall with the bandaged one. He could only make certain things out of this conversation, and they did not add to his peace of mind. He

waited for the girl to make answer to the apparent advances of Benjamin.

Then Spring spoke. "I think it would be better for everybody, Benjamin. Wouldn't a wedding be a perfectly lovely thing?"

Pendren shivered. He bit his teeth into his lower lip, for not only was his strength giving out, but his patience also.

"I've saved ever since I was fourteen," Benjamin was saying. "An' I got no cause to be ashamed to offer myself."

"One would never be ashamed," Spring was taking things up again, "if it's love all through, Benjamin."

"Dunno what you'd call it, Miss Spring, but it's here . . . here, and that's where the safest things belonging to a man lie, usual, in his heart, not in his pocket. An' so I made up my mind when Mary went out today to come right along and ask you . . ."

A sudden darkening of the doorway stopped Benjamin from saying more, and Spring opened her mouth very wide, amazed to see Pendren standing there gesticulating with his bad hand while he supported himself against the frame of the door with his other.

"Oughtn't I to come in . . . to come in?" he asked fiercely, angry lights in his eyes. "I'm sure

I've been out long enough today. Why . . . wny . . . don't you come and . . . and suggest my coming inside?"

He realized that he was behaving foolishly, that his manner was querulous; but Spring took him seriously.

"I'm so sorry," she said. "You see, Benjamin . . ." She stopped, knowing that she could not divulge what the boy had confided to her.

"You see . . . Benjamin."

"Of course I can see him," said Pendren irritably.

He stood staring at Benjamin till the great, shock-headed fellow began to measure his own length nervously trying to discover what everybody was referring to.

"Ain't nothing crook with me . . . eh?" he asked, observing his heels and his elbows carefully.

Spring realized that she had brought about a misunderstanding unmeaningly and began to laugh over the cause of it.

Pendren, who saw no joke, turned to go from the kitchen. He had suddenly become aware of the fact that the laugh was with Spring against him, and he was furious with himself, and wroth with the whole situation and with the circumstances that had brought him into it at all.

"When will Miss Settler be home?" he asked

sharply. "I must get fixed for a move on tomorrow. Tonight, if possible. This sort of thing can't go on any longer."

Spring was going to ask: "What thing?" but the expression Quilter Lancelot Pendren was wearing would not permit her to say a word. She stood gazing at him very sorry and very upset, for some scarcely known reason, and Benjamin stood awkwardly and uncertainly beside her.

Pendren had started his temper blazing, and it got out of hand as quickly as a prairie fire.

"I'd like you," he denoted Benjamin by a wave of one hand. "I'd like you to give me a hand getting my things together, and if Miss Settler does not return presently you might hunt out my boots. I can't go to New York in bath slippers."

Benjamin stared at him, as though he thought that the young man from the city had taken leave of his senses.

"My boots," Pendren said stiffly, to impress Spring with the firmness of his intentions. "I'd be obliged if someone would tell me just where they are."

"You really mean to . . . to go?" It was all that Spring could say. Her tone turned the tide of his resentment, but although the young man answered her mildly, he still held himself aloof.

"I've been meaning to go . . . every day and

I've delayed foolishly," he said. "Perhaps it would be wiser if I did not wait for Mary's return. She is apt to persuade one, and I'm quite strong enough now to get into the car and run my business through. Have you the least idea where those boots of mine are?"

Spring began to search the kitchen. Benjamin followed her about, awkwardly searching in precisely the same places as she did to find the boots.

"Guess this is a kind of a sort of Sherlock Holmes job you've turned on to us," ventured Benjamin when they came round to the side of the kitchen where young Pendren lingered, still gripping the door with his best hand. "Mary, now, she hadn't ought to hev put a chap's boots away so careful. Maybe it's the mice she's fearing. You started out from the accident with as decent a pair as was ever skin to a hoss. Sure Mary can't be wearing them herself."

"They must be somewhere in the front parlor," said Spring at last. "Would you . . . would you mind being taken back to your own room, Mr. Pendren? Then we could hunt in there while you sat and watched us."

Just for a moment the young man had forgotten his ill humor and was looking from her to Benjamin and back again from Benjamin to the girl. He was wondering how this tousle-headed fellow had

started out with the notion that a girl like Spring could ever care a rap about him.

"I think I will go to my room, thank you," he said calmly, "and if you can unearth my boots I will be really grateful."

He let go the door frame and began to move unsteadily along the passage. Spring watched him with Benjamin, her eyes dull with the depression of fear lest he should drop before he got to his room.

She followed him along the passage. He turned his head and spoke over his shoulder near the door of his room.

"I'd like to get that car along tonight. Boots or no boots, I can delay no longer."

When they had both reached the little parlor, Pendren settled down on the couch bed like a weary, old child. He looked at Spring.

"I'm convinced that I was right, after all, when I told you a woman that time. You have a wonderful way of baffling a chap, so I've got to think twice before I can . . . can trust myself to even, even . . ." He stopped because the girl was standing there looking as if she might be expected to break into tears any minute.

"What's the matter?" he broke out sharply.

"You change your mind so quickly," Spring said.

But young Pendren went straight to the mark.

"When I discovered just today that you were most of all a woman before . . . before anything else it came naturally as a bit of a shock. So many things you have been keeping back from me, though you were honest enough to allow that you had not told me all your name. There were other things, too, that you had not told me, and yet we seemed to get into the private corners of your family only an hour or so ago. We were learning all about Prue and Christine and . . . and your mother, and your coming to New York to . . . to take up a proper start and to earn enough to make things go, and then . . . and then I suddenly find out . . . other things. Miss Spring, honest Injun, do you think you are treating me fairly?"

Spring's face glowed with fresh hot color. She did not know what to say.

"You must admit, Miss Glory, that you've left an awful lot out that, that, well, might have made things easier between us if you had told them to me."

"I wanted to tell them," came simply from Spring. "Only you would not allow me to speak today."

"Then I suppose I have only got myself to blame. Would you mind turning all the things over in this room and seeing if you could find those

boots? I never knew a pair of boots to cause so much trouble before."

He was arriving at that stage at which a man asks himself whether he may not have overdone his righteous wrath and indignation. He sat watching the girl turn over his bag and Mary Settler's old chest.

"Were they ordinary boots, just like anybody else would be wearing, Mr. Pendren?" Spring asked presently, when he had stared at her for quite an uncomfortable time.

"Quite ordinary black boots," he said indifferently. Then all at once he got up again and moved slowly towards her.

"Stop looking," he said, and restrained her as she attempted to go down on her hands and knees under the table in the corner. But Spring had already crouched and was nearly under the table. He caught her tenderly, gently, and almost reverently by the shoulders to raise her to her feet.

She righted herself and found her small body very close to his and that he had not even taken his hands from her shoulders. Turning her about, he looked straight into her face.

"So . . . you think it ought to be love all through, Spring?"

Very slowly he said *no*, and the girl looked back into his face unafraid, but wondering.

"Why, yes. For Benjamin. Don't you?"

"I never knew till this last hour that Benjamin came into it at all, Spring. That's one of the dreadfully horrible, womanish things you kept from me."

Spring knew that she had never been held in such a grip in all her life, for the young man was so earnest now that he had forgotten to remove his fingers from her slim young arms.

"But, you see . . . it would never have done for me to have mentioned anything to do with Benjamin or Clara, because you see it's his own very private affair and . . ."

"Clara? Who the . . . who's Clara, now?"

"Why, Benjamin is ever so much in love with Clara, and Mary isn't altogether pleased because, of course, Clara is ever so much older than Benjamin, but it doesn't seem to matter to me at all. Would you think it a very bad thing, Mr. Pendren, if . . . if you were really caring all through, and the girl you just loved better than anything in your whole life was more like your mother? Would you mind? Would you? Don't you think caring is just the same whether it is young or old, or like a sister, or like a mother? Don't you? . . ."

But Pendren could not take all this in. He was so overcome at the idea of his stupid mistake regarding the farm-help and the garrulous woman

who visited the place mostly in the evening, that he just clung to Spring and forced her to come and sit down with him on the couch-bed.

"I think you are the most beautiful little soul ever born," he started. "Spring, I've got ever so much to tell you about that same kind of caring all through that you talk about. Why, all my life I've hunted for it and women have come and passed, and once . . ."

At this very minute, just when Spring had allowed her hands to be taken firmly in his, and just when Pendren started on the story of his life with some definite purpose, Mary Settler put her head around the door and gave her opinion outright as to the manner in which some people set about finding a pair of boots that had never been lost at all.

"If it's boots, Mr. Pendren, sir, that's keeping you from being overhappy in this climate there they are. Benjamin thinks that car ought to be around here about sunset. It's getting on that side now, so . . ."

Never before had Mary Settler seemed to possess so much spine. She stood there just looking at him, but in that look many things were plain. Pendren got up slowly from the bed and took his boots without a word.

CHAPTER XVII

PENDREN's car had been brought into the yard, but the young man himself remained in the front room just as Mary and Spring had left him there.

On the floor in the half dark his boots looked to him like the end of all things, for after Mary had departed to the kitchen, taking the girl with her, he had been aware for the first time that he was an intruder rather than a welcome guest.

He sat on the edge of the little stretcher and touched the fabric of the covers. Nothing had ever appeared so deliciously cool and easy before. All around him there was the peace of something which he felt he had been living in for an eternity, the beginning of which had been lost somewhere and the end of which was right now staring him in the face. The smell of recently cut grass across the road filled him with a feeling, the like of which he had experienced only once in his life before, and that was when he was leaving the newly-made grave of his best man-friend.

He realized it the very moment Mary had handed him his boots. There in front of him were his boots polished so that even in the half-light they

seemed to mock him by their readiness for action. Twice within the last week he had cautioned himself not to ask questions about his boots, and for the very reason that he wished to avoid the unpleasant sensation of a break from his secret comforts. And now he had done the very thing to bring about that shock, and the break was here, and there were but ten minutes to make up his mind as to what he was going to do.

Once or twice he wondered whether Mary was considering his sudden resolution to go a joke; and was just humoring him by seeming to consent to it. She was not the woman to allow him to go out into the dusky uncertainty of the country while he was still so weak.

She could not possess a spirit of such pure Samaritanism and permit him to go . . . but then she had put the case so cleverly and directly. That was the fault of Benjamin, of course. The man of the yard had supplied such information in the first few moments of her home-coming that she had immediately taken it for granted, as Pendren insisted on going that very night, that his visit was becoming a bore to him.

Four minutes passed. The boots absolutely rippled in lines of brightness. Somebody had been using the polishing paste pretty freely. As the darkness crept into the corner of the room, there was

no mistaking their invitation. They almost called to him to pick them up and put them on. But he felt himself less capable of pulling them on than of walking the distance in his bare feet. But something had to be done and done at once. The clink of china being set on the table for the supper made him feel his position the more keenly. The meal would be served in a few minutes. Despite the fact that he had insisted that he would not even wait till Mary returned from her visit to Cora Spinney, Mary had been in the house some time now, and still he delayed.

He leaned forward to pick up one of his boots. The clink of china came more familiarly than ever. He dropped the boot. Surely no one with such a generous heart as was in Mary Settler's breast could permit him to go on his journey without as much as a mouthful of supper? Usually she was over-anxious that he should be well fed. Apparently now, because of his ungraciousness, Mary was prepared to ignore his existence.

Pendren wondered if Spring would remember him. . . . He stooped to pick up the boot again. His fingers were burning and he tried to persuade himself that he was having a slight fever on account of rather overdoing his strength in the afternoon. But he kept the boot in his hand and looked into the creeping silent night.

A tramp, unkempt and weary, dragged his legs across the road. The man was making for the fields, evidently in search of a comfortable straw barn for a night's lodgings.

Pendren watched him from where he sat. In the mood that held him he felt little better than the tramp. He was crawling mentally along the road of life in the same disappointed way. His hopes of happiness lay all behind him, he told himself dejectedly.

Then forgetting his languidness, he walked briskly to the window, adjusted the shade so that he could see further out, and watched the man, who scattered the dust as he slouched along. This gave him an idea. He whistled, a short, sharp, distance hail, and the tramp turned. Pendren then held up the boot, signaling to the tramp to come to him.

Two minutes afterwards both boots had started on a fresh track under the arm of the tramp, and Pendren looked much relieved, although certain lines round his mouth told of a guilty sense of mis-doing.

He turned quickly from the window as Mary Settler entered the room with a lamp in one hand and his rubber rain-proof and hat in the other.

"Like as not you'll arrive at the depot time to miss a good square meal, Mr. Pendren," she said, putting down the lamp and taking good care not

to observe that his valise lay open on the table, and without anything having been packed into it. "I jes' told Spring to parcel up a few sandwiches. You'll be glad of them when the dust begins to get you a bit. I might put you up a bottle of my cider as well. This express notion of yours don't exactly fit with my ideas of hospitality."

She looked at Pendren out of two soft, warm eyes.

"It does seem a bit of a . . . I mean, it does seem ungrateful of me to hustle like this, and you—tired I expect, Mary, with so many things on your mind."

It was all he could manage just then, for the kindness of her heart was making him thoroughly ashamed of himself.

"Oh, I don't mind now as Cora Spinney's through with a fine plump baby. I set Mark down to doing some of the chores of the house same as I would Benjamin. Tomorrow I'll go along jes' to take observations like, and if things don't look kind of promising Mark goes *out*, and Hulky Smith goes *in* and takes the entrance money."

This sudden change of subject allowed the young man sufficient time to recover his lost ground. He delayed his own grievances by carrying on the affairs of the neighbors.

"Do you mean to say you are going to pay a

man to do the work on his own land?" he asked quickly.

"Dunno that I'll be doing the paying; but Mark won't sit tight there doing common house chores unless there's something in it."

"And the money . . . who is standing in for that?"

He had a suspicion that Mary herself was more than charitable in this, as in most other instances.

"Well now," said Mary, giving the lamp a bit of a rub with her apron. "Would you be throwing a somersault if I was to give you the direct information that Hek Dean, Cora's own father, put that money up this very day out of consideration of the way things has been going of late? Oh, Hek's a bundle of tracks, pictures and all, mostly, all handing out of nothing but hot air on the subject of what's right in his estimation, but same time if I can get him to hand under a nice easy rub-down, he comes up all shiney and purrs just for all the world like Hannah-Ellen, my old kitchen cat. Mind you I don't say I'm not distributor and collector of that cash; and it all goes to show that if we can turn on the tap to the main channel of Hek's banking account jest occasional, Cora ain't likely to suffer none on account of that baby and Mark out of work."

"Mark has no work and there's a baby?" Pendren looked really concerned. His concern gave him time, too, to reinstate himself in Mary's good graces. For the first time in his life he blessed Cora Spinney for being the woman she was. He could spare quite a lot of interest on her and to an extent it was sincere.

"If it wouldn't be presuming too far, Mr. Pendren, and you not in a big hurry tonight, I'd take it mighty kind and charitable if you'd jest run that car along be the fence of Hek Dean's land, and ask him to step up and see Cora. Hek's got to be kept moving for the reasons of that new baby, and to stop his legs goin' stiff with rheumatics, at the same time.

"I'll jes' send Spring in with those sandwiches . . ."

She bustled out again, and young Pendren found himself facing the open valise and a row of toilet things which he had not noticed till the lamp came into the room. Mary had arranged these things just handy for him to pack while she had been dilating on the affairs of her neighbor and he had not noticed what she was doing.

The full realization of what he had to do now was not to be ignored. Mary expected him to go, and to execute a commission for her at the same time. He started to pack the bag, but the idea of

his going seemed so ludicrous that he smiled. Of course he wasn't going. How could he, without his boots? He looked at his feet. The scarlet leather of his bath slippers reassured him. Surely Mary must have noticed that he had not put on his boots and that his boots were not there to put on!

He called softly.

"Why, Mary . . . I declare if those wretched boots haven't disappeared again."

He managed to keep his voice pretty even and reasonably sincere. To his horror and complete amazement Mary Settler replied from the end of the house.

"Jes' what I expected, Mr. Pendren, sir; but as they were only a pair as Benjamin had by him many a year, bein' unable to wear 'em on account of a bad corn he was rearing at the same time, there ain't no cause for you to be upsetting your mind so fearful. I'm bringing your own pair in under ten minutes . . ." (A pause while the woman held her own breath out of sheer fright that she might show her private opinion too freely, followed.) "Ten minutes . . ." she went on carefully, "or maybe half an hour. Dear me, it will take me more than a day to get the mud off them, but still . . ."

In the front parlor young Pendren carried a happy heart.

"More than a day to get the mud off them," he

repeated. "More than a day . . ." The mere idea sent him down the passage a different man.

Spring was sewing very quietly on the kitchen settee and her eyes came slowly to his as he passed through the door.

"More than a day . . . to get the mud off them," Mary repeated from somewhere out of sight, and he heard a vigorous brushing of boots.

He looked at Spring and sat down next to her on the little settee.

Mary came into the room with the boots on her hands.

"I guess we'll give 'em that time to soak in the cream, Mr. Pendren. I should say they'd be easier to shine by tomorrow."

"By . . . tomorrow," said the young man, looking only at Spring.

CHAPTER XVIII

A SHAFT of soft moonlight rode like a blessing right across the open fields and laid lingering, tender hands on the woman's shoulders as she passed along. It was eight o'clock and the earth and its creatures had settled down into the calm that creeps out of the unknown as the weariness of a day passes.

Mary trod silently over the dusty ground and the moonlight on her black cape might have been pale hands embracing her. For the second time that day she was visiting Cora and the new baby, taking Hek Dean as an incidental of the journey. The car belonging to young Pendren still remained like a lumbering, heavy monster waiting to be stirred to life in the yard, and when Mary passed it she gave it a few hand-pats of confidence.

"Not that I'd be thinkin' I got any right to try and understand the works of such a mind as that Lancelot, and not that I'd be right in me own mind to be judging such, but sure he's as cunning as any I've tried to dig into. What's underneath has got to come up and the sooner the better."

She crossed her own cultivated patch of land and crawled through the fence into Hek Dean's fields.

"Reckning on the Graham P. business being just about white hot now for stirring so's not to burn the bottom of the pan, I guess it was about the correctest thing to leave those boots lie a day under the poultice of cleaning paste I give them. Never saw such a mess of boots before . . ." She chuckled. "I'm wonderin' what he did with the other pair, the ones belonging to Benjamin that I unburied in a mortal hurry earlier, and which I knew was good to work the problem in his mind to a finish? Finish?" She sighed. "If this night don't settle into something, and that something be to the good of us all, counting Spring in as a sort of Queen bee to lead off a bit . . . then I give it up."

Her musing was here interrupted by coming face to face with Miss Liz Hetty, who, with cloak and bonnet, was preparing to leave the back door of Hek Dean's kitchen.

Mary and Liz had never had what one might call a really private interview since their ambitious days. Miss Hetty had acquired a sort of subtle quiet when alone with Mary which the good Samaritan always welcomed rather than blamed. On the other hand, Miss Hetty would have found much to say if Mary Settler had chosen the silent course.

But tonight, for the first time in years, Liz Hetty found herself leaving an open field to her

neighbor, that open field being Hek Dean's profitable graces and neatly arranged kitchen and living-room. Therefore she clung to the door handle of the house and met Mary querulously and on the defensive.

"Seems like, Mary Settler, some folks ain't got enough to do at home with ellergant boarders from the city and a kind of summer-girl living rich and good on the profits," she said. "I guess you'll be wearin' out your body before it's had its rightful time, same as your mother did, on'y her much younger and better wearin' than yourself when she took to her burial."

Mary nodded.

"'Tain't everybody, Liz, as remembers my mother same as you do," she remarked easily. "It's mighty kind and charitable of you to worrit yourself over me. Times I've been laid in me bed wonderin' how it was you never come to be 'momma' to me after that good soul passed right along to the best place picked for her."

This little reference to a difference in the respective ages of the two women had its effect. Mary knew in her own mind that certain things had been worrying Liz Hetty for a matter of ten to fifteen years, and that the slowest years of a woman sometimes are those that come after forty. She took what Mary said quite quietly.

"Folks might have thought so," she said carefully, dropping acid into her speech, "when I ketched up to you first year at board school and Miss Passey, our school teacher, havin' it against you that you started there three years before I got the chance."

"Sure you carried enough brains about with you, Liz, to weight you to home without as much as a day's learnin' in that old schoolhouse. I mind the day you stopped home on account of the rain. Miss Passey was mos' terrible upset. She wanted you to speak up, for Deacon Burdy, and none of us with anything ready. She was mighty keen on gettin' you goin', Liz, no matter if it was Deacon Burdy, or school festival. And us all sittin' there with not as much as a quarter of the tongue you could supply . . . sakes alive, I remember the time . . ."

The gentle grilling of Miss Hetty might have gone on further had Mary not suddenly remembered her mission. She turned to walk to the porch.

"Hek ain't to home, Mary."

"That's likely, Liz. I see you was leaving prompt this evening."

A slight flush ran over Miss Hetty's withered cheeks.

"Maybe he's gone up to Cora already?" inquired Mary.

"Maybe, Mary. Maybe not."

Liz Hetty went down the path to the little white gate and Mary turned the handle of the door. It refused to open. She looked about for the key.

"Like as not Liz has it in her pocket an' will keep it there till she thinks Hek's time to return home will be kind of drawing close. Well—it's no kind of a day, or night, when Mary Settler had to climb in through a winder because she wanted to wait somebody's return to have a word in season, but still . . . sure as I'm seven years the junior of Miss Elizabeth Hetty, I can do it if it's necessary."

But neither window nor door would give to her fingers. Miss Hetty had turned the house into darkness for some reason or other, not yet plain to Mary, but she sat down wearily on the porch looking into the moonlight, and there she waited. Time never had proved so profitable. She was determined to see Hek alone and to do so she must wait his return, even if he brought back Miss Hetty with him to open the door. It did not worry her . . . it was an opportunity to think and to work out the various parts of the several domestic tangles growing like a web before her. She looked back towards where her little cabin of a house lay in the light.

"First of all . . . those babies in my kitchen," she said, and mentally turned the leaves of her day ledger.

The kitchen settee was not really wide enough for even a small girl and a man quite so tall as young Pendren. That is, not if there is stitching to be done, and a good arm's length of cotton to be considered. Spring wore a face as glowing as a summer rose, and Pendren reclining just behind her shoulder, had been telling her so many exciting things about New York and his sister that an unexpected warmth rushed all over her tender young body. She positively burned with happiness.

"You were so right, Spring, about it being love all through. Of course it could never be the proper kind of stuff if it had any flaws in it. It would be cheap at that . . . and that is why I want you to trust me."

Spring looked over her shoulder; but his face was so close to her ear that she could not keep her eyes in that direction.

"Is it Benjamin you are talking of?" she asked. "Or someone much nearer yourself?"

He smiled, she was so simple and sincere.

"I wasn't speaking of Benjamin at all." Pendren took a deep breath.

"Of course it was someone much nearer myself. Someone quite—quite close. . . ."

"A relation in New York?"

"Not exactly, though my sister may be considered in it as well. You see she is older than I am

and usually takes me in hand. Before I can make things quite plain to you, Spring, there is . . . something to be considered. All that has got to be unraveled and this business of the firm's—the affair with Blessing. Listen to me, Spring, will you promise me to stay with Mary till I'm through with it; not to move as much as a foot to take work or anything like that? I'm bound to get this beastly thing through in a day or so after I locate the people I'm looking for."

"And when will you do that?"

"Oh, possibly in a week! I can't use my wrist on the car for a time, but I'm going to hunt round for a man to drive, and I'll get through very soon. Then . . . my sister and New York . . . New York for both of us and . . ."

Here Spring could hold the needle no longer. She drove it through the material and left it there.

"Mr. Pendren," the voice and eyes were a child's. "Would mother be in it, too?"

"Why, yes . . . and Prue and Elsa and Christine and that cuddley baby."

She folded her hands in a way that suggested a little silent prayer, and young Pendren, sitting there so close, just touched her lightly round the waist.

"Spring Glory," he said, smiling, "you are the most perfect thing that I've ever known. If I could let my tongue go now . . ."

"But it isn't only Spring Glory," said the girl, raising herself and turning so as to face him directly. "It is not only Spring Glory."

"Hush," he said, "you can confess when I do. There are so many things I've got to get right now before we can start plans for home that I don't want you to say a word. Not a little word! Just go on being you a little longer. I prefer you as Spring Glory until I have the right to . . . to . . . know you as something else."

There was a fine light in his face as he said this, and Spring picked up her sewing again. Presently he took a wooden chair at the table and picked up a piece of paper and a pencil and tried to write.

Spring put down her work.

"Why didn't you tell me you wanted to write, and let me do it?" she said. "It's ever so much more interesting than the sewing."

But Pendren went on practicing to write with his left hand.

"I must learn," he said.

In Mary's mind his case was undergoing a thorough investigation meantime. She put it to herself in this way.

"For all the world like givin' the place a proper clean-out once in a while. Down comes the pic-

tures and ornaments off the bureau and up goes the broom. My, but it's wonderful what you can raise out of the dust behind them ornaments, even counting in the once-a-day cleanin', never missed by any kind of a mistake. Sometimes out of the dust you can sort up all kinds of trouble that's got blown there when you've left the winder shades too free, and sometimes it's unexpected things comes out of that same cleanings, and you're sort of surprised and gladsome that you undertook the thorough turn-out."

Her eyes wandered again across the fields to where two golden eyes, the windows of her own house, glowed in the misty darkness.

"Now Lancelot and my girl Spring come in on that list of cleaning, same way. By leaving them alone tonight makes it the precise moment when unexpected things is going to come down in the dust. The winders have been open free to the light and fresh air ever since they met up in the garden patch, and him wearing enough of it on his bath slippers to convince me that the 'mountain had gone to Mahomet,' as the sayin' is. Well . . . what's been hiding away behind the things in Spring's and that young man's mind has got to come down now. It's a clean sweep, and I'll be collecting some most interesting things in my dust-pan presently. I guess it will need the sifter to

root out the precious bits of information I'm coming across if there's much in the Roper, Graham P. business—but that might have more of a blessing in it than we've reckoned on."

As she surmised this Hek Dean came wandering, dragging one leg, towards the back porch. He saw Mary and signified it by a nod; then he took his place on the step beside her without a word.

For a time there was nothing said; then the old man rolled some tobacco leaves in his thin, knotted hands.

"Minds me of the time we climbed Paradise Hill, Mary," he said, curiously indifferent to the fact that the woman might have been waiting there an hour or more. "You mind that time . . . your mother was mad as a hen off her setting of eggs because we stopped out a bit longer than we had ought to. I mind there was two winders in Johnson's house all lit by a banner lamp, that kep' up a winkin' at us, and us taking as much notice as we . . . might be doing now. There was nothing to ireeze us home them days, Mary."

Mary replied with her eyes still set towards her own place.

"The rheumatism hadn't worked up so familiar then, Hek," she said.

The old man smoked silently for a few minutes, then he said crisply:

"There was worse things than rheumatism then, Mary. There was wimen's tongues . . ."

"Same as this very present time, Hek," Mary interrupted.

"Yes," he answered. "I was forgetting Liz Hetty."

"You've no cause to forget Liz, or anything she's done charitable for you lately, Hek. Doing what she's doing at this time of life for you goes in as part of things, just as much as climbing Paradise Hill when . . . when we were thicker of blood and more easy roused."

"'Tain't likely, Mary, I'm forgetting what Liz does here be the day, or the night, for that matter, now that she takes to coming back to put the poultice on me chest for the pneumonia she's scared I'd be getting. What's a poultice anyway, if it comes regular as a man's pipe once of an evening? Only difference is that I enjoys the pipe and I can't say as how I likes the poultice quite the same. Liz has a hefty way with her. She might be stacking hot bricks on me chest, way she drops that linseed plaster and shifts it about."

"It ain't depressed you any, Hek, all the same," said Mary, still watching the windows of her own little cabin across the dark fields. "And you ain't got the pneumonia, nor cold, nor anything rampageous in your lungs since Liz took to doping you."

Some folks would go down on their knees to Liz Hek for half as much."

"I wouldn't mind jest about half as much, but Liz's plaster's twice the size an ordinary cow would kick at."

"Cows is cows, and men is men," said Mary. "I never put much on the fact of treating them same way. Liz knows what's she's doing."

"Sure she does. She's got the key of that door in her pocket now, so's I can't—can't get in without her knowing, and so's I'm not to escape the plaster." He breathed deeply and went on smoking.

In the interval Mary turned her mind to the reason of her visit.

"Did you see Cora?"

"Yep," shortly from Hek.

"And the baby? It's as like you, Hek, as . . . as your two hands is like each other."

Hek turned suspicious eyes towards her; but she had never taken hers from the windows across the field.

"You'll allow there's a chain or two's difference in our ages, I s'pose, Mary." Roused somewhat, he let himself go very near being sarcastic.

"I dunno that there's as much as a chain or two, Hek. I never found a man different to a baby in misunderstanding himself in the whole course of my life yet. When a woman marries she thinks

she's got what they calls a husband; well, if she only calc'lated on it beforehand, and understood jes' what she was going to undertake, she would find she was starting her family right then, with a very big trial that had to be fed and watered same as anything else, of a different name."

Mary stood up on the step. Miss Elizabeth Hetty was coming along the sidewalk and things were likely to be taking a fresh turn.

Hek stood up, too, and there was that in his face could not be kept out any longer.

"You got a mighty funny way of forgetting to hang that key behind the water barrel, Liz," he said.

"The water barrel ain't exactly the place, Hek, to leave the key when there's tramps about, and folks who come in and out as if the place belonged particular to them." She threw one sharp glance at Mary and opened the door with the key.

"By a lot of ways I'm agreeing with you, Liz," said the good Samaritan quietly, "but it's over late to keep a man of Hek's years out in the cold, glued to his own porch same as a cockroach waiting its proper turn to get to something better. You'll be needing to give him an extra dose of the linseed and mustard before you goes home tonight."

She went down towards the little white gate and through. All this time she had scarcely lost sight

of her own windows which faced the porch, and crossing the fields she kept them before her all the way.

Presently she noticed something different in the glowing eyes of the lamplight in her house. It was a silhouette, distinctly outlined in the square in the kitchen wall. Young Pendren had finished his letter, carefully written with his left hand, and something had relieved his mind to the extent of making him do the thing which had been in thought so long. He crossed the kitchen to where Spring sat stitching her little muslin frock. Mary saw him stoop and raise the girl to her feet. His arms went round her and she submitted to his tender kiss for the first time in her life. Something seemed to snap in the good woman's head as she watched the picture.

"It's all the same," she said, standing there in the patch of stubble of the garden, "it's all the same if it's kisses or poultices . . . there's the heart of the mother behind it all."

She wandered on. "Blessings have come down in the dust same as other things," she said as she scraped her feet on the door-iron.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN Pendren rose deliberately from his chair and left his letter on the table, Spring looked surprised; but when he took hold of her as if she had never grown up at all, and was just an armful of something soft and lovable, she did not wonder any more. He had so often held her wrists, or her hands, or her shoulders, and this complete embrace seemed only in keeping; but ever so much more tender and to her own taste, than any excited, hasty handling.

The young man started talking right away as if he had just been putting some of it down in his home letter.

"I asked you just now to trust me, Spring, and to remain here—not to move a foot from Mary's house till . . . till I arranged to take you away." He kissed her red, warm lips and something ran into the girl's blood that had never been there before.

The change showed in her face.

"Do you know . . . I don't think that I should have done that. But you looked so . . . so abso-

lutely eatable. Spring, I feel as if I would kill any man who has as little right over you as I have if . . . if I'd seen him do a thing like that."

But Spring was just looking at him, and the flame in her eyes and on her cheeks was not chiding at all.

"There you are! I'm about as inconsistent as a summer breeze. I don't go to the point right away, and I'm a long time getting there at all. But you see . . . dear, I can't explain myself until . . . until I get an answer to that letter over there. You'll try and believe and wait, won't you, Spring?"

The simplicity that is in every man when love invests his soul was springing into his eyes and beating in his heart. Its pulses made him feel as young in the world as the girl was.

"Do you mean, believe that you are good?" asked Spring.

He touched her again gently, but her lips were sacredly revered.

"Believe that I love you, Spring. Anything else at present doesn't matter. Oh, my dear, there is ever so much to tell you! Ever so much to be hammered out and put right! When this rotten business of the firm's is fixed, and . . . and the other . . ."

"Something troublesome, is it?"

"Something that is but a temporary obstacle, dear, i. . . . in our future together."

"You mean in New York?"

"Yes, in New York and . . . other places."

"Is it here—the obstacle?"

Slowly he answered. "No, it is not here, thank Heaven."

Spring put out her hand. "Do you know you seem to be in as much trouble as our family?"

"I believe I am," he replied, half smiling. "Only that there is only me in it, now. You see, if I didn't get through it all, safely, there would be you and Prue and Christine and Elsa and that cuddley baby and the most precious mother all in it, too. I want to avoid that, and so if you stand by and believe in me, dear, and wait . . . oh, there might be ever so much waiting, because, you see . . ."

The sudden noise of feet being scraped on the door-iron stopped him. He put up a finger. "Remember, even Mary must not be told a word of what I have been saying."

"You mean . . . about . . ."

"About . . . well, about my loving you, Spring. It's got to be a secret until all this business is settled. You see, it might so turn out that I . . . I could never marry you, Spring."

He got no further, for Mary was at the door, looking in. From her appearance and her de-

meanor no one would have imagined that she had heard anything, but those last words of his were taking in her heart, as hard and fast as if they were knives driven there.

"When you are up against the band," she said mentally, "an' the music some excitin', it's small blame if your constitution does get up and shake itself."

However, she made a few remarks while hanging up her cape and bonnet, and turned to the two quite easily.

"Hek's encouraging a chill or pneumonia some by allowin' Liz Hetty her own way with his back door key. Seems like them patent winder catches might be useful, after all. You can't lock 'em up any more'n you can unlock 'em, so there's safety in bein' unable to break into your own house at nights more often than not. Miss Hetty now . . ."

But the silence with which the two received this gave her a hint that she was talking too widely for the present situation.

She was simmering under the young man's last . . . and she wanted more than anything to ask him what he meant by them. Marrying him had never suggested itself to her even when he had confessed to loving her. Everybody loved her, except her Aunt Susannah, she thought; and even she might have if she had been a dutiful niece and had

not broken the things on the whatnot when she went to stay with Aunt Susannah.

Pendren was lost to find out what he wanted to do first. There on the table was a letter addressed to somebody whose existence had never been mentioned by him, whose significance in his life had not entered into his thoughts for the last month or two. The address was showing as clearly as the kitchen lamp on the table would permit, and what was more, because of his infirmity, he had printed it largely with his left hand.

Mary was not looking at the letter; but Pendren felt uncertain about everything connected with his visit in its presence. He began to take the place of a thorough blackguard in his own opinion, for having told the girl of his love. But no accusations came from Mary, who sat down and leaned on the table without seeming so much to glimpse at the letter.

"You'll be turning that auto on pretty free to running away in the morning, Mr. Pendren, sir, I suppose," she said. "Spring will be wanting a ride as far as the turn of the road; but no further. Autos are dangerous and unrighteous things to sit in, 'cept you're able to do it upside down occasionally when the time comes for the reverse engines business. Say, Spring, if it don't give you the hint to strike a trail for your bed this very minute, then

I'll have to carry you there meself, and I'm more weary and upset about . . . Hek and Cora, jest present."

Spring folded her sewing slowly, although she had done it before, but she fidgeted and pricked her fingers, and finally went over to Pendren almost as if he had called her to him.

"Good night," she said. "I won't be going in the car. I'll—I'll be helping Mary . . . and . . ."

She wondered if he would kiss her again, and stood there, almost waiting for him to. There would have been no blush of shame or modesty if he had stooped and touched her lips. In fact she expected him to do it; but as he stared at her, almost strangely, she thought that the kiss must have been part of the secret, and the mistake she had made showed gradually in her cheeks, which paled slightly.

"And making ready for that nice-looking job I'm preparing for you, Spring, lovey," the good woman finished for her. "You'll be seeing Mr. Pendren in the morning to say good-by, so jest you go to bed comfortable in your mind about any benefits he might have had in his mind over New York and fattening you up like a Thanksgiving turkey. It's good-by in the morning, an' you can sleep to-night jest as usual. I guess we will both be kind of sorry . . . but so will Miss Hetty for locking

Hek Dean out of his rightful place. Life is much the same everywhere, here, or next door, or in New York. You get me, Spring?"

But the girl did not understand. She passed dreamily out of the kitchen and along to her room.

"Now if you'll jest take a corner of that settee same as when Spring was setting there a while ago, Mr. Pendren, sir, we'll come to business right away."

Mary watched till he sat down wearily, then she went express to the point.

"You've been kind of pulling a string on that baby till you've got her almost tied to strangulation. You needn't jump on the settee as if I was throwing fire-rockets about. I don't blame you none, Mr. Pendren. Spring's as fine a girl as will ever go to the pickin's of an uncommon, high-level woman. But all the same, we don't want her, as I said before, pushed into something that don't suit her, nor what she don't understand, any more than we want her on exhibition for things as is not in stock like they advertise in the papers, and never has behind the counter. Say, Mr. Pendren, what sort of a kind of a friend are you to Spring? That's my job from this minute. I want to get on to the tail-board of the cart that goes to the proper depot, and I don't mean to upset that cart none because I may seem overanxious to get to the truth in a

hurry. No, sir, you're driving that same cart, which is only a matter of fake, after all, an' I take it you must be driving somewhere and expectin' me to foller; as it's Spring being carted into the special abode. Where's this fairy palace in New York, and what's it all mean, anyhow? Is it straight cut or an extra shuffle, and quite a couple of cards under the table, nobody knows anything about? I'm handing you out my honest opinions, sir, and I want yours in return."

All this time Pendren was staring at the letter on the table and Mary had not lifted her eyes from his face. With an easiness born of experiences in the business life of a great city and its daily exigencies, he crossed the room and picked up the letter. "You are quite right to ask me that, Mary," he said with a masculine attempt to cover any confusion there might be in his breast. "Spring is, as you say, an uncommonly fine girl, and . . . and if it's to be New York for her . . . well, we'll all drive there presently."

He smiled at Mary and used her own simile to dispel anxiety.

"All drive there . . . meanin' me on top of the cart, same as yourselves?"

"Why, sure! Spring will need careful handling. And she will need someone she loves to be with her. I would never dream, either, of separat-

ing you, Mary. She has grown into your heart, I can see, as she has grown into . . . into . . .”

He found himself getting out of his depth again. The letter in his hand idly pressed against his side, reminded him of what he should not say. He balked, swallowed the rest of his words, and let the good woman finish for him.

“As she has grown into yours, Mr. Pendren, sir. Now I’m not blaming that. Anyone who could resist Spring half an hour after seeing her, and hearing her talk in the quaint way she’s got, would have to be cast in clean steel.”

Mary rose from the table.

“There’s things in this dope I can’t understand, Mr. Pendren. I can’t swaller any more till you’ve set certain thir ght in it. Now I’m not asking you, but I’ve g aething to tell you. Did that baby ever give you her right name?”

“No, and for the reason that I forbade it. Mary, I want to play fair, and until I can——”

Mary threw up her hands. “Sakes alive,” she queried, with something of pain in her eyes, “is it a double deal and both of you with cards on the floor? Look here, Mr. Pendren, sir, it’s all on account of that dear, sweet, precious woman as is mother to Spring that she and me has been keeping back her really and truly name. This is precisely the corner of the road, sir, where we stops dead as

a shot rabbit and finds ourselves never so much alive in the whole course of our lives. My! when Spring opened out the Glory part of her name clean on to you like an electric spot-lamp comin' sudden and a bit too familiar into your face, and you expecting nothing more than an ordinary buggy lamp, well, I says to myself, Spring has got her own reasons, and after a bit I says to myself that it works as good as a door catch to keep out anything that hasn't yet been handed out an entrance ticket; but now that I steps into the thing with two feet scraped clean of the mud and the road dirt, and you tell me that you haven't been playing fair . . . I'm clean to frazzles. Mary Settler, sir, is a remnant, with a bargain-sale card clean tacked on to her from this time forward. I'm down from the two-and-a-half-dollar table to the five-and-twenty-cents. My experience is cheap, sir; human nature isn't my line at all. . . . Dear Lord, but it makes me feel I'm to blame, sir . . . yes, to blame, for as sure as you're born I've been sticking Spring up in your face, same as if she was something you been hunting for and was mighty particular about the finding of. I been . . ."

Perspiration and tears were streaming down her face and she stopped to wipe it with her sleeve.

"You want to be fair, you say, Mr. Pendren? That's precisely my case. Spring isn't above the

age to play tricks on a fellow when he's acting fool-games like you were on, that time she sets in the hammock trying to look as lively as any grown-up, but me . . . Mary Settler, don't sit looking on any longer than it takes for her to get a terrible unpleasant slap to jump clean out of her seat and speak her mind. I've brought all this upon you, Mr. Pendren, sir; I've made an uncommon heap of leaving a syrup tart in the oven when it's scarcely out of the dough stage, and me hammering my tongue something frightful to get Spring to desert you and leave you without any real knowledge of the case. Oh, I've schemed and trapped you, Mr. Pendren, sir, and here you want to get up and say 'you want to play fair,' as if it was you to blame all the time. No, sir, Mary Settler was clean knocked the tack out of the wall and brought down the imitation sword of Dam—somebody or other, and it's all my fault from the start!"

Here young Pendren tried to get a word in. He did not understand what she was referring to. The good woman was humbling herself so that he felt almost certain she had seen the letter on the table.

"But I have not played fair . . . I mean I *can't* play fair to Spring until—until I get certain things fixed," he stammered out.

"And that's precisely our case again, Mr. Pendren, sir," said Mary. "There's Clara Hopkins in

it, too, and Spring, who's only a baby same as her mother is, and we been . . . just as you put it . . . unable to play fair till we got certain things fixed. Now this is the turn of the road, sir, just where it says, 'Keep to the right,' or 'Go slow, there's rocks ahead,' or something mortal uncomfortable like that, sir, and I guess we better see what's round the corner before we go an inch further. Now, Spring——"

"One minute!" Pendren stayed her. "The business that is keeping me from playing a straight game with Spring can be settled and done with under two weeks, I hope. Will you allow things to remain as they are until then? I shall have run through to Ladybird, if that is the name of the place where these Roper people are, and by that time I have an answer to the letter I wrote tonight, I can then go to Spring and—and . . ."

Mary was holding her face as if it would drop off.

"Seems like as if I was jes' goin' to put me feet into something mighty hot be the look of it, but cold as ice water to those whose experiences are better than mine are," she cried distressfully. "Now, as you're going to give me a chance again, sir, to trust you, sure I'm going to do it, and all I ask is that you'll do the same by me."

"What? Trust you, Mary?"

"Jest as far as Ladybird, Mr. Pendren, sir. I got another scheme, which won't be so far out in setting things right, from our side, within a matter of twenty-four hours. Gakes, I'll never sleep easy in me mind tili that twenty-four hours is over."

Pendren smiled. "If your side is right, then perhaps mine may be righting itself a bit, except that—that letter . . . has to be posted and I must receive an answer."

Mary waved a finger at him.

"Leave that letter be, and let us get the canopener on to the very best idea I ever had. Mr. Pendren, sir, take Spring alongside of you to Ladybird; she knows that part of the country like she knows her mother. Take Spring, sir, just for luck to your winning the case."

There was something so twinkling in Mary's eyes as she said this that Pendren thought he was losing some special point to her.

"You can drop her at her own mother's place when she's given you direction, and you're keen on turning on the Graham P. affair that's upsetting all your pa's money bags. The run would please Spring and clean elevate things before you get started because—if the day don't turn out good that girl will give you the sunshine in her heart."

"If the day don't turn out good, Mary? You mean?"

"There's days, and days, Mr. Pendren. It might just happen that Spring and your day might be proved by your losing your case."

"I'm going to win my case," said the young man, with rising color. "I can bluff all I know on to that Roper crowd, but it is something else that is worrying me. Something at home in New York——"

Mary began to straighten up the kitchen.

"Get your letter to the post, sir, and just when you are ready to set out for Ladybird, Spring will be going home to her ma. You can drop her jest where she tells you, and no surprises, if you don't find out the rest of your way."

"Yes," said Pendren, leaving the kitchen. "I think the very first thing will be for me to mail that letter."

n. It
might

young
ow on
e that
New

when
g will
r jest
don't

"I
mail

CHAPTER XX

"Looks like as if things had got a wrong twist, and wasn't goin' to work nearly as well as we thought, Mary," said Clara Hopkins, coming right into the kitchen late the next afternoon.

Mary, who was turning out a pantry off the kitchen, put her head round the door.

"Set down, Clara; some things works better with a twist than with otherwise. Minds me of the clock I had once. Nothing you could do under earth or heaven would start it workin' proper. Then we turns it upside down. Well, from that day onward we got the correct time, and had to pretty nigh stand on our finger nails to do it. If you stood that clock up as much as a second on to its feet there was a pull up with a regular street-car grind, but if you left her misplaced on her head, which was her alarm signal, ordinary hours, she went through her turn regular as something paid to do it. Now things here is pretty much like that. I've got Spring and that Q. L. P. away in the auto which is as much of a twist on things as that old crazy clock.

"If I'd done what was usual, I suppose I'd have kept Spring behind, seeing that it was against com-

mon ordinary sense to let her go as far as the gate even with the discovery I made last night. Oh, yes, Clara, I've in mind that old clock . . . why, folks wouldn't believe me when I told them that she works her inside, upside down. . . . Well, this Graham P. business has as much chance as that clock had, and is likely to work out something useful if we let it have its own way, even topsy-turvy ways as the case looks like now."

"Well, I don't agree with you, Mary. Why, I seen it myself!"

"Seen what?"

"I seen it in Benjamin's hand."

"Has Benjamin been stopping up your place this morning, then? I dunno what you could see in his hand other than a few cracks of the yard dirt he hadn't time to get rid of, me being out of the common yeller soap and no time to think about it. P'r'aps you been making palmistry lines and looking into the future jes' by him opening his hands for you. That's a thing I never could abide. Providence don't see fit to put us up to points like that, though they will try and convince you that half a dollar scraped in the palm of your hand is as good as looking into a kind of goldfish bowl and making fancy pictures outter nothing jes' to try and keep that half-dollar. What you saw in Benjamin's hand must be like that old clock, gain . . ."

"I seen the letter, Mary. The letter Mr. Pendren give him to mail."

"An' that's something to go on with," answered Mary, returning to her shelves.

"It's more to go on with than we reckoned on, Mary. Did you see who it was written to?"

Mary answered from her work behind the pantry door.

"I didn't happen, Clara, to come that close to Benjamin so as to be able to interpret things he held in his hand. What was on the letter?"

"It was addressed to Mrs. Lancelot Pendren. Land, Mary, you mind the day we made a list of his things? Four pair of silk socks? 'Course we might have known why?"

"Why?" Mary's voice came easily from the shelves.

"Why? 'Cos when a man's away from his home and wife, he don't stop to darn his socks. That's why he carries four pair and the ones he had on him. I'd have thought, Mary, that you would have picked out that information long ago. I mus' admit to having my suspects ever so long."

Mary came out of the pantry carrying an armful of miscellaneous boxes.

"Clara, you're for all the world like the things behind my closet door. Got to be taken clean out to the yard and have the dust shaken off them be-

fore we can get the contents of the boxes into our hands! Now what's under all this you are choking over? Suppose that letter was addressed to Mrs. Lancelot Pendren, I didn't have need to side-track Benjamin to see what he carried to the post, for that young man standing here last night was as good as telling me things without opening his mouth. What if it was addressed to Mrs. Lancelot Pendren!"

"Sakes alive, Mary . . . did it never hit you that she would be his *wife*?"

"You mean Spring, Clara? I'm stacking my chips for that all along."

Clara beat her hands together.

"Not Spring. How could she, with him writing letters to Mrs. Lancelot Pendren?"

"'Course she could, Clara. I've known cases more likely than that. Now you wouldn't have thought that old clock could go on telling the truth standing on her head, but she did . . . so in the case of Spring and Q. L. P. There's more in the workin' of the whole thing than we could ever understand. Look here, Clara"—she came forward and stood with the dust on her face and the fighting spirit in her eyes, "we're only two very ordinary, common sparrow kinder people. Folks would pass us by and never know we got anything out of the usual to themselves, and us all the time raking about for

information about what really don't concern us at all . . . but at the same time we are only ordinary sparrow kind of people, you and I, and we can't see deep enough into things because of that.

"Now, when I turned that clock upside down, and it started going right away, it was only a try-on—a fluke—and so's this case of Spring. I've clean turned things topsy-turvy on purpose to see just what might happen presently. If I'd done what was perfectly right by that old clock I should have scrapped it to a hawker at the door for old iron, or something, and same with Spring. If I'd done what would have been perfectly correct according to opinions, I should have tossed Q. L. P. out on his neck into the middle of the next street and shut Spring up in my pantry here, but I didn't. I turned things upside down, I tell you, and I'm trusting in Providence to set the works going good and proper."

"But the letter to his wife?"

"I haven't calc'lated, Clara, on it being to his wife at all. Same way as I never calc'lated on that old clock doing one thing out of the ordinary. Leave it be, Clara; things may appear upside down and contrariwise now, but they'll be right-side up presently. Why, did you never take a peep under the back-cloth of a photographer's picture camera? Everything is bottom end up, and yet the very

things being photographed sitting as straight and proper as you and me at this moment. You'd swear the lady being taken was not altogether in her right mind, Clara, to be posing there with her feet, so to speak, in the air and the roof under where her toes ought to be, but . . . it's quite all right, and she's sitting ordinary, and like any Christian, when you look over the camera and see for yourself."

Clara took out her tatting. She was busy these days, and always brought a little sewing or hand embroidery along to work on as she talked.

"Well, I suppose there is something in that, Mary," she admitted, "though you won't be exactly sweating up things till you know, about our fitting Spring for her visit to New York."

"Indeed I'll be up at Jake Heldy's store tomorrow if it's a fine day, just looking round like, case there's a roll marked twenty below cost and kind of suitable to underclothes for Spring."

"And I guess you'll be taking another loan on the property from Hek same as you did lately to recompense that wooden-headed Mark Spinney and Cora. Everybody knows Hek didn't pay that money because there was a baby comin' into the world, Mary."

"It's certain sure he didn't pay it then, Clara, because that same baby and his own flesh and blood

was no consideration to him at all. Hek's that pleased he went right along to Cora and stopped a spell. It wasn't borrowin' the money at all, I promise you. It was jest as good as a christening cup to the new baby, though Hek wouldn't like you to be mentioning it. You see he's ruled these days by the love and influence of Liz Hetty, and perhaps that done it, or the way she treats him makes him soft-like . . ."

"Liz Hetty never made anybody soft-like in her life. She'd make a tiger spring the wrong way to get out of sight of her, rather than anything else!"

"Well, Hek don't take no springing job lately, and her looking his way pretty often in the day. I don't mind sayin', Clara, that Hek is this very minute lying in bed with a linseed and mustard poultice on his chest for pneumonia, and Miss Hetty as scared as anything it might turn to both lungs 'stead of one."

"She'll be marryin' Hek presently when he's least aware of it, Mary, if somebody don't step up and save him in time."

"Save him? Mercy, Clara, save a man from being looked after by a proper loving wife?"

"'Tisn't love at all, Mary. I know all about that."

Mary caught her eye. "Then I'm not arguing anything, Clara. You got experience perhaps I

missed. Though I dunno. . . . When I went through my turn years ago it was kind of topsy-turvy also, like the old clock. But no matter how I worked it, there was no regular ticking inside."

She carried the boxes, well dusted, into the pantry again.

"If it was real love, Mary, it didn't stop working all the same."

Clara bent to her tatting and talked slowly and deliberately. She knew that Mary's eyes had gone from her face.

"I suppose so, Clara," came slowly from the pantry.

"If a woman . . . keeps true, Mary, no matter how long, or how hard it's been, he's sure to come back to her, somehow or other, even if it's in the grave."

A short period of silence reigned in the kitchen, then Mary climbed down from the shelves. She spoke from the pantry floor, where she waited, although there was nothing more to be done in there.

"From the grave, Clara . . . yes, I suppose so; but if it's . . . another woman?"

"It's all the same . . . if it's love."

After this Mary bustled about the kitchen and Clara said no more. Something of the sandpaper surface of her nature had been smoothed to an evenness which almost made her gentle of voice.

Benjamin had that morning remained in her kitchen without shuffling and awkwardly raising the dust, and what was more, he had talked like a man to her. A man . . . she was aching and longing to tell Mary some of the things he had said.

She began presently.

"Mary, I was jest thinking. Benjamin . . . Benjamin's 'most like that—that old clock of yours."

"'Specks he is!" from Mary, as she wiped down the table and put the cloth on for supper.

"He says outright to me today, Mary, that I got a right to marry him and no one to blame if I don't."

"Eh? Benjamin's getting over free, Clara, but I suppose it's his way."

"Yes . . . and I was thinking what you said of the clock, Mary. It's all topsy-turvy, that's what love is. I'm years over Benjamin and more like to be his mother than . . . than his wife."

"Meaning he'll chance a turning upside down and a thorough good hard spanking when things don't go right, Clara. Land, if that's Benjamin's idea of matrimony, it's the surest case of love."

"I'm sure I dunno which way to take him," said Clara, putting up her work. Mary came forward and touched her on the shoulder.

"Take him . . . anyway, Clara, upside down, or right side up. You'll find it will work just as well."

CHAPTER XXI

THE car was running gently down the long road. Pendren was finding things awkward with his bad wrist and trying to manage as best he could by giving the bulk of the work to his good hand.

Spring sat next to him with her fingers clasped round a prodigious bundle Mary had intrusted to her care. In the bundle were gifts ranging from fresh eggs to gayly-colored hair ribbons and sashes, from Mary to the family.

As the car swung sharply into a length of road not so uneven as that previously crossed, young Pendren looked into Spring's face.

"And all the time," he said quietly, "I am wondering why Mary let you come."

"But I had to go home somehow," said Spring. "I'm ever so delighted to be here with you. I like the car because, though it is jolty every now and then, it isn't nearly so dangerous as Jerry Grab's horse and cart. It had a temper of its own and no mistake!"

Pendren smiled.

"Same here," he said. "I never can trust this machine to go well just when I want it to. That's

why I'm wondering why Mary let you come. You see, if we had a breakdown now, you'd have to tramp a long way on foot to the railway, or else put up with me under the hedge there till somebody passed this way."

He was joking because it pleased him to try her.

"If the moon came out and it wasn't chilly it wouldn't be so fearfully bad," Spring said simply. "I've always loved looking at the moon, and it would be ever so much better with you."

She was looking directly at him when she said this, and the sincerity of her whole nature made him creep cold for an instant. He leaned forward till his lips nearly touched hers, but a twinge of conscience made him spring back and adjust the levers of the machine as an excuse for not having kissed her. Mary's words of the previous night were rustling about in his ears. "If you are going to give me a chance to trust you, Mr. Pendren, I'm going to do it . . . and I ask you to do the same by us."

He thought of the letter written to New York, which he knew would create a sudden storm, and perhaps deluge this girl and her little life with sorrow. He had not intended that that should happen when he had expressed his love for her.

As he spun the car along he knew how much he wanted her love and her purity of mind and soul.

He knew too that the business that was troubling him in New York was a matter of getting rid of a certain tie which seemed almost to be choking him now. He had no more right to think of offering Spring any part in his life than he had to think of claiming a part in hers, because she had poured out some of her soul to him. But all the time he was aching . . . longing to know the state of her heart, and if she would wake up from her childishness at his touch and return in full measure the ardent feelings he carried in his own soul?

Again he took a hurried look at her.

"Spring Glory," he said lightly. She seemed to be dreaming again, but his words awakened her quickly.

"Shall I tell you the rest now, or shall we wait till you see mother?"

"We will wait," he said, and became very serious. "Tell me," he continued, as they directed the car into another corrugated country road, "tell me, do you know Bird Town well?"

"Oh, yes, we know nearly all the people there. You see, father . . ."

She stopped. Mary had particularly reminded her in leaving that it would be as well if she said nothing of her family affairs at all until her mother had met the young man. She remembered this now and closed her lips.

"Do you mind," she said presently, as he was still looking at her, ". . . if I don't say any more just now? Mother can tell you all about everything. You see, I generally put things all out of place. Once I told somebody that my Aunt Susannah was only twenty-seven because I thought I heard her saying she was, but mother told me afterwards that it was my mistake, and that Aunt Susannah wasn't referring to her age at all. I was quite certain I had heard her rightly, but mother seemed to know just as well; besides . . . Aunt Susannah was quite fifty or sixty at the time. I have had to be ever so careful of what I say, since . . ."

Pendren opened the throttle of the car a little more and let it out for a long-distance run. Spring's cheeks reddened in the glorious rippling wind, and her eyes took into them glowing points that might have been fear or expectation. Pendren gripped the steering-wheel, although he wanted to pull up and take her into his arms then and there.

His mind veered to the purpose of this drive. Since Spring had written that letter to his father for him concerning the business which had brought him to this part of the country, he had not been able to discuss the subject with her. She had almost chided him when he had explained to Mary and to her something of the nature of that business, and

her words: "You ought to give them what is theirs without a fight!" stuck in his mind. He was not nearly so keen on wrestling with the affair as he had been. These last few weeks with such women as Mary and Spring had completely altered him. If this crowd called Roper were only women, whom it would be easy to bluff or bribe, he did not quite know that it would be playing the game to do it. So he let the matter drop and resolved not to mention it to Spring again.

When they were starting out, Mary had said to him:

"Spring will be as good as a finger-board to you, Mr. Pendren, once you touch Bird Town, or Lady-bird, where her mother lives. You follow her directions and you'll see she'll not send you wrong."

He had no idea of the double meaning in Mary's words, and she had chanced Spring's not revealing her real name during the run to the district.

The car purred gently where the roads were level and well-made. Rows of raspberry bushes and young fruit trees on the farms nearby opened and closed like a huge fan as the two in the car passed them. Objects came rapidly into view at the top of the hill, flashed alongside, and then fell behind them like things shown on a sheet. The air whistled and whined in the girl's ears and the car swung a little to right or to left, almost jumping obstacles.

Pendren did not dare look at Spring again. His heart was beating violently and his pulses were like the things whistling past. Almost heedlessly he increased the speed a little and they went spinning at a greater rate than ever down the long open road. Spring had never before felt herself being so rapidly rushed through space.

The car was going at three, four, or five times the speed that Jerry Grab's horse had gone after it had lost all sense of direction and restraints. Spring thought of that now, but no fear entered her mind. Of course the pace made the car a little too bumpy to be quite comfortable, but then the road was hardly fit for a town car. When she was lifted bodily towards the side of the seat where the young man was adjusting levers and working the wheel this way and that, she apologized for nearly knocking his cap off. But he did not seem to hear her; his teeth were set into his lip and his face was wrung with pain.

When the car tipped awkwardly and struck a stubble-edged corner of the next road, Pendren was thrown against her. Her right ear came in contact with his collar so suddenly and harshly that she felt the edge of it almost cut into the flesh. The car righted itself, but no word was spoken. Pendren did not even apologize for the jolt. Before them another long-distance road was opening out

and disclosing ragged edges of country on either side.

Spring stole a side glance at Pendren. He was frowning and working as if he were trying to get even greater speed out of the machine. But as a matter of fact he was doing nothing of the sort. He had for the moment lost control of the car, and the stiffness of the levers which had been repaired in the period of his recovery from the accident refused to give to his persuasion. He managed to fret himself into a fever of wrath at the obstinacy of the gear and the weakness of his wrist. The long road was empty and safe enough, fortunately, and he reckoned on being able to get his machinery well in hand before any dangerous turns or sidings hove in sight.

"Thank God—she does not understand," he said mentally. "If it had been my sister or . . ." The difference in the town and country woman gave him a sudden breath of relief. Without looking at Spring, he spoke.

"Enjoying . . . it?" he questioned as if there was nothing wrong.

"It . . . it's . . . like . . . being beaten up . . . in a bowl . . . or a cup, like . . . an egg," said Spring, and laughed in the full breeze of whistling air.

"Good Lord . . ." Pendren did not feel like

smiling, but the knowledge that she was absolutely unafraid reassured him.

Again he wrestled with his gear, and the car rushed along and shook itself, and danced over the road very like an impetuous lady who would not stop her merry ways. But the end of the third long road was coming into view. Pendren could not see what lay beyond it, so he called to Spring again.

"Are we anywhere near Bird Town?"

Spring gripped the seat to prevent herself going right into his lap as she replied.

"We passed it half an hour ago! At least it looked like Bird Town, but we went so quickly, and it wasn't through the principal street. Oh, yes, that is old Mary Blind's farm over the rise there. We must be very near Ladybird Farm. Oh, there's the Willow Bend, and soon we shall see the . . . river."

She was so elated at the idea that they were near the fields and farms she was familiar with that she almost stood up in the car, but Pendren, who had not yet got control of the levers, shouted to her to sit down.

"What . . .'s that? Something about a bend and a . . . river. Where? Good God!"

Spring took another side look at him.

"You will have to stop near the first field and

we will take the panel out. You see the river. . . . Oh, it isn't much of a river . . . but we all call it the river because we are so proud of having it run through our field. It is only a cutting, really, with very little water in it at any time of the year, but still . . ."

The young man with the fear in his eyes heard this and interrupted her roughly.

"Only a cutting. . . . Do you mean . . . it is a precipice? Because this car, . . . Spring . . ." He put his nearest arm right round her suddenly. "We've got to jump unless I can move this under five minutes. Less than that! How far is the river . . . or cutting? Is there a turning in these endless fences. Quick!"

Scarcely understanding, the girl pointed ahead.

"The cutting runs right across this road at the foot there. There is a slope before you come to it and one up the other side. We could dash right across if the water was low, but I have forgotten exactly how much water there was a few weeks ago."

"A slope—you mean we can't get over the edge. We can run down and across if the water is low. Spring, we have got to chance it. I'll hold you, dear, and we will pray that there may be—water in it. Great Heavens!"

Before he had finished speaking, the road showed

in a long decline that sloped gradually into the cutting and ended there in a high bank on the other side. The car would stop either in the middle of the cutting or dash right into the bank opposite. As yet Pendren could not see—and again he prayed that there might be sufficient water to break the force of the crash that was impending.

Down the slope the car went, doubling her speed. He moved the wheel over to turn the machine along the bed of the cutting. With a ripping, tearing noise of falling stones and earth the car swung round and half tipped over. Pendren went over the side with the girl in his arms. The machine grated and whirred for a while before the water rose over it and stopped the engine.

The bed of the so-called river consisted mainly of sand, loose rocks, and débris, which had silted up into a kind of plateau just where the two were thrown. Pendren felt the sharpness of thorns sticking into his flesh, and a dead weight on his body. How long the weight was going to keep him pinned to the thorn bushes and stones he was afraid to think; but even as he thought about it a wash of river water thrown off by the car engine as it expired revived him. He realized that the weight on his body was Spring. She had clung to him in falling and had fainted. He struggled up sufficiently to see what had happened to her, and was

thankful to find that the girl showed no broken bones, or injuries to be alarmed about.

The car half buried in the slush of mud and water a few yards away looked a derelict, abandoned and useless. Beyond the stretch of silt on which Spring and Pendren had been thrown ran a spinning eddy of liquid which might have been water, but which looked more like fly-clogged syrup.

Sitting up among the brambles and stones, with the water lapping against his knees, and Spring half in it, Pendren took another look at the girl. She might have been asleep; only the paleness of her cheeks told him that she was unconscious.

Pendren dragged her knees out of the slush of evil-smelling water. Then before getting up he raised her face to his.

With the burning of his kiss she opened her eyes and looked right at him. Her lips went to his again of her own accord.

"I'm so glad . . . we were . . . together," she said.

CHAPTER XXII

THE sweet summer day burst the covers of the night as quickly and deliberately as a chaste lady stepping from her couch to see what delights lay in the golden warmth of the morning.

Sunshine, flecked with a myriad of dancing aerial phantoms, lay over Ladybird Farm, and the peace of perfect understanding seemed to be everywhere.

Humming insects darted through the open window of Pendren's room and chased each other through the web of sunshine into the corners and out through the window again. Fragrant things of fragile bearing and delicate proportions woke him to a sense of something that might have been paradise; but he knew that he was in bed, and that his haven of rest was Ladybird Farm.

Somebody called "Most Precious Mother" had met them, when he and Spring had waded through the mud, and in a dreadful state of cuts and bruises were making for the farm. She bathed their wounds and cared for them with the fondness of a parent who knows only the sorrows of others, and has the power to relieve with the divine sympathy and love of a pure mind.

There had been little talk of anything except the runaway car on their arrival at the farm, and then Spring had taken entire possession of the family which seemed to appear from every corner of the place.

Pendren, as he remained in a kindly embrace of charitable sheets, had mental visions of small people who peeped and pried at odd corners of the veranda from which his bedroom led. These small people had had so much consideration for "Spring's gentleman," as he heard himself called, that they had taken turns to patrol that part of the veranda, and kept up a patter of small toes and heels till the most precious mother carried them away in installments.

He had come from the most blessed sleep, undisturbed by dreams of any kind, and awakened to the freshness of the morning. Fields well flooded with sunshine spread out before the house and wound into paths of beaten gold. He was in a room, bare of anything but his bed, a chair with a rush bottom, and a parti-colored rug which lay across the floor. Dried grasses seemed to be under his head and he wondered what composed the bed he lay on. Most of the things about seemed to be home-made, perhaps woven by the fingers of the sweet-voiced woman he had seen, with cleanliness and comfort everywhere.

He thought of Spring, of the kiss given so nat-

urally and taken so much as part of a complete whole, that whole being their mutual understanding and love. Yes, he was sure it was love on her part as well as on his; but she had yet to experience awakening to the meaning of all that love meant. He reveled in the thought of her budding womanhood. Deep draughts of it fed his soul as well as his heart and ran into his blood, warming it to a rush of perfect happiness. He had never in his life met anyone quite like this girl, he told himself; the city was filled with beautiful women whose only show of natural womanhood seemed to be in an indifferent smile. One woman in particular he thought about. She would think it indeed graceless and certainly not "the thing" for a girl to return a man's kiss in the way Spring had done sitting there in the midst of the wreckage in the river. To her it would have meant cheapening, almost humiliating her womanhood unless given under seal of a glittering ring.

But Spring had pressed her lips unasked to his several times. She was glad in doing so. In her pure love and simplicity she had not questioned whether they would marry, or go to New York, or say good-by at that minute. Her unbounded sympathy for him, and her desire to be with him in a time of trouble had made her show her feelings in this sincere fashion. If it was as real as he thought

it must be it was a gem to be worn and treasured by him, even in the gaudy lights of the city. But the city did not seem to touch this passage in his life at all. Business and the ties of his home were broken into by something new that this girl had brought to him. He wanted to live in another self, to bask in the warmth of such love as she could give, and to emerge from it a different man.

Little feet were beginning to patter on the veranda again. The small people had started another patrol. Whispering came as loudly as the buzzing of the insects. Pendren could see no one; but the small voices hummed around him, intermingling with the dancing sun-flecks.

"He's Spring's gentleman!" was whispered loud enough to make the birds flutter and take flight from the eaves of his room.

"He . . . might be dead. The automobile is . . ."

An interval of silence was broken by more scraping, tapping feet.

"Momma mended the crack so's we can't take any looks at him!"

Further tapping as apparently another member of the family brigade joined the others.

"Spring's mos' growed up. Momma gave her a tortoise shell side-comb to keep her hair out of her

eyes. Momma says Spring looks as if she never was combed any more'n Peddler was."

Peddler, another addition to the coterie of confidences, suddenly asserted himself by scratching on the doorstep of Pendren's room.

"There's maple syrup and buckwheat cakes. . . ."

More hurried feet along the veranda as apparently two more of the small people joined the committee in the precise spot.

The whispers grew furious and incoherently mixed with some fresh excitement.

"If he's dead it would all be wasted, and Spring would be mad, I guess."

"Did she find him?"

"Yes . . . at the crossing where it's as messed up as anything. Momma says it's perfectly marvelous how she got *all* of him out of the mud."

"Did she get him out of the mud? Did he grow there like the things sticking up?"

Another interval while the whole lot collected a little nearer Pendren's door.

"I remember Barney Corr's horse when it got stuck in the mud. It died with its feet kicking in the air . . . momma wouldn't let us talk about it. Sh . . . sh . . ."

"If Spring's gentleman is dead, could we have the buckwheat cakes?"

"Could we just look at him once, like we did at the horse, and run away very quickly?"

These queries seemed to bring their own answers, and Pendren expected the entire family to enter his abode that precise minute.

"We could poke him very gently with a stick through the door!" was murmured.

Then as somebody with a firmer tread came along the veranda there was a scatter. The whispering and the *mêlée* ceased, and the children apparently were dispersed right and left, with care, for there was no noise of reproach or scolding.

Without knocking, or giving him any warning whatever, Spring herself walked into his room. She was part of the day as much as the flickering sunshine, the incense, the wholesomeness of everything. She walked right up to his bed, put tender fingers in his, and stooped and kissed him. It was the purest thing in the world, that kiss.

"I'm just so pleased about everything," she said, "your loving me and being here, right in our very house with Christine and Prue and Elsa and the most precious mother in the world. Oh, I did not know really how much I wanted to come home till now I am here. And more than anything I wanted you to come here to be shown off too."

He lay there, breathing hard, and the girl knelt

down and her two arms went round him, almost mothering him in their warm embrace.

"You see you are the first real man I have ever loved. I know it is love, because I kept awake wondering what I should have done if both of us had been killed in the accident yesterday. It wouldn't have been nice to be cut off so soon, with all the plans you have been making for New York, and the provision for mother and the children."

Just for a minute something like a jealous pain shot into Pendren's heart. He wrestled with the desire to push her away and query her last words. New York and his plans for the provision of the family and her mother seemed so much to her, and she was quite frank about it, as if it were only the financial benefits he could give her that she was thankful for. He swallowed some of the disappointment and raised himself on his elbow.

"You will have your tray now, and then you and mother can just have the talk of your lives," Spring said. "I've told her it's to be New York, but she doesn't seem to understand quite what I am going to do there."

A shade of something like self-accusation spread over his face. Events were moving so swiftly and he was not quite ready to be questioned. Most, and first of all, he wanted to find out wherein lay

the purity of her love. Whether it was from the thankful heart for his suggesting a way out of the family troubles, or because she was just the primitive woman responding to the instinctive call of her mate.

Pressing her face back, he looked right into her eyes.

"Does the thought of New York really excite you so much, Spring?" he asked. "Is it the things we can buy there, the soft shades of silks and chiffon, toys for the children, and the attention you will have from friends? Is it that which calls the color of joy into your sweet face, girl dear? Tell me . . . tell me this instant. In going to New York, what is it you want most? What is it that would be first and nearest to you in the life I purpose to start for you there if . . . if all goes well? Why do you want to go at all?"

Spring looked amazed at his sudden questions. "Why," she said, "I want to go because you said that I could make money. . . . I must make money—things are ever so bad here, and the farm . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know. But suppose your mother was provided for, and the children and the farm set right, would you just as soon stay and help at home, or would you choose . . . New York?"

Spring's eyes never wavered. She looked into his face.

"Oh, I want to go to New York," she said. "I think I would feel it ever so much if I did not go."

Then his pulse beat rapidly and he held her nearer, his face almost taking some of the warmth from hers.

"Spring . . . you child of Heaven, tell me why? If there is reason enough and it means your happiness, by all that is right you shall go."

"I want to go to New York because . . ." she let him draw her down to him, "because . . . you are going there and . . . I want to go with you."

CHAPTER XXIII

MARY SETTLER addressed the old house cat that was stalking round the kitchen and giving vent occasionally to a rather weak lament about something or other.

“Hannah-Ellen, it’s only very ordinary folks that never stretches a leg or a hand to save themselves, and always relies on other people to sing the march onwards. You’ve got a grouch this morning about your kittens deserting you, and it’s no more right for you to sing out then it would be for me to call down misery on account of Spring and that Lancelot taking their own way in matters I got no right to interfere in. Everybody in this world, be it dogs, or kittens, or cows, or waterbugs, or human women, or children, or men has the best right to think and go as they please. Even clouds has that much allowed them, and even if, after all, everything connected with them, be they men, women, children, kittens, cows, or clouds, *does* go to water, and come down a perfect deluge, it’s only the ways of things.”

The cat looked up from the floor and whined on a long-drawn note of incredulity.

"Howl out as often and as big as you prefer it, Hannah-Ellen, but you got to take this to bed with you. Other folks, not in the deluge, has only got the right to go in afterwards and wade out to do what they can to stop those foolish creatures from the drowning. If the mistake wasn't of their own accord and misfortune, there would be nothing for such as you and me to do afterwards."

As if Mary had said something convincingly soothing, Hannah-Ellen settled down where she was, and blinked slowly. She was quite agreeable to leave all matters of botheration to somebody who evidently understood them better than she did.

Mary stood looking out across the yard. Benjamin was turning up the row he had dug two days before and breaking the soil and scattering the tussocks of weeds everywhere. Every now and then he would lift his hat and wipe his hot face upon it and look wide into the country. Mary seemed to know his every thought.

"He's finding the row hot work all on account of fretting about Clara," she soliloquized. "Land, it is much the same with Miss Hetty and Hek Dean! Life seems all topsy-turvy, and things is hard by reason that somebody will have to go in, as I said just now, and pull these poor foolish creatures out. 'Tisn't as if they would drown, not be a long way; but they will struggle and struggle, and

clutch at each other, and maybe hurt one another the more for bein' in the swamp, when all the time they don't want to be in it at all."

She watched Benjamin a minute longer, then went in to begin her afternoon's work.

"Jest supposing that Lancelot is married, and Mrs. Pendren as much of a cinch as a man's head is to his shoulders . . . well, I don't suppose there would be any use of us to interfere 'cept to pull Spring out before she gets her head under. Suppose she has got her head under already? I been leaving her feelings out of the matter pretty much as if she had none at all. . . . Lancelot, he cares right enough, but she . . . well, she don't understand life as we do. I'd be kind of particular relieved this instant if I thought that . . . that it was, after all, on account of the dressing, and the plate-glass winders, she wanted to go to New York."

Starting on a piece of work, Mary tried to go through with it, but evidently it did not please her, for she put it down and began something else. Half an hour later she put that away, and began to heat the irons for no proper reason whatever.

"Seems like I am going into the deluge meself and can't stick to nothin' till someone comes to pull me out," she remarked to Hannah-Ellen. "Here I've started fully three things in an hour and none of them a properly going concern, and it nearly

three o'clock already. What I put those irons on for would be as hard as guessing who that is raising the dust on the top of Jake Helder's hill of turnips." She looked out with shaded eyes. "Waste of time guessing. Same as it is a waste of time trying to make out what the matter is with me today. Perhaps I got too many people sitting on my brain at the same time, and I ought to kind of work a few of 'em off before I settle to sleep. Same time, Hannah-Ellen, it ain't the hour to save foolish creatures till they are really in the soup. Meantime, I better get busy saving meself from too much interferences and too many upsets in consequence."

A little later she was interrupted by Benjamin shouting to her from the row. Together with this came a rapping on her front door, and a general tumult of grating, vibrating machinery, and voices from the road, almost as if someone had pulled up, thinking Mary Settler's farm might be a railway depot. The good woman opened the door to see a full-sized automobile and four or five people standing in, or round it.

A young man on her doorstep, rustling with the importance of leather leggings, a rubber coat, and a pair of globular blue-black goggles worn across his forehead, questioned her spasmodically.

Mary Settler did not know whether to listen to his questions, or to answer the lady in the car, who

was gyrating and talking from the minute the door opened. The goggles of the man on the doorstep held Mary all the time the chauffeur was trying to make her understand that they wanted to find someone presumably lost in that district; but in the excitement of the arrival, with no one but this shabby, kitchen-marked woman to receive them with a polite nod of recognition, they seemed to have forgotten to give the name of the person they were seeking. The lady in the car was hailing Mary to come to her immediately, and the man wearing the rubber coat was trying to get some information out of her before anything else chipped in. Mary surveyed him once again from his double pair of dust-rimmed eyes to his mud-clogged boots, and then left the door to come further out into the porch and the sunlight.

“Is it Mr. Lancelot Pendren you are churning up about?” she asked, only guessing that it might be Q. L. P.’s people come to inquire about him.

“Yes, it’s Lance; where is he?” The second lady standing between the car and the house got her first word in.

“I been expecting some of his folks down these parts since ever he got messed up weeks ago,” Mary replied. “Shall you be putting up here or continuing your passage, seeing that the bird has flown, as

the song says? I had Lancelot under my wing long enough to hand you out some information for and against the case. Whichever side you prefers, you have only got to step inside Mary Settler's parlor and the drinks is on the house, as they tells me, though it's only apple cider or cherry wine made in my own press. Come in, sir, unless you'll all be disembarking. Maybe you'd like to help the ladies out of the machinery first of all."

The girl standing in the road laughed merrily and said something in an undertone to the other people sitting in the car. Beside the chauffeur there was a subordinate who stood near the tonneau and seemed never to remove his eyes from the one direction except to open and close the door of the car. Then immediately he would fall into line again and assume the same sphinx-like attitude. Also there was a gentleman of the lethargic, yawnful nature who seemed to have to be probed to be waked up at all. Out of the whole crowd Mary seemed to think her dealings would be first of all with the lady whose gyrations and queries seemed to be one and the same thing. The girl who had laughed so merrily found a place right inside the good woman's soul from the moment she met her face to face. There was the same direct look in her eyes as there was in Pendren's, and that caught at the heart-strings of Mary Settler. It was almost

as if truth were calling for truth from the depths of those eyes.

"You are Miss Settler, and you have been looking after Lance, my brother, like a mother?" asked the sparkling little woman. Mary took that as if it were a gift thrust into her hands. The mothering of Q. L. P. was a touch of fire to her heart for this young woman also.

"I cried all night when I heard of the accident . . ." the girl went on, "but when the letter explained how comfortable and . . . and happy he was, I just sat down and howled over that."

She put a dainty buckskin glove on Mary's hand, and Mary felt a glow of extra warmth start from her fingers and run right to her toes.

"This is the one that takes to her bed first chance, and me thinking it a mortal sin, may the Lord forgive me," flashed through Mary's mind. "She's clean metal all through and no denting if there's any rough handling."

"There's nothing like a good cry, miss, to kind of wash out some of the trouble, and it gets over a deal of other things which run down the sink at the same time. Come right along in. I had this room turned out only this very morning after Lancelot, I mean your brother, had resigned his claim."

"Then he is not here. How disgusting!" The

second lady came in for her turn again. She sat down on the couch as if she had been pushed there and loosened her wraps and silk motor-veil. "Such a journey, too, and such awful roads! I thought that we would be capsized every second minute."

Mary nodded her head slowly.

"Precisely what I said to Clara Hopkins when Lancelot set out with Spring Roper for her ma's place a few days ago. The way that auto lopped about. This country weren't ever laid down for anything but the wagons and vegetable carts, or for feet like mine or Benjamin's. . . . Won't the other gentlemen come in and take some refreshment?"

The other gentlemen were standing at attention near the car outside, and Mary waved a long arm in their direction. The girl laughed again, and the lady who had emerged from the folds of her motor coat and wraps, stared, at a loss to know what to say.

The only reply came from the lethargic gentleman, who stopped yawning when he got into Mary's parlor because there was so much to interest him in it.

"What's that about Lancelot?" he questioned. "We understood, my wife and I, that his recent accident in that rotten little dash-about car of his, had tied him a prisoner here and that he was far

too smashed-up to return to his home. Strange he should have deliberately gone, Pearl, after writing in such a way!"

Pearl, who was the youngest lady, did not seem to think anything strange at all. She simply smiled at him, and the other woman answered instead.

"My dear Huckle, some of the things that Lance does, and some of the places he gets into at times, do not bear the light on them. This whole business of his is questionable. Who did you say he went away with?"

"He clean drove that auto like mad for Bird Town, miss, or, begging your pardon, perhaps you are Mr. Lancelot Pendren as we posted his letter to."

"Yes, I am Mrs. Pendren," said the bundle of clothes. "I want to take a clean cut with Lance about this whole affair. Possibly he was never wrecked up at all. I never trust these country places. They are a perfect vortex of cheap adventures which generally end in—stupidity. His letter to me shows that."

It was evident by her manner that Pendren's last letter had raised some trouble that was not going to be put down immediately.

The youngest lady of the party, still smiling, as if everything were a huge joke, took a hand in things again. Almost at the same moment Clara

Hopkins put her head in at the back kitchen door and shouted to Mary.

"What was the name of the girl you mentioned just now, or was it a man who drove away with Lance?" the youngest visitor asked, and Clara at the same instant, right from the rear, cried:

"My word, Mary, you should hear that there Benjamin. If it don't beat all I ever came across! Mary, where are you?"

Mary Settler assorted her visitors into several different chairs with a fresh show of politeness. "If you will just stack up together here, I'll get that Clara Hopkins to fetch you some refreshment, then we can get to business right away," she said. "There's something doing your side, I can see, as well as ours, though I don't always hold with folks who call out before they are shot, as the sayin' is. Sit down, sir, there's room on the settee, and it's the same as young Lancelot himself had cause to use so often, it won't be beneath you if you are as tired and ready to die of weariness as he was when I first located him up at Liz Hetty's."

This was addressed to the gentleman called Huckle, and Mary could not make up her mind whether to assign him to the younger lady of the party or to the one who presumably wished it to be understood that she was Chief. He looked at the settee and its gaudy flowering cover, then he took

it, indifferently, and crossed one leg over the other.

"I don't believe we have really explained who we are, or what we have come about," said the nicest of the party. "I am Lancelot's sister, and this is my husband, Mr. Hucklebury Carr."

Mary looked at the gentleman indicated and waited for him to speak. She felt almost stunned. All along she had been thinking that he might belong to either one or the other of the two ladies, but somehow things didn't seem to run smoothly with Hucklebury Carr attached to the dear little smiling lady. However, Mary nodded, and the frantic revolutions of the lady on the couch began again.

"And I . . . am Mrs. Lancelot Pendren. It is solely on my account that we are here at all."

"I don't get you," Mary remarked calmly. "I thought it was purely on account of that Lancelot, who was very nearly wrecked to bits, that this deputation happened at all."

"It's the same thing," retorted the chief lady. "Lancelot and I are bound by . . ." Here Clara Hopkins and her insistent squeaking came rapidly along the passage into the room. She stopped short.

"Land, Mary," she said, "Benjamin never said nothing about you having company."

Mary introduced Clara, and everybody but the younger woman looked almost offended.

"This is the city folks belonging to that Q. L. P., Clara, we been so precious anxious about of late," Mary said. "Would you mind fetching in a pitcher of the apple cider and some of the wine in the press, and jest a handful or so of them cakes from the box on the kitchen shelf? Mrs. Lancelot looks mortal done up by the travel, and we've business to start on that maybe will be digested better on a full stomach."

Clara made as quick an exit as she had an entrance. Then Mary took a chair and started in right away.

"I was saying, Mrs. Hucklebury Carr," she spoke to the merry face right in front of her, "that it was Spring Roper that Lancelot, your brother, drove off with like mad for Bird Town."

"*Roper!*" Everybody seemed to say it at the same time, and the good woman felt as if she had been suddenly slapped.

"Yes, Spring Roper, as lives with her ma and a bunch of children, all as perky and as pretty as peaches blown off a tree. . . ."

The lady who had been on the couch started to her feet. "Why, the whole thing is a trick, of course. Huckle, can't you say anything? Roper is the name of the people that all this stupid fuss

over the firm's rights has been about. After what Lance wrote to me about this girl, and the fact that she is of the very family who would defraud his father, can't you see that he is in their clutches? He must be out of his mind, and of course it is the result of the . . . the accident.

"Do you mean to say," she turned to Mary, "that Mr. Pendren actually drove this girl he is so infatuated with . . . be quiet, Pearl!"

Mrs. Hucklebury Carr had tried to stop her.

"Let us stick to the point, Alys, whatever we do," said Mrs. Carr.

"I want to understand the whole matter before I . . . before I give Lance the freedom he thinks he has a right to. This business of the girl might have had something in it, if it had been a matter of sentiment, but when we find out that she is one of the very family that the firm is going to fight for . . . for what is legally theirs . . ."

"Meaning . . . the Ropers'," put in Mary.

"Meaning the Pendrens'," said the lady. "Nothing is legally owing to the Ropers any more than it is to . . . you. The whole business is a trick on the side of that family; I can see it, if nobody else can. Do you think I would sit by and let my . . . my Lancelot be defrauded by a set of people who send a girl with country-bred ways to entrap the boy? Poor fellow, I can see he has been nicely

taken in while he has been under the . . . the effect of the accident. Huckle, can't you see it? Pearl? How silly you all are! Lance has been worked upon when he has not been quite himself. His father would be furious. . . . We must stop it right away." She began to throw out her arms and to walk the room as if beside herself.

Mary took it all very calmly.

"Stop the auto . . . you mean, Mrs. Pendren, or stop Lancelot loving Spring?"

"Stop the whole stupid business and give that girl something to hold her tongue. I admit that Lance must have been foolish, but then that fall from the car is responsible for a lot. He evidently was not in his right mind when he wrote that letter to me."

Mary stood up to admit Clara with cakes and cherry wine.

"Clara," she said quietly, "would you say that Lancelot Pendren we nursed so long was accountable for his actions or not? Seems like there is some argument here about it."

"I never seen anyone so sane in my life," said Clara, putting down the tray. "Benjamin says——" Mary put up her hand.

"Well, Clara, this here lady sitting up ready and pleased to take a drink of cherry wine and a cookie, as you've kindly brought in, is the other end of

that correspondence, being herself Mrs. Lancelot Pendren—and ready, I take it, to die to prove it true.”

Clara stared, hopelessly frank.

“Mrs. . . . Lancelot Pendren,” she said with gaping mouth. “Sakes, Mary! no wonder he was clean upset to get that letter to the post. Sane, wasn’t he? I should like to tell you that I guess he was never saner in his life than he was while he was here. Wait till you see Spring Roper . . .”

CHAPTER XXIV

"SEE her? Of course I shall see her," said Mrs. Lancelot Pendren. "If there is anything in this affair at all I shall bring an action against everyone of you for taking advantage of a man suffering from—mental aberration."

Mrs. Hucklebury Carr allowed a long restrained laugh to escape her. The gentleman on the settee sat forward and spoke at last.

"Whatever is the matter?" he asked.

Pearl Carr seemed to be enjoying herself tremendously.

"The idea of Lance suffering from mental aberration is so killing!" she exclaimed.

"I should not laugh over it," snapped the lady-in-chief.

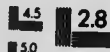
"I certainly would not cry over it, then." Mrs. Carr was rocking about on the couch.

"How can you, Pearl? Is it nothing to you that certain facts about the case that that wretch Blessing has stirred up might be brought to light and proved against us? I don't say for an instant that it would be to our discredit, rather more to a flaw somewhere in these beastly agreements made years



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



4.5
5.0
5.6
6.3
7.1
8.0
9.0
10
11.2
12.5
14



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

ago. But with that staring you in the face, and Lancelot's future at stake—with my future at stake . . . it is preposterous!!! Why, this girl has got hold of him, don't you see? And the whole scoop will be theirs, just through her fooling of him. Oh, I know what Lancelot is with women. He has a bee about the simple life and all that kind of rubbish. When it was a matter of fighting the thing for his father he was ready to burn for our rights, but when it comes to a saucer-eyed girl—who probably shelters her real reasons for getting at him under the blushes of apple-cheeks—he lets everything go for a sentiment that is as sloppy as this wretched place is. Huckle, get up and do something, for goodness' sake. Lance has been led into things while under a mental strain, I say."

Another good laugh from Mrs. Carr stopped her saying more.

"For the life of me, Alys, I can't stop laughing," she said. "It all makes Lance into the hero of a two-cent-serial run in installments. First chapter: The villain enters and tries to take the good old family estate; second . . . the heir apparent dashes for the country-side to discover, if he can discover, any loophole to save the fortune which he has long enjoyed; third . . . by a lucky stroke of fate he encounters the blushing maiden of his dreams—lo-

cates her through an accident, and they fall in love; fourth . . . he woos her under another name . . .”

Mary Settler could scarcely keep still. “You got it clean off the slate, Mrs. Hucklebury,” she interrupted, “all but the ‘*other name*’ piece. Lancelot never wooed Spring under any name but that of God’s good name of love. And the wooing, allowing for shortage of certain things on Spring’s side of it, which any town lady would have carried about with her kind of natural, going on under me very own eyes, not happening to have as much as a fortune tacked on to it at all. Lancelot, he up and falls at Spring’s feet only through her being a mere child and not knowing what he was at. Money bags don’t come into it when God Himself is directing that auto to her very mother’s house and him not even knowing her name any more than I knew his when I picked him up worse off than when he fell into the lilac bushes round the corner.”

But Mrs. Hucklebury Carr continued her little game.

“Fifth . . . he is ignorant of her real name and family, and takes her to her mother to ask consent to the marriage . . .”

“Stop it!” The lady-in-chief could sit still no longer. “Pearl, you are making a hideous comedy of the whole thing.”

"Well, isn't it better than turning it into a tragedy, Alys? 'Oh, let us be cheerful,' as the boys say. I don't care if the whole bank goes smash so long as Lance really is happy."

"Happy . . .? Pearl, you seem to forget my part in it all. I should never dream of giving him his freedom, and it will serve that girl right."

Mary looked at Clara, who had been sitting simply staring.

"If that auto plays the tricks it did on his arrival in these parts," Mary said, "I should say he might take his own freedom like he nearly did before." This brought a silence in which everybody gazed at her.

"If you'll excuse me, Mrs. Lancelot," Mary continued, "you'll let things be till the Lord Himself unwinds the apparatus. It's like catching your feet in a mess of things you don't understand. Before making them any the worse you'll have to set down and think it out. The further you go the more tangled up you'll get, and until you come to common human sense about it, you'll find yourself sitting on the ground on your head and ears more like than anything. If that auto ran straight for Bird Town, it's likely that Spring and that Q. L. P. would be well in the bosom of the family by now. If you like, I'll confess to helping on their mutual understanding, but then . . . same time, Clara and Ben-

jamin and me never really got to the correct state of his having anyone like you to—to . . .”

“You mind, Mary,” Clara took her turn now, “you mind the time we dug out those socks and underclo’es?”

“They didn’t prove nothing at all any more than you having your best things on now makes it that you expected me to be having company today.”

“Oh, I can see it all,” chimed the lady-in-chief. “Lancelot told us first of all that he was too upset by his fall to think about the firm’s business. Then I suppose the girl’s influence has kept him here until he suspected some of us would be down, and he has made a dash to get things settled.”

“He was mighty careful about that letter should go at once to you,” said Mary. “None of us were acquainted with the contents, but I guessed there was fire and regular business hot on the track after him by the way he was that anxious.”

“Poor old Lance. I am dying to see him, Alys, if it’s a case of love, as Miss Settler says, you’ve got to go out of this.”

“I’ll never, never give Lance up, not even if the whole estate goes to the other side. The girl has simply taken advantage of him . . .”

“Well, let us find that out.”

Mrs. Hucklebury Carr unbuttoned her wraps.

“But before going another inch to do so, I am

going to eat four of those cakes, and put my feet up, and have a thorough good rest."

Mary rose immediately.

"There's my bedroom, Mrs. Carr, and I'll jest draw the shades so's you can be undisturbed and not even a fly to bother you."

"That will suit me perfectly," said the younger lady. "Huckle, don't you step an inch to wake me till I am ready to go on. Look after Alys. She needs it more than I do. I'm just going right to bed this very instant and I am not quite sure that I'm not going to have a real good cry just to ease up a bit."

"Just as you like, ma'am," said Mary. "Lancelot did happen to mention that you was very partial to something of the sort, though . . ."

Mrs. Hucklebury Carr, with a cake in each plump hand, got off her chair and walked over to Mary.

"If I oversleep, Alys, don't bother waiting for me. The sound of you and Lance breaking your long-lived contract would give me a headache with the noise, I'm sure."

She went along the passage with Mary Settler, and Clara rose to clear away the tray.

Way down past Bird Town, Lancelot Pendren sat in the slumberous afternoon light with Spring close beside him. At different points of advantage the small people of the farm crouched hidden so

that they could watch Spring and her "gentleman" playing "company" to each other. Pendren had his bad wrist bound again and in a sling. Spring had insisted on this, and the "most precious mother," scarcely lingering to say anything, had gone about the farm work with her usual care and quiet. Towards the evening, she told herself, she would sit down and let these two young people tell her their story. There seemed no reason to hurry them over it.

Pendren could not help staring at Spring's mother as she sat there in the light of the evening with the trellis and vines sheltering her from the rear. Spring was very like her. She had the same true eyes, the same direct way of looking through a person, and the same quick little fashion of putting her hands together as if everything in life were a matter of beseeching and of giving thanks.

"We want to tell you ev . . . ng, my most precious Mother," said Spring, but Lancelot held back, almost afraid. The answer to his letter had not come yet, and he felt that he was not free to speak of Spring's future until he was sure of his own.

"We love each other," Spring was saying, "and it's just a perfectly heavenly feeling like you have for the children, Mother. But first of all we've got to start a kind of confession . . ."

"That is what I'm waiting for, dear," said the woman.

Then, vanquished by her gentleness, her sweetness, Pendren went down on his knees and kissed the hands which lay in her lap.

"Can you trust me a little longer, most precious Mother?" he asked.

"Trust you with Spring? If you care. Oh, it would break my heart if you did, not. She doesn't know yet what all this means."

Pendren felt his head swimming. Almost he wanted to rush away. He began to explain. "It's this way: I have got business to attend to for my father. But I want to get it through first of all, and receive an answer to a letter I sent a few days ago . . . then I can open my life freely to you and to this dear child that truly I love as I never knew I could love. Most precious Mother, as they call you, will you trust me a few days longer before I ask you anything? Will you wait as I said, my little Spring Glory . . ."

"Mother's name and mine is Roper." The girl got it out with a rush.

"Roper, father was Graham P. Roper, and I've been dying to tell you all the time. We're the Ropers of Ladybird. I'm so glad it's off my mind."

She twined an arm into the young man's, and

expected him to say something, but he only stared as if struck dumb.

"Roper! Graham P. Roper! You're not joking, are you? I mentioned that name once before. Was it to you, Spring? Oh, surely . . . when you wrote my letter for me. . . . Tell me, didn't I mention that name to you?"

He was almost indignantly insistent.

"We never said my real name once in the whole time," she said, without understanding anything but the fact that he was thoroughly angry.

"But . . . but didn't I mention the fact, when referring to the business about Blessing, that the people I was chasing to . . . to—oh, good God . . . it's too awful! Mary knew, anyway."

"Is it something troubling you, Mr. Pendren?"

The sweetest woman in the world began to tremble with the girl.

"Trouble? It's . . . oh, I don't know what it is! I'll have to go and work this out a bit before I can explain to you." He walked away slowly, his feet dragging. In the distance was a patch of amber light where fields were shimmering in the rising moon-flame and he went towards it.

CHAPTER XXV

AND into the moon-flame that spread over field and house and roadway, she came to him presently, as a softening breeze, trembling, pulsing with delicate life.

He was sitting on the ground, reviewing what had happened to him lately—the things mazed together by Fate so marvelously. He was surprised that he could take this new turn of fortune so calmly. He wondered that he had never heard Spring's real name mentioned. It seemed unbelievable that the weeks could have gone by without someone having spoken it. The reason why he had not been allowed to hear it now seemed clear. Mary, and even Spring herself, he managed to convince himself, had been playing a game with him.

The sight of Spring coming towards him across the pitched moonlight stirred him.

But the inherent fight in him, and the ardor which never cools until it has had a sudden outlet, gave him an impulse to meet her as he would have met a weak enemy. He knew how strong he was to strike, and to turn all to his own ends.

His father's fight was his, he knew that, and it

would be a very easy matter to do as he had originally intended. Of course he could, if he liked, go away and laugh at the idea of these sensitive beings so full of sweet femininity ever being able to make legal claims on him, or his father, or understand the situation, which would enable them to make those claims. Even if they did understand it, they would as soon think of facing a law-court as they would of going about the streets unclothed and unashamed.

The impulse to meet Spring brusquely died in him as she came to him, looking into his face as she had always done, and seeing through him as no one else had ever done. He could not fight her. Between them suddenly there rose a sword of justice, pointing down to strike if he forgot the responsibility of the best thing ever given to him, that of his pure love for her and of her pure love for him. There in her eyes he saw the pity for his grievances, the motherly tenderness of sweet protection. In the face near him, as he rose to his feet, there was sympathy, unselfishness, and something else. Was it fear? It seemed like it; but it was the fear that he was suffering.

"If you would only let me understand just what it is," she said in a low whispering voice.

And the strong man in him replied:

"It is so little, and so great. Yes, great. I have

just discovered that! Little, because you are a handful of babies who find life a mere game and cannot understand anything that is heavy about it. And great . . . because . . . in you all I have found something so big, so satisfying, that I know I cannot live without it. Spring, did you not understand that . . . you and your precious mother and Christine and Elsa and Prue were the crowd I was sent down here to fight?"

The moon-flame shivered in her eyes. One hand went out to him, then fell lifeless at her side.

"Do you mean . . . mean that all these years you have been living on the money that really belonged to my father?"

"Not altogether; but I must admit that somewhere further back in the generations something went crooked. It wasn't even your father's father; it was before that. The original Graham Roper evidently had one son and one daughter. The son disappeared and was never traced. Then the daughter married against her father's wishes and also lost ^{some} _{of} somehow of the family fortune. Later her husband worked it so that their son reaped the whole fortune, and from then to my father's time the thing has come on in turn. Your side is evidently the direct line, through the son, which ought to have legitimately come into the bulk of that fortune. But your father probably knew nothing of

this, or he would have taken out a case long ago. Anyway the whole thing would have to be proved in court, of course."

Spring was just staring at him all the time he was speaking, and now she drew back, very much upset.

"Court? Our family in court? Why, mother would never stand that. Besides, if . . . if we took the money it would mean that you would be the poor people."

"Precisely, though I must admit that things would not be quite at such a low level, even then. That is not what worries me now. Great heavens . . . !"

Looking at her across a little strip of light, he realized how she would take her rightful place in the world even as she would have done long ago had her father been recognized as the direct descendant of old Graham Roper. The claims he had already put in to take and keep her affection seemed an impudence on his part, and what was more, they could easily be misconstrued by everybody who knew that he had anticipated taking her to live with his sister in New York. At the same instant he became aware of the certain things he had written recently to his sister and to another lady whose claims on him might be justified and upheld in every court in the land. Those certain

things blazed at him now, quivering with the real truth. He felt sick at heart as he thought of them, for they were the direct evidence of his plans for the girl's future and his own. In asking his sister to stand in with Spring and let her enjoy life as a companionable subordinate of the household he had only meant to give the girl a place till he had worked things out with the lady to whom he was bound in another way; also to write to the latter and plead the cause of his own happiness and that of Spring. In the face of what had now happened he could only see himself as a schemer and as someone chasing a fortune through the medium of this inexperienced, fresh-hearted girl.

Of course it could only be thought of in one way. He had deliberately laid out the whole thing. Knowing that there was a justifiable case for this family if the fellow Blessing could run his scheme through, and prove what was apparently staring them all in the face, he had to all intents and purposes, for his financial welfare, played on the girl's innocence, got into the sacred precincts of her heart and home, and the rest would not be merely guessing.

With these dancing visions before him, Pendren still saw Spring in her place in the world. The fact of her having said that she wanted to go to New York because he was going seemed a small matter

when he heard her words questioning the truth of others having enjoyed a fortune whilst her father and mother and little sisters had scraped along on what they could gather, almost as birds of the field might have done. She was still standing there in the moon-flame. And so he waited, with just that space of light between them. He knew only too well what it was he would have to say presently, but he could not bring that torture to his brain for a little while.

"It means . . ." Spring began on her own accord, "it means that mother could go to town. She has always loved the lights and the big buildings and the rush that one watches from a high window. She has been there before, of course, but it is so long ago, and then she only lived in a very small place right down on Twenty-third Street. Oh . . . the children could go, too, and we would have a place up ever so many stairs and a janitor and . . ."

Her innocence, her belief in trivial happinesses, surprised him.

"You remember that morning, Spring," he said quietly, "when I spoke of running you up to New York, and letting you order everything pretty and suitable from the big stores? Well, it would just be that for you . . . and for your mother, and for Elsa, and Prue, and Christine, and the rest of them.

It would be every bit what I have said . . . with your own purse in your hand, and your right to decide how much you paid or enjoyed. It would be the beginning of a proper existence for you all, and . . .”

With a little excited gesture Spring stopped him.

“Oh, it would be just one of my dream stories coming true! Do you remember the afternoon that we talked across the passage and we played that game of guessing? You were ever so stupid, but couldn't help it, I have found out since, because your head had been shamefully knocked about. Well . . . I told you then of my most perfect dreams and we said they might be some of the things that couldn't possibly happen. But one has happened, hasn't it?”

Slowly he answered, watching her mouth and eyes.

“Yes . . . it has happened, but . . . there is this in it. The dream we began to plan for the city, and the shops, and the soft shades of silks and crêpes for you, Spring . . . is only part of the great thing that is going to happen. The other part . . . our part together . . .”

He was going very slowly now because it was the ground that seemed so uncertain under his feet.

“. . . well, it won't be exactly the same.”

“Not the same? You mean that what you

wanted to give me will be mine really and not just kind of loaned. You mean that. . . .”

Across the beam of light he went to her and stood at her shoulder, but withheld his hands.

“I mean, Spring, that the bulk of my father’s money really belongs to you, and because of that my little plans for pleasure in New York must be slightly altered.”

“Like being real enemies?” Spring began to throb with uncertainty. “I read something like that once. They called it the family feud, and everything was smashed up most horribly, and one brother took all the money from the younger one because he had been away for years. It was a cruel thing to do, because there were little children just like Prue and Christine”

The sweetness of her voice and the trembling of the sympathy in her whole being made him put out one hand to her.

“Spring, it is just so with this dream story that is really happening. We’ve got to play fair to those little children and to you. You shall go to New York and have things just as I planned, but the difference in it now is . . . that I shall not go with you or have the blessed joy of ordering your things.”

“Because you will not have the money, you mean. Because we have taken it from you like

that horrid elder brother. . . . Oh, I couldn't enjoy a thing! Not one little thing!"

Childishly she went right up to him and laid her face against the sleeve of his coat.

"There is something to separate us . . . besides this wretched money, Spring," he said quietly, "something that you would not understand."

CHAPTER XXVI

MILES back in Mary Settler's house there had been but little progress except as far as Mrs. Hucklebury Carr was concerned.

Somewhere near six o'clock in the evening she awakened from a sleep of absolute babyhood and had found Mary adjusting the shades so that there might be a little more light and air in the room.

Mrs. Carr turned her plump wrists outwards in a splendid yawn and let her satisfaction run down to her very toes.

"Say, this is top-hole, Miss Settler," she said. "If Lance put in a week or two of this kind of thing it would be the making of him. What time is it?"

Mary rested her arms on the foot of the bed.

"According to some folks, Mrs. Hucklebury, it's time a move was made in the direction of where this piece of trouble is going to be felt the most. I'd like a word on that same if you won't be encouraging that particular hurry same as somebody else is, now in my front parlor."

Mrs. Carr sat up and laughed. Her hair was mostly down her back and her shoes lay in different directions across the floor.

“ I can see Alys without looking at her. She has powdered her face nine times in her vanity-bag mirror and said to Huckle: ‘ I am positively burning to get this business through. Please see if you can get Pearl to wake up and let us order the car! ’ ” She laughed again. “ Now I am one of those persons who do as I like. If I gave in to Alys or my husband even just the once I should never have the courage to stick to my own opinions again. Now I gather from all this that there is more in my brother’s game than he has really allowed. I’ve expected there is a woman in his case as much as Alys thinks she’s in it, and when he wrote, hedging and asking me if I could chaperon a kind of companion to my own children, I fancied there was fire about. First thing though, Miss Settler, I must talk to you . . . and I can’t for the life of me hurry. Please send my husband to me and arrange it that we put up here for the night. Alys can have this room and I’ll take that stretcher in the front room. The morning will show us more light than we can get out of anything at this time of the day. If we are not inconveniencing you, Miss Settler, will you be so good as to fix things for us to stay over? ”

Mary's face widened.

"Clara will be glad to do what service she can with your hair and dressing," she said almost excitedly. "I propose that I deal with the rest of things myself. Now your husband . . ."

"Oh, I'll manage him beautifully. He's always tired, so that I expect he will be glad to take the car to the nearest hotel. Please send him in."

The matter was even then being discussed in the front parlor.

"It's too bad of Pearl to sleep so long, Huckle. With this matter on hand we ought to have left for Bird Town hours ago."

"The whole thing is most alarming," said Huckle.

"Then wake Pearl and let us go through with it."

"Wake Pearl? My dear Alys, I never heard of such a thing."

"Nonsense. If you can't get Pearl to see the seriousness of this affair, we will simply leave her behind and go on at once."

"Go on to a place called Bird Town, or some such name as that, and leave Pearl behind? Why, Alys, have a little sense. I've never left Pearl one night in the whole of our married lives."

"Then insist that she hurries now, and let us get away."

Hucklebury yawned. "I'll see what I can do, but I should never dream of trying to wake her."

Just then Mary announced Mrs. Carr's intentions.

Mr. Hucklebury Carr left to consult his wife and Mary stayed to appease the woman in the parlor.

"It might be as well, ma'am, if you were to kind of settle in your mind just what kind of a program you'd like best, seeing that Mrs. Huckle has made up her mind to stop over. If you'll allow me, I'll just get Clara to fix you up with a wash and a clean towel, and when we've sorted out this muddle we'll all be much happier in our minds."

To this the lady-in-chief replied in a mollified tone.

"The whole thing is so upsetting, Miss Settler," she said. "I know in your womanly heart you would never see me turned out of my rightful position because of a girl who . . ."

"I been fighting for Spring and her ma all through," Mary remarked calmly, "and I've got to admit to parceling those two up, same as if they were a pair of gloves only made to go together, and one no use without the other. But say, if I'd known . . ."

"One minute, my dear Miss Settler. We are all anxious that you should have your due as regards trying to settle things. Given, that this girl . . ."

"Miss Spring Glory Roper," interrupted Mary with some fire.

"Sounds like a sunset, or a new sunshade color," came flippantly from Mrs. Lancelot. Mary bounded.

"You get me," she said. "Sunset or sunshade, it's all the same when you get in touch with one of that family. Young Lancelot now he jes' turned out his mind for a thorough spring-clean when he got ideas from that lamb. Sakes alive, ma'am, how that young man changed. . . ."

"I know. Oh, I know he has!" Almost in tears Mrs. Lancelot broke out afresh. Then she shook herself together and tried Mary again. "It might be managed to make certain payments to the Ropers if they would forget this miserable business of . . . of his peculiar attachment to the girl."

Mary smiled.

"'Twouldn't be much use, Mrs. Pendren, ma'am. The peculiar attachment, as you are pleased to call it, and which we all encouraged here . . . not knowing you had first rights to Q. L. P. . . . is more likely to turn out high-class quality that will stretch as far as from here to heaven."

"You are leaving me entirely out of the question, Miss Settler."

There was some sharpness in the woman's words,

but Mary knew she had the right end of the argument.

"Seems to me you hold a claim worth all that might belong to Spring and her ma," she went on carefully.

"Which you are all trying to steal from me," almost sobbed the lady.

"Begging your pardon . . . but might I ask, ma'am, if you don't put more honest feelings into the matter of that hard cash as is really belonging to the Roper bunch than into the affection of Lancelot himself?"

Mrs. Lancelot Pendren turned from her. "I don't understand you," she said as Mrs. Hucklebury Carr came into the room, refreshed and smiling.

"Did Mr. Pendren ever really explain—about me to you?" she asked.

Mary shook her head. "Didn't need that! The concern in the camp over that letter . . . well, it jest about up and shook trouble at us without us saying a word. There's things run too deep, ma'am, times, to let us ask questions."

"Then perhaps we had better start at the beginning, Pearl, and explain."

She looked across at Mrs. Carr, who waited cheerfully at the door.

"Let us move an amendment," said that smiling

lady. "Huckle has gone to sleep on your good bed, Miss Settler, and the Lord only knows when we can get on. I never dream of waking him."

There was a merry twinkle in her eye, and Mary left the room because she knew that Clara was just about breaking her neck round the corner of the passage.

CHAPTER XXVII

"Now then," said Mrs. Hucklebury Carr to her husband, "tell Bricker to let the machine out to a full gallop. I mean of course to do some traveling and get this business fixed before we see another night. Huckle, give your voice a little exercise on that speaking tube and show Miss Settler how we do things up our way. Speed her up and pare the corners clean as you can. Gee! if ever I get into anyone else's love affairs again may I be asleep and dreaming. After Alys's fifth attack of hysterics, I should call it good going to do the trip under time limit. Are you comfortable, Miss Hopkins?"

In the car were Mary Settler and Clara Hopkins, together with the visitors of the day before. Mrs. Huckle had thought it a great scheme to take Mary and Clara for a run down to Bird Town and to Ladybird Farm to see the finish of the drama they had been so much concerned in. By the look of things it was evident that some definite conclusion had been arrived at, and Mary herself was more pleased than she could say all at once. She and Clara sat hunched inside the tonneau looking as if they were part of the machinery itself and could

take no unwise license such as leaning too far this way or that, or giving the slightest occasion for losing their balance over the ratty parts of the road.

It was the first time that either of the two country women had ever stepped inside an automobile, and the sensation of such a thing very nearly stupefied Clara into a kind of "mal-de-mer."

"I'm just . . . right," she said in answer to Mrs. Carr's question, but all the same she did not look it.

When the car took the long open road in frantic little bounds, perhaps a trifle over regulation speed and sufficiently unsteady to start the whole crowd swaying from side to side, Clara took her movements from Mary Settler. The good woman was speechless, under a mood of thankfulness that had suddenly grown upon her during the night. To her the whole of her life was just opening to the full like a precious rose spread to the sun, and the coolness of the winds that traveled kindly past it. Clara thought that Mary was trying to adjust her mental bearing to the terrific speed of the car, and therefore she switched on certain constituents in her own temperament that had never been called upon before.

"You are not too crowded?" asked Mrs. Huckle, again leaning forward from her own perch on a little shelf of a seat that folded away when not in

use and made quite a decent thing of a journey so long as the occupier did not mind being dragged sideways along the road.

Clara said, with fortitude, that she was "not a mite too crowded," and the little smiling lady turned to Mary.

"This will do you all the good in the world, Miss Settler."

Mary answered steadily, though her balance was not altogether in the right direction.

"More than one body has a right to expect, Mrs. Huckle, in so short a time knowin' you. Spring and her ma will as near shed their skins in excitement as anything they've done yet when they hear this rattle comin' 'long the road."

"And the 'happy-ever-after' part to follow," laughed Mrs. Carr, looking at Mrs. Lancelot Pendren in the corner.

The lady-in-chief refused to take any part in the conversation since a certain development in the affair the night before. That development was even now nearing its completion, and she was trying to work it to her own satisfaction some way or other.

The road ran on interminably. Clara Hopkins bobbed and apologized and trod on people in her displacement. Presently she put out a hand and held on to Mary, and so, united in sympathy, they continued their journey together. Things went flying

past them so quickly that they thought some of them had been thrown from the fields on purpose. Even the stately birch trees and maples seemed to get themselves up in a mighty raging wind and hurl past vertically and parallel to the telegraph posts which positively danced out of the way of the car as it approached them.

In all her life Clara Hopkins had never had such an experience. It was as surprising as Benjamin's courting of her.

He had been left at home to look after the farm and Clara's own small homestead, as well as give an eye, under strict orders from Mary, to Cora and the new baby. Mary would not consent to leave the district till all these things had been arranged; even Hek Dean, under the shadow of Liz Hetty's wing as well as Liz Hetty's temper, came in for consideration.

Mary was thinking of the things she had left behind. Liz Hetty began to sandwich herself between the dancing field ahead and the little patch of fruit and onions at home. Mary was feeling it keenly that she should be sitting there in an automobile with no idea as to how things had progressed at home for several hours.

The bare fact that she had left the place when Cora was not responsible and Mark out of work, and Hek Dean under several kinds of discomfort

through the good but firm attentions of Liz Hetty, made her palpitate inwardly. She had come away without even sending any special word to Hek; without even stepping over the cultivation lot and saying a parting word. Perhaps it was the terrific rate of traveling that made her afraid now. She wasn't really going away, she told herself, for any length of time, but she seemed to be passing so quickly through the country that it was almost as if the last years of her life were speeding away from her. Perhaps Hek would not have time to notice her absence. The thought gave her some relief, but at the same time it helped on another totally different kind of feeling. She was not altogether happy over Hek. Every time the car took a turn into another road she wanted to call out or to stop the driver. Right back there Hek Dean was sitting in his place, perhaps expecting her to drop in, or to hear from Cora and Mark that Mary had "stepped over for a spell" and left a word for him. She could see it all so plainly.

She helped Clara right herself at a quick turn of the machine and sat back again. The lady-in-chief was sitting with her eyes shut and Mrs. Carr was talking glibly about everything that she could think of. But the rattle in Mary's mind went on with the hum of the wheels and the engine.

"I didn't have cause to leave things so sudden,"

she said to herself. "I didn't have cause to leave Hek, or Cora, or Mark . . ."

Her troubled reflections as to what was happening at home did not leave her until Mrs. Carr shouted to her husband:

"Huckle, I'm sure this is Bird Town, because I have suddenly become possessed of a frantic desire to get out and fly in search of something to eat."

CHAPTER XXVIII

PENDREN found himself gazing in the sweet face of the most precious mother. Sufficient was it for him to know inwardly that in those clear eyes before him there was neither reproach nor accusation.

The words he had heard Mary Settler utter once long ago while he lay half-conscious came back to him.

“. . . she was just the sort of human creature I was expecting after knowing Spring for a night. One of the kind that wears big eyes in her head and hardly uses 'em at all 'cept to stare at you when she don't know what to say. . . .”

Pendren thought that Mary had outlined this woman as though she had taken a pencil and drawn her very features.

He waited a moment. Then, with the same pleading, folded hands that every member of her family used when trying to work out something incomprehensible, Spring's mother began to talk.

“Mr. Pendren, you mustn't take too much notice of what Spring says when she tells you she's caring and anxious to fall in with your plans for the city. I think she has got it all like a story-book in her

mind, and it's certainly true that she . . . likes you more than any man she knows, but then . . ."

Pendren had guessed that Spring saw or knew few men but those sometimes employed by her mother to do chores about the place.

"You are trying to be fair to me, Mrs. Roper," he said.

He gathered himself together to say to her what his heart and soul were full of.

"I am quite ready to trust the look in Spring's face and to know that once she places her love . . . it is as tightly fixed as though it were welded there."

He stopped nervously, searching mentally for a real beginning to the truth.

"Believe me . . . there is not one thing wrong on your side, Mrs. Roper. I—I have found myself out as . . . as a donkey guided, as it were, by the ears. Last night I learned my lesson and I have come here to repeat some of . . . you."

Again he waited; but the . . . dled hands and the wide eyes implored him to go on.

"I told you last night before I broke away and went to the fields that there was a trouble in my mind that I could not explain to you. Well, it is that trouble that has got to be made clear now, and then I can go . . . yes, I suppose there would be nothing else to *do* but to go"

o you mean go back to your people without

Spring? You must not mind that, Mr. Pendren. She is so young and will possibly understand later that . . . that all your kindness and plans were meant in just a friendly way. The deeper meaning of love has not yet opened for her."

He was silent a moment, then he pulled himself together, speaking smartly to get things on to the proper road.

"I came to this part of the country some time ago to find out a certain family who were reported to be a side branch of our family, and who can claim, if they want to, perhaps two-thirds or nearly all of my father's fortune. I was willing to fight them tooth and nail. Yes, I came down to abuse their rights, to laugh at them, to run them through every court in the land, if necessary, even to the absolute wasting of that fortune rather than see these people take what had been ours for so long. Then . . . came my accident, and Spring's revivifying part in my life. But . . . through all our merry hours in Miss Settler's house—I cannot think why—Spring withheld her real name."

He waited a moment longer; the wide eyes looked afraid, so he went on carefully.

"Yesterday . . . the name of the people up against my family's happiness and prosperity came from the very girl for whom I wanted to fight this thing, for I wanted to have and to hold her against

all odds, to see her in fine clothes—things that suited her sweetness—and to watch her eyes glow because her mother, her ‘most precious mother,’ could live a life of ease in the big city. The name Roper, the name of the family I had come to fight—to rob—was that of my girl—my little Spring Glory who had shown me the real true meaning of life and love. . . .”

“Do you mean . . . we are the side branch of—”

“I mean that your husband, Graham P. Roper, ought to have come into the biggest share of his father’s money, which had never come to his father before him through family disputes and lost addresses. It came to our side through my great-grandmother, whose husband took it all for his son, my grandfather. . . . Oh, it is all very complicated, but the fact remains. . . . You must have papers belonging to your husband’s people, surely. . . .”

“There is a box, but I have never looked inside it. Graham said it was the record of a most miserable existence of his father and grandfather and that as long as we had enough to eat we need never bother over it. . . . Sometimes I wanted to break it open and see what we could do for . . . for there wasn’t always enough for the children to eat. . . .”

Her eyes closed a moment, and when they opened they were softer than the blue mists of night.

"Imagine my horror," Pendren continued desperately, "for I wished above all things to play fair to the precious love between that dear girl and myself . . . I saw myself in the eyes of the world a thing that chases the heart of an inexperienced girl, so that I might, by keeping her to myself, hold the main part of the fortune still. That is how it appears to me now . . . and for that reason I rather welcome now the fact that there is a tie—a tie which bars me from taking Spring away from you. Yes, that tie from which I wrote asking freedom only the other day. . . ."

Just a few words came from the woman in her new understanding.

"But if . . . if it turns out that Spring cares more for you than for this money . . . she would be so unhappy . . ."

"Spring *does* care, thank God! But the world will say cruel things, perhaps persuade her that I managed a fine coup through her love. No, it is better that I withdraw myself from this matter, once and for all."

"And leave my girl . . . breaking her little heart?"

"Most precious Mother, you said just now that it is all like a story-book in her mind. Perhaps it is. She will find the realest things at the end of the book."

Passing along the veranda, he went to find the girl. He had not seen her at all since the talk with her in the moonlight. Now he found her in the shadiest corner with a troop of small people sitting on the floor before her and the cuddley baby on her knee.

"I have fixed matters with your mother, Spring," he said sharply. "The rest can be done by whatever solicitor she may appoint. Could . . . could you dispense with these small folks long enough to walk with me across the fields? I want to see what can be done with the car. It may not be able to be mended in time. . . ."

"You are going, then . . . and I have not fully understood just what we are all to do. Oh, Mr. Pendren . . ." she had never become used to calling him anything else, "is it the something that you said I would not understand that is sending you away so quickly?"

"Yes."

The children ran away as swiftly as rabbits at a word from Spring, all but the cuddley baby whom she picked up and held in her arms.

"And I am to stay here and not go with you? To wait till we are really rich and then pack up and go to town? Will I see you then? Will it be very long? Will you get over all the difficulties and meet us very soon?"

"I am afraid there is one difficulty," he said slowly, "that we could not get over. Spring, I had never intended you to work with my sister. That was only a blind till we saw how things went. I wanted you for my wife . . . for my little play-fellow . . . and for the mother of all the little cuddly things that might come along."

He ceased speaking.

"Yes . . . I . . . I would like so much to be . . . be all those things to you," she cried eagerly. "Going to town with you in any kind of way at all would have been just perfect! Oh, Mr. Pendren, even if I couldn't be the wife, and the playmate, and mother to the most precious cuddly babies, could I not go just the same! Just the same?"

Pendren started but did not touch her. The child in her arms acted as a break to his impetuosity.

Her eyes wandered from his as sounds of traffic came down the open road towards the cutting. He followed her gaze and saw the auto, with Mary and his sister, also the lady-in-chief and others in it. The car was moving slowly towards Ladybird Farm.

"The reason why you could not come, just the same, Spring, is here now in that car—the lady sitting back with the motor coat. . . . Everything finishes here."

"Town folks to see you! Oh, Mr. Pendren, and

SAMARITAN MARY

311

I cannot go back with you because . . . because of that lady?"

She pressed the baby to her heart, and young Pendren turned his back on the car so that the people in it would not immediately recognize him. He wanted a few more minutes with Spring.

CHAPTER XXIX

"You must come," said Pendren presently. Spring did not speak. Already the car containing the city folks was slowing down and his sister and the lady-in-chief had caught sight of him standing there with his back turned towards them.

Spring Roper held the child a little closer and looked at him out of eyes deep with pain.

"I . . . can't . . ." she said almost beseechingly. "It's . . . like having something inside of me all torn so that I can't breathe without it hurting . . . it's more like being really ill than anything."

"Poor child!" said Pendren, aching to comfort her, but knowing that even then the inmates of that grinding, awful piece of machinery were preparing to rush the veranda and bombard him with queries.

Spring hung on to the last moments with the girl as if they were the dregs of a cool drink after the pain of thirst-racked fever. "You care . . . so much, Spring? You . . . you . . ."

"I . . . I don't know what it is," Spring breathed sobbingly, "but it means a dreadful trouble, I'm sure. If she would even let me go with you . . . just for a little time . . . long enough to get used

to things, to be able to have them afterwards . . . like little pebbles or stones collected on a beautiful beach and kept as the memory of a glorious day in the sunshine. If she would only say I might go on loving. . . . Oh, it could never harm you or her. . . . Perhaps I could ask her . . . yes, I might do that. Ask her to let me have you sometimes just to speak to . . . to think about . . ."

He stopped her by a quick movement as she turned away. His hand went out and claimed hers, even as Mrs. Hucklebury Carr and Mrs. Lancelot Pendren came walking towards the veranda.

"You precious thing," Pendren whispered quickly. "You dear, precious thing. I did not think it was so . . . so much to you. I wanted you to have every chance, but, by Heaven . . . let the world wag a thousand tongues . . . let it shout my name as anything it likes . . . let them all go down on their knees and beg, beg, beg me to give you up, and as sure as God made you, and the little cuddley baby, I won't give you up! No, Spring, at the last moment you have saved me. I didn't know what I was doing . . ."

He was breathless when Mrs. Hucklebury reached his side, pounced upon him, and kissed him briskly.

"You darling Lance," she said, then half-whispered a warning which Spring heard distinctly.

"Alys is out for murder and sudden death. She

is going to have satisfaction for her massacred heart. For goodness' sake, Lance, take her right out to the country as far as you can get, and have the thing settled once and for all. Is this Spring who is coming to stay with me——”

While she moved towards the girl, who quickly put down the baby and stepped back with some nervous hesitation in her face and a little uncertain pain still in her eyes, Pendren found himself face to face with Mary Settler, who had managed somehow to outstep the lady-in-chief and was right next to him, with a stream of information bursting from her lips.

“There's more ingredients goes to the conditions and the making of that girl's future, Mr. Pendren, than any of us understood when first I started things express, for a reason of my own. Why, here's Clara Hopkins in it too; and if Clara has to hop into the muss like a dash of soda to give things a rise, well, there's going to be a nice-looking kinder settlement afterwards.”

Young Pendren shook hands all round and came to the lady-in-chief, who deliberately laughed as she put her arms out to embrace him.

“Naughty boy, Lance,” she said quietly and briskly. “You gave us all a turn. Why, I even considered your letter serious. Miss Settler, too, gave me quite a wrong impression. I was going

to be most dreadfully upset about . . . about things; but now I see the true state of the case I have come down to do all I possibly can to put them on a proper footing."

"That's good," said Pendren, and jovially hit Hucklebury Carr on the shoulder as he joined the crowd.

"The true state of the case, as you say, is right here before us. I find that Mrs. Roper can claim——"

"And we mustn't be mean about things!" interrupted Alys. She took his arm familiarly. "I am quite ready to give over . . . part of the estate, and even more than that, if . . . we can just persuade that girl, there, that you had to act perhaps a little unwisely towards her to get to the truth of this affair. Poor Lance . . . did you have a very bad fall?"

Pendren, taking his cue from the light in Mary Settler's eyes, quickly reassured her.

"The most delightful tumble of my life, Alys! It knocked sense into me, anyway, where I had been carrying . . . foolishness. I found that I never really loved you . . . that is, not more than as . . ."

Here Spring and Mrs. Hucklebury Carr came into focus again. The girl's eyes were shining and her lips trembled; but she wanted to understand the

situation because of her rebellious little heart which was nearly being ruptured with the uncertainty of everything.

"Will you tell me," she began softly, interlacing her fingers and with her warm face held up to the taller woman,—“will you mind my asking you . . . are you very, very dear and near to him? I mean, somebody like . . . like a mother, for instance . . .”

Mrs. Hucklebury Carr exploded into peals of laughter, and the lady-in-chief was furious to the extent of nearly losing her head.

"Like his mother? You mean his wife, I suppose, but you dare not say it. You are a wicked little girl and you are to blame for taking advantage of a man while he was suffering from—from——" She hesitated, scarcely daring to say again what she had said in Mary Settler's house and so challenge more of Mrs. Carr's amusement.

"That's what it was, though nobody but myself can see it!" she declared defensively. "Look at him, Huckle! Pearl! Lance has been foolish because he had this accident while under stress and worry. You must understand that, Miss Roper." She flashed round at the girl, and continued:

"Mr. Pendren has been much fretted and overworked for some time and the accident has just . . ."

Another peal of laughter rippled from Mrs. Carr.

Pendren was thoroughly angry.

"Are you trying to make out that I am crazy—mad, Alys?" he demanded quickly. "Answer me!"

The woman shrugged her shoulders with an amazed expression, while Spring hid her eyes on Mrs. Carr's shoulder.

"Not crazy, Lance, but just a little unhinged, perhaps—by all this worry and the accident. I would not dream of blaming you, seeing that . . ."

"Never mind the blame," shouted Pendren. "Tell me this: Do you imply that . . . that my admiration for Roper is the result of an accident to my head: . . . that it? Answer me!"

Everybody had something to say. Mrs. Carr laughed a little nervously, and her husband said something quite harmless. Spring breathed a question that nobody could catch, and Mary and Clara broke into quick undertones. But Mrs. Lancelot Pendren herself had to answer definitely.

"Yes . . . I think it must be something like that," she said.

"And . . . you are here, to . . . to be kind and consider the case? To run me home again, not quite as a lunatic, but just mildly loco. One minute; don't interrupt me! I'm fighting for my whole life

now, Alys . . . and perhaps for yours. You practically question my sanity?"

"In the matter of . . . this infatuation, certainly," said Alys, now firmly assured of her own ground.

"Then if there is a question of my not being responsible for my actions since the accident, there is danger . . . I say danger for you in being tied to me for life under such conditions. One minute more . . . do not open your lips." His attitude was imperative.

Mrs. Lancelot Pendren drew her wraps around her as if she were cold. Everybody waited expectantly as he went on speaking.

"I told you in my letter that I wished you to hand me back my freedom. It was after the accident. Presumably I was not in my right senses, we will put it that way. Now I take that freedom because you yourself have questioned the fact of my sanity. That at least you will admit, and also grant that I have the right to withhold my . . . affection, seeing that it is not to be relied upon . . . after the accident. According to the laws of nature no lunatic has a right to . . ."

"I never said that horrid word, Lance."

"Lunatic? You implied it, Alys. I do not wish to ask you to in any way alter your opinion. Who knows . . ." he looked at Spring. "I may not be

in my right mind, that is . . . the mind I possessed when I left the city. Certainly my brain has received a shock at my own behavior, but if the mind I carried with me out to these parts was the right one, then the change is a decided advantage. I have got the chance to make up a fresh mind, and now I take my freedom in that new one, leaving you just as you were, and still are, the wife of my late cousin. So our engagement must now be considered at an end—completely.”

For a few moments not a word was said. Even Mary Settler held her peace and, for the first time in years, Clara began to wipe her eyes. She had caught a glimpse of Spring's face, which shone in an ecstasy of purest sweetness.

Pendren broke the silence.

“I take from you, Alys, in the presence of these witnesses, the pledge I made you years ago. Seeing that I am mentally deficient, I need recognize no law of social bond, or even that of affection. And . . .”

He walked over to Mrs. Carr, who was holding Spring in her arms.

“I ask, implore, and beseech Miss Roper, in her sweet generosity, to accept me as a husband, even at the risk of having to put up with my mental aberrations from this day onward to the end of my life.”

Mrs. Carr put Spring into his outstretched arms; he drew her protectingly to him and over her shoulder his eyes spontaneously laughed.

"Consider us a pair," he said gayly, and everybody except the lady-in-chief joined in the laugh.

Mrs. Hucklebury Carr made a quick step forward to her husband.

"For the sake of everything blessed, kiss me, Huckle," she cried. "I feel as if I should explode with joy! Alys, you played too high, my dear, and now you must go back again and . . . well, just be another to somebody else."

But Alys was in honest, childish tears. Mary Settler went to her and another sorrowing soul was taken into her big charitable heart. With true Samaritan gentleness, the good woman talked quietly to her.

"Sure it often happens that way, Mrs. Lancelot. You've got more of his name through being his cousin's late wife, or I should say his late cousin's wife, than our girl Spring there, up to time of closing this meeting; and as sure as you think about it, you'll find that even that much you'll want to get rid of presently when another man comes right along looking his eyes out of his face on account of not being able to see you quick enough. Spring wasn't so far out when she said that about you motherin' him, near and dear. . . . I done that once

for a man and I found he treated me same as Lancelot has you. Sure it's our mistake, maybe . . . but it's what we're stacked for. You go on with the mother principle all you know, till you sight the other chap wearing magnifying glasses because he's missed you a spell and can't sit down happy till he has you up against his watch pocket."

Over her shoulder Mrs. Lancelot cried heartily. Mary turned to Clara.

"You mind, Clara, what I said about that old clock? She wasn't his wife though her name was Mrs. Lancelot Pendren. Wasn't that topsy-turvy enough for anything? I tell you, Clara, things work just as well sometimes with a bit of an uncommon ugly twist."

CHAPTER XXX

"BILLS," said Mary Settler, bringing herself up against Clara Hopkins suddenly one afternoon, after she had spread her outward and visible financial liabilities on the kitchen table, trusting that her friend would not hop in too suddenly and take her unawares, "bills is much the same as children. Once they get the top hand on you, well it's a sure thing you better give up business right away."

Clara stood her ground and opened fire.

"Mary Settler," she said, "if you could give business up as you has it, you wouldn't be scorching your heart with worry these nights and Hek Dean and Jake Heldy and others as has some hold on this concern, be hinting to you tender-like that your property was in a mighty big danger of changing its name. Business, you call it? More like too much fool charity. Think I didn't know how things was going? And how much you was putting on that turnip crop that has only turned to blight and burnt roots, and given Benjamin as bad a time as anyone?"

"Just taking you on the hop, Clara . . . about

that same," interrupted Mary, glad of an opportunity to change the subject. "Benjamin has been having a bad time, sure thing, but this is where we start right at the beginning and manage his affairs same as our own. Now, Clara, this concern of mine looks like going into other hands. I can't call on Hek, nor claim two cents more from him by any kinder way whatever, so if Benjamin's startin' a new trek, it's your business to see you start out with him."

Clara opened her eyes wider. "Sakes alive, Mary, you're not talking of turning Benjamin out of the place? Ain't he been bred and born here and eaten his food out of your hand and tamed down to a kinder pet animal? Ain't he part of the concern same as the yard or the things growing in the cultivation patch? Ain't he flesh and blood of the life we been living these years . . . ain't he . . ."

Mary had to stop her. Glistening drops were rolling from Clara's eyes and that troubled Mary fearfully.

"You ain't got cause, Clara, to get upsetting yourself on account of Benjamin. He's a good, honest boy and can get work anywhere. When I've settled with him, the check ought to be good enough to start you and him anywhere you like. You don't think, Clara, that I'd be pushing the boy

out into the cold street, on a kinder barefooted, homeless, lame-dog stunt?"

In the good woman's eyes, also, tears were starting. A thousand fears held her own heart, but this was the only intimation that she was feeling any way out of the ordinary at all.

"Why, I been circulating ideas into my own brain all this month, Clara, ever since they took my girl Spring to town and married her proper with her mother and family handling her clothes, same as if they were the Monday wash and must be held to logs the right way of the wind. Sure I been setting up my mind that you and Benjamin would be doing the same thing now, and my check owing to Benjamin just coming in handy to set you up."

Here Clara blubbered outright.

"Think I want Benjamin working in another person's place? Think he'd be happy? Think we'd take your check, Mary, at such a time?"

"My check is only what's been owing to Benjamin for about nine months or over. Sure, I had it ready, but Benjamin never kinder hinted he was in a hurry; and there was other things . . ."

"Yes, I know. Mark and Cora look pretty perky these days. Seen her at Sunday School last week. Dark blue serge, nothing less, and a hat that was trimmed at the store, and not at home any more

than her boots was. I'm just wondering, Mary, what's going to be left out of the wreck you brought on yourself."

The lights were dipping in the sky and Mary watched them slowly. Across the fields Hek Dear's little house took the colors of the cold evening, and she shivered. There was something in the scene that affected her more than she knew.

With a heavy sigh released, she answered Clara.

"There's meself . . . left . . . out of the wreck, Clara, and that's something to be thankful for."

Clara mopped her eyes; then began to cry again.

"I could make Hek sorry for this if I wanted to. Everybody knows how he's been loaning and loaning you money till you don't know which is your yard and which is his. He's got no sentiment about knowing you since you was a girl, Mary."

"Who told you he knew me since I was a girl, Clara?"

Mary asked the question with the abruptness of a door banging.

"Why, Hek, of course! Only the other night Miss Liz Hetty was trying it over Hek about things, and Hek arguing that you had first call to— to . . ."

Mary's eyes were luminous, though her face was white as death. She held up one hand.

"Clara, for the love of Heaven don't go telling me things like that!"

She swallowed some of her excitement and went on more calmly:

"If Hek ain't gracious to Liz Hetty for what she's done by him these years——"

"She's near driven him out of the country!"

"That's his way of making you think so, Clara. Minds me of the time Miriam Plenty got herself up to shouting colors and style of hair, jest because a feller was coming courting her sister and her sister going to refuse him good and strong out of spite for something. Miriam she dances along like the wind on the water and catches her sister in her arms and tells her that there was a proposal coming her way that very day. . . . Well, what actually happened was this, that her sister gives her no chance whatever and grabs him by the collar first go and asks him outright what he means by it. There was a terrible lot of play-acting that minute and the curtain had to come down sharp, or Miriam would have been in with a hop, skip, and jump to seize anything she could in the way of that feller, just out of fool notions that her sister might let him escape. Same with Hek. He's clear-sighted about his own case. He allows that Liz Hetty ain't got no call to have first place with him, but she has all the same."

Mary finished by dusting her face with her sleeve. She was wringing her handkerchief, though she had forgotten to use it to dry her perspiring hands, and Clara noticed them. She smiled at Mary.

"I got a letter from Hek, this very day, saying things had got to be fixed, Clara, so that shows your argument is just wanting sentiment for me, though he has known me since the days when he did chores for my mother. He's going to settle with Liz Hetty, or else he's in for a bad time with pneumonia this season, and nobody to take him in hand."

Clara looked knowing.

"I'm trying to guess where you'll be, Mary, if there's nobody to take him in hand?"

Mary never answered. Her old face grew shadowy like the evening and she began to bustle about in the kitchen right away.

"Suppose you'll be out-be-the-day doing washing for the folks around Bird Town, Mary? I'm going right along to Benjamin this minute to settle that first of all."

And as if to prevent any further argument, Clara banged the kitchen door as she went into the yard.

Mary began to seriously think about her business affairs with her eyes set towards Hek Dean's house. A light shone out from the windows and made the

shadows more formidable. For the first time in her life she discredited Hek of systematic charity. He had put the case of her loans in the broadest way, never hinting as to how she might pay in ready cash at any time; but made it plain that the friendship would be the same when her property had been signed to him and the dividing fence broken down between the farms. Her property. . . . Not for one minute would Mary Settler have thought of taking the trouble to an outsider. It might inculpate Hek, and that would not be playing a fair game after his services to her in the years. She began to think he was right to claim her small house and land; but it threw Benjamin into the masses of the unemployed right away. The good woman never took into consideration that she also might find it difficult to wade through the advertisements for a "charwoman" wanted by the day. That all seemed so small, now. She was getting old, and could live on as much as she gave to the chickens if it came to the point, but Benjamin . . . with his ideas about marrying Clara.

The more she thought about it the more she misunderstood Hek Dean's motive in putting the case so plainly to her. He had showed her the true bill over her head. It seemed to have expanded telescopically in the last two years. Of course there had been liabilities through bad seasons and acci-

dents and general poverty in the neighborhood; but that had nothing to do with Hek.

"Not that Hek made any fuss about my getting the money in time," she said to the rising shades of night. "Don't think he put it that way at all; but then of course if Liz Hetty's comin' into things maybe the house would be more profitable, and . . . I don't think I could keep above water even with Benjamin, now the turnips is gone on us as well."

Yes, she had to admit, Hek had been considerate. He had simply implied that he could claim the property any day now, and that he would like her opinion on that same subject if she would step over a spell some morning before Liz Hetty arrived on the scene.

She had never stepped over so far, as she wanted to think it out first. She wondered now if Hek would agree to keep Benjamin on, as he would be working the two places? Liz Hetty wasn't likely to disagree to that, and Benjamin was a thorough good lad and equal to Hulky Smith for a day's solid work.

Hek had not mentioned the matter of what was to become of either Benjamin or herself. Naturally she thought he would not expect her to remain, even if he had included Benjamin. Perhaps he thought that she would go to the city and do chores in Spring's new home on Fifth Avenue. It seemed

as if he must have, as he was so keen on the point of not asking her to try and pay the debt in cash at all. Clara had hit it right away, it appeared. Her property was in a mighty big danger of changing its name. Well, she would not have minded so much if it had not been for Benjamin . . .

Clara and Benjamin came into the kitchen.

Mary put away the bills because it seemed to increase her trouble of mind to see them about.

"I'll see Hek in the morning," she said out loud as she pushed them into the knife drawer and turned to speak to Clara.

"Hek Deau don't get this place, Mary," Benjamin began before he sat down to his tea. "Not if I have to borrow the money meself, and Clara and me run it on corn husks till we can hit things proper with them as loans us the ready cash."

"I was thinkin' of asking Hek, Benjamin, to let you and Clara stop on a spell and work the place same as you——"

Benjamin flourished his fork. "Ask Hek nothing. I guess you better hand me out the proper rights to talk the situation with him and find out what he's really hitting at."

Mary looked slowly at him.

"He's hitting at only what's owed him, Benjamin, through my bad seasons, nothing else."

Benjamin swung round in his chair and took a

good look at Clara. She smiled back and Mary was left guessing.

"Hek's trying to lose Liz Hetty; if you can't see it, Mary, you're blind as a mole."

As Mary could not see anything of the kind she shut her mouth for good on the subject, and the evening grew in shadows as Clara went home, sniffing and rather down at the mouth.

It was nothing to her that Benjamin had allowed her to stand fretting him into a fit for fully two hours that night. She had always managed Benjamin, but—things looked very bad for Mary Settler.

CHAPTER XXXI

“FOR all the world like falling on your feet proper-ways when somebody had turned you upside down and dropped you from a terrible-looking height, thinking to stop off your life allowance by jamming you good and hard on the rocks below. If it had been Hannah-Ellen, my old cat, I shouldn’t have wondered. She always did fall into place like a lady, right side up, even if you pushed her off the table good and hard in a worse temper than you knew about . . . but Mary Settler . . . to strike it rich this way, do you hear me tellin’ you, Benjamin?”

Benjamin was slow to catch her meaning, but he stopped eating his breakfast-food and looked at her.

“Spring and her man been writing a check for all you done, Mary?”

“No, Benjamin, it’s just that Lancelot himself, leaving Spring where she ought to be the time of night he wrote it. Here it is:

“‘My good Samaritan Mary’ (Now, Benjamin o’ the yard, you’re not to copyright that to Clara be any chance. Town folks is apt to misconstrue the Bible same as the rest of us, and Lancelot ain’t to

blame for the name he's given me outter his kindness of heart.)”

“Read the check first,” said Benjamin, with a wonderful glee in his face. “Read out the check, Mary. Clara will be here soon and it'll be my turn in the yard with that old hoss. . . . He's likely to be more interested in me than folks that happen to say they'll marry after Thanksgiving.”

Mary postponed the letter till she had said a few words about Clara.

“Benjamin, if Clara was to fall on your neck, she'd maybe *kill* you with kindness. Her kind don't act that way. More likely she'll hit up things good and strong after you're married, and you won't know a moment's mortal peace; but she'll love you like your mother did years before you knew it. Clara's the sort to talk the head off a stick of rhubarb, but that's what she's marrying you for. If a woman can't be to home in her own house, and work off steam a bit there, well, she's as good as never wed at all.”

“Never wed at all!” Benjamin looked hard at Mary. “That's what I'm grouchy about. Clara puts me off and off . . . you'd think I was a hat she'd been wearing till her head was sore about it.”

Mary began the letter again. Lancelot Pendren had made her out a check payable on presentation at the nearest bank. It covered all liabilities on

the property as well as allowing a balance in the bank to meet expenses the next two seasons if they happened to be bad ones. Spring had joined in the letter at the finish, beseeching Mary to leave Clara in charge and come to her before the end of the present season so that she could share in all the good things and see the beautiful gifts presented to her by her husband and his people.

Clara Hopkins walked in at this point and said something about Mary leaving right away.

"Spring will outfit you from the stores the moment you touch her place," said Clara.

Mary allowed this to pass, as there was something bigger looming on the horizon.

"I allow I might go to Spring right away," said Mary, "but happen you to think, Clara, that you an' Benjamin can't take on my place together, 'cept you get Deacon Heddy to come along and fix you good and proper."

Clara hedged, but finally had to give in.

"If you'll leave the place to Benjamin and me, Mary, and go away this very week, I'll get all my starched and colored's in early, and marry Benjamin . . ."

"An' I'll help you with the flannels!" Benjamin burst out, scarcely waiting to draw a breath.

"You got enough to do about your own work without interferin' with mine," said Clara.

Benjamin found himself boss for the first time through sheer bravery. He caught Clara in his arms before Mary.

"You'll see!" he said gleefully, holding Clara as she protested indignantly all the time Mary was putting on her cape to go and see Hek.

Half an hour afterwards the good Samaritan scraped the mud of the damp fields from her boots on the door-iron at Hek Dean's house. The place was very silent. She knocked but got no answer; then she turned the latch upwards and the door opened easily.

Marveling at such a free entrance, she walked in. Hek was breathing heavily in his bed in the little room off the passage. Even with a prodigious plaster, Miss Hetty had not succeeded in warding off the specially invited pneumonia. Mary paused and looked in on Hek.

"You're mortal bad, Hek, and I shouldn't be interferin' . . ."

Breathing with painful difficulty, Hek managed to convey to her that he wished her to come nearer.

"Better ease your mind first, Hek, by telling you that I got the money you lent so good and often. You'll lie better now that's off your mind."

But the patient did not lie any casier. He struggled to get up.

"I never asked you for the money, Mary." It came through stiff lungs, and the heart of the woman cramped in her body because he looked so forlorn and desperate.

"That was good of you, Hek. You never did. But I'm proud to be able to hand you the check as that Lancelot and Spring sent me this morning. I'm hitting a new track for New York, Hek, leaving Clara and Benjamin o' the yard in charge till . . . till I come back again."

The old man struggled to get himself up in bed. She put him back softly, tenderly. For the first time in years she touched him on the head with her hands.

"Till you . . . come back, Mary?"

"Yes."

"Will it be soon? I never felt comfortable about things when you went as far as Jake Heldy's store even."

"You got Miss Liz Hetty, Hek, and that's something to be thankful for. Besides, there's Clara and Benjamin and Cora and the baby."

The old man struggled up again.

"Sounds like you ain't exactly comin' back, Mary?"

Mary answered slowly.

"No . . . I ain't exactly comin' back, Hek."

He breathed again heavily, and his breath was like the moan of wind in the house.

"Mary . . . Mary, you mind the time . . . I been thinking of it so many years. Paradise it was——"

Mary folded her cape closer.

"That was the hill we climbed, Hek. Paradise it was till we . . . got home . . . at nights . . ."

"Mary . . . that money. I never wanted to loan it to you to get it back again."

"D'yer mean you was making me a present of it, Hek?"

"Wall . . . not exactly, but . . ."

"You wanted my property, Hek. Everybody says my place would look better tacked on to yours. Something like traveling a refreshment car with the passenger and baggage train, eh?"

"I wanted . . . your property, Mary. . . . Yes, that's what I wanted. Take your check away. If I can't have your property . . ."

He tried to get easier in his mind before speaking further, and Mary went on talking and tidying up the room a bit.

"My bit of a place ain't worth two cents now, Hek."

"It'd be worth more'n that to me, Mary."

"'Cos it's only got the dividing fence between?"

"'Cos it's only that fence, Mary, that's been botherin' me all these years."

She thought that he might take a sudden fit if she did not immediately go to him and place him gently back in the bed.

"If that fence troubles you, Hek, I'll allow you to pull it down right away. Keep low now."

But Hek could not keep low.

"You mean that, Mary? I can get Hulky Smith to . . . to take it down?"

"If it makes all the difference to you, Hek. I'm not stopping you."

"And . . . then the property is one, Mary . . . and you and me . . . is . . . one."

At last, after untold years, he had got it out. Mary stood in the center of the room, staring at him.

"You're not too bad with pneumonia, Hek."

"I'm mortal bad, Mary. Bad enuff to want you to give over that idea of New York City—bad enuff to want you for the rest of my life."

Mary simmered on this. "'Tain't exactly playing the han' Liz Hetty's side of the table, Hek."

"Liz Hetty knows my mind . . . will you ask Benjamin to get Hulky Smith to take down that fence?"

Slowly she walked toward the bed. Hek was an old man, far older than herself and not easy to

deal with at any time, much less every day of the year. She stood looking down at him.

"Hek," she said, "I never knew you cared that much when . . . the break came. Cora's mother beat me spite of the scented notepaper and the chewing gum, and such, but if God's willing to let me take up the ropes where I let 'em drop . . . well, Hek, there's only one God and . . . you, and . . . me . . . after all, to settle it now."

"And if the pneumonia ain't too terrible, Mary, I'll be up to watch 'em pulling down that fence . . . maybe next week."

"Maybe, Hek," said Mary, although he coughed so badly that she felt it go clean through her own old body.

All day she moved about the house, adjusting the crockery and the furniture. The neighbors told Miss Hetty what was doing at Hek Dean's and she did not come near the house. Late in the evening, when the wind quieted down into distressingly mournful sighing through the cracks of the old building, Mary watched the old man lying low in his bed.

"That pneumonia's going to leave Hek a different man," she said mentally. "Don't think he's ever going to be much use again, still, thank the Powers it happened when it did. I might have been in New York hitting up a time like I used to dream

about when . . . when I was . . . called by the name of a blessed flower, and him never suspecting me as just plain Mary."

In his slumbers the old man almost seemed to hear her. He was wandering back to the old days.

"Daffodil," he said, like the whispering wind, and Mary bent over the bed.

"He must be mortal bad to remember that," she said to herself. "So it's me he wanted through that bit of property." She stood tranquilly brooding over the past.

"Seems like Providence didn't remind him long ago on purpose," she told herself, "and the things I've cherished all these years have come in as benefits, so to speak, to make up for what I lost. What . . . I lost . . . why, Hek, if you'd only thought about it before . . . when I was a bit younger and more fashioned for—for . . . oh, well! I suppose Cora will keep us in touch with a new line of human emotions. It 'ud be more than we could expect of the Lord at my time of life. Same time . . ."

She looked at Hek lying there breathing heavily.

"Count . . . your blessings . . . as I've always said," she went on, as she took a chair and deliberately sat down to watch over and tend him through the creeping coldness of the night.

THE END

the
ing

to
ys.
nd,

she
ugh
od-

ong
ngs
ne-
hat
ght
and
ose
nan
of

ily.
ays
de-
him

