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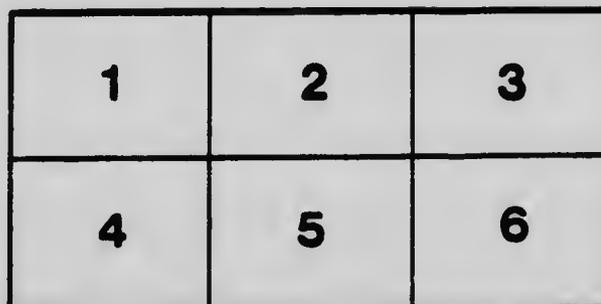
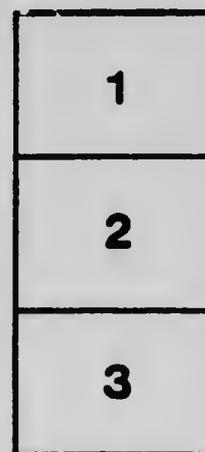
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He Who Passed

To M. L. G.

"Unfortunately, it very seldom happens that a reviewer has any reason to be grateful for the opportunity to read a book. But this story of the career of an actress is one in a thousand. . . .

"I cannot recall at the moment any novel of the stage with such an intensity of life and emotion, such an assurance of fidelity to the fact; such grip, in short, as in this book. It is an excellent piece of work, well written, vivid, and absolutely without that sickly taint of sentimentality which is so apt to disfigure that sort of story. It is a book worth while, and deserves to be popular—sometimes really good things, are—alas, only sometimes!"

PETER DONOVAN.

He Who Passed

To M. L. G.

TORONTO
HENRY FROWDE
1912

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1912

* * *

Printed in England.

To M. L. G.

BECAUSE I could not bring myself to tell you these things, and because I would not marry you unless you knew them, I let you go without me. I let you believe that I did not care enough to go so far away, though in truth I would have gone to the darkest corner of the world with you, seeing only sunshine.

As people say, not thinking what the words mean, "we have passed out of each other's lives." But can those who have loved deeply pass out of each other's lives? You are my life. You began to light the world for me—not the very first time we met, because then I misunderstood you strangely—but the second time.

Every night now I dream of you, and the dreams are more real than reality. In the dreams we meet by accident. Sometimes you have come back to England, and we run across each other in the street, or at the house where we met that wonderful *second time* and opened the door of each other's souls. Or else, I have been sent to the far-off eastern country of warmth and sunshine where you are—where I might be with you to-day, if I had said yes instead of no. But—in the dreams—wherever the places of our meeting, we always say the same things to each other. You tell me that my not caring was the worst part of your

loss. And I tell you—what I am telling you now. Because this is for you and no one else. Though others may read the book of my life, only you will know that it is mine. And my heart is in it for you.

In the dreams, I never finish what I have to say. Something always comes to make me break off in the midst, and I wake up in the dark with the same heavy sense of hopeless loss I had when you left me, after our last talk, and I heard the door shut behind you.

I would have given all the future, except ten minutes of it with you, to call you back, then; but I would not call. In the dreams it is different. I start to call you. I am ready to go on my knees and beg you to come back. But the door of darkness is shut suddenly in my face; or else it is as if a bridge between our two spirits broke with a loud crash, leaving a gulf that we cannot cross.

If that day I had run after you, and opened the door, and called, you would have come to me gladly. But—I could not have told you these things, and if I had tried, stumbling on, explaining, excusing myself, you would have stopped me. You would have been impelled by your love and pity to take me in spite of all, perhaps to regret your generosity when it was too late. For you would have stood by your word, I know, doing your best not to let me see that I had struck you a blow over the heart. But I should have seen that you suffered. I daren't think what our life would have been together. I might have killed myself. I should have had to free you somehow.

Or else, fearing yourself and your love for me, yet knowing the love to be not quite strong enough, you would have broken short my story in the midst—I think I can guess just where—and have gone away of your own accord. The door would have shut between

us, just as it shut when I sent you from me, but the pain afterwards would have been sharper for us both. Bitter humiliation for me; for you, the sting of having failed a woman who loved you with all that was best in her.

That was what I reasoned out when I let you go, all of myself, all of my life going with you, leaving only a shell—a shell full of echoes sad and sweet. I thought I was doing the wisest thing—the only thing, as I could not take A—'s advice and marry you without telling. A— is the one person in England who knows, and she but a few facts.

You will understand why I told her. In America, among those who remember me, nobody really knew the whole story. I could have kept it all from you if I had made up my mind to be your wife, and never to speak of things I wished to hide. But though A— said yes, something in myself said no. And my no was louder than her yes.

It is these dreams which have made me wonder lately, whether I ought to have sent you away not knowing what you were to me. Yet what could I have done? I ask myself that question over and over. And a still, small voice answers "Nothing else then, maybe. Yet it is not too late to speak to him, across the wide spaces that dreams can bridge."

This is a way that I have thought of. Not just a letter. No letter could be long enough. And a letter you would have to answer—in one way or the other. Or if you did not answer, your silence could mean only one thing.

Now, if you never write, I can comfort myself by thinking "it may be he never found the arrow I sent him from the dark. Perhaps if it had reached him he would have written or come." I could manage to

HE WHO PASSED

live on that morsel of comfort, feeling I had done my best for us both. Yet I believe that my message will find you where you are now. You will see your initials in my handwriting and the *sign*. I wear the star in the ring always on the bangle you gave me, the fourteenth of June. I wonder every day if you have kept the key. But even if you have thrown it away, I know you cannot have thrown away the memory.

If I had tried to tell you these things, stammering them out hot from my heart, they would have been like a confession.

This is not a confession. I do not mean it for one, nor for an explanation. I shall just tell you things as they were, taking my life step by step, showing how it made me what I was—not what I *am*; for you, and loving you, has made me over again, into what I am. And I have to begin at the very beginning, with my first memories, and sometimes many details, so that if I am worth understanding, you may perhaps come to understand. Only—could a man understand?

I don't ask you even to try. All I ask is, for the sake of the old love, if none is left, do not pity me. I won't have pity. And, when you have read all, and are deciding for or against, decide for your own happiness, not for mine.

I.

It was as if I had always lived in the house. I know now that I was two years old when they brought me there; and I suppose people cannot begin to remember things that happened before they were two.

In those days things didn't seem to happen. They just were, and I was in the midst of them.

The house was in a long, straight street, very wide. There were two lines of car tracks that went along it, and I used to climb up on a chair in one of the front rooms—whenever there was an empty room, with no boarders in it—to look at the cars rushing by, up and down, up and down. It was very strange to me where so many people could be going, the whole day, back and forth, in opposite directions, for the cars were always crowded, with men hanging on outside. I thought the two ends of the world must be at the ends of our street. Whether anyone had ever told me that the world had jumping off places like that, I don't know, but the thought was in my mind. It interested me, and was so mysterious that there was more pleasure in looking out from a window of an empty room than from the parlour, as we called it, where all the boarders were. It was an adventure to steal into a room, after the people who had lived there were gone—perhaps never to come back—and climb up on a chair. Sometimes the room would smell of

a perfume the last person there had used, for nearly all our boarders perfumed themselves a good deal, and it was seldom anyone thought to open the windows, except in hot weather.

One day, when I was caught in the second floor front room, looking out of the window, with the door shut, I was pulled off the chair and my ears were boxed hard, so that I heard a sound like a top humming—one of those tops boys played with in our street in summer. Rose, the black girl who boxed my ears, said that next time I spoiled one of those good cane chairs kneeling on it with my sharp knees, she would lock me up in a closet where rats lived. I was afraid of Rose, because she was black, and had a strange, musky smell, different from white people; and I was afraid of rats; but still I could not keep away from the room, whenever it was empty. It fascinated me with its echoings, and the feeling of all the people who had been there, and were gone I did not know where. Even if I had forgotten some of their faces, they would come back to me clearly in the room where I had seen them. I used to think I might see figures pass across the dusty mirror if I kept my eyes fastened on it without winking; and often when I had stared so fixedly that my eyes watered and everything grew cloudy, I imagined that the faces were there, behind the glass.

Another reason I liked the empty rooms was because I had a game to play before the mirrors on dressing-tables or mantels, or what we used to call "bureaus." My favourite room was the front one on the second floor, because of a large looking-glass with an old-fashioned gilt frame that tipped forward a good deal over the narrow mantelpiece. The frame was encrusted with fly-specks, but it seemed splendid to me, because

it was gold. This was the most expensive room in the house, so it was frequently empty; and I used to play, before the big mirror, that there was another girl living next door talking to me through a window. I called the girl Lily, the name I admired more than any other. She was Lily Merritt; and if I did anything bad, or got scolded, as often happened, I would say, "It isn't me. I've gone over to Lily Merritt's house. This is Lily Merritt who is naughty." But no one paid much attention. I don't remember ever being asked who was Lily Merritt. Perhaps this was because, at our house, people were always talking so much and so loudly that no one listened with interest to anyone else, especially to a child.

Almost everybody called the boarding-house keeper Ma, so I called her Ma, too, though I think I knew vaguely from the first that she was not my mother. Odd, how children do seem to know about mothers, and that everybody must have one or have had one once! Lily Merritt and I used to discuss mothers through the looking-glass. Hers was very pretty, and gave her beautiful things on Christmas and other days. Lily said that she never had her ears boxed, and no one ever shook her. This friend in the looking-glass was a great comfort to me, and she got to seem so real that I almost believed in her existence separate from mine.

"Ma" was not very old, perhaps, but I thought of her as old. She was large and fat and soft-looking, especially in the mornings, when her figure was rather like the bags of kindlings I used to watch going down to the cellar. In the afternoons she generally put on stiff corsets, which she hated. Then the baggiest part of her figure stood out like a mantelpiece, and at meals she dropped things on it unless she took a

great deal of pains eating her food. There were spots on all her dresses because of this, spots that wouldn't come out of her winter things, because she loved plush, and materials which looked rich but marked easily. Her hair was greyish-brown at the back and underneath, but there was a surface of red bronze that was much brighter about once a week than at other times. I slept in her room, and it fascinated me to see her take off and put on most of her hair. The part that came off was in puffs, which she hardly ever combed out or brushed, for usually she was in a hurry to dress and undress; so they looked like rows of dusty mice with reddish fur, all herded closely together on her head.

Once she might have been pretty, for even I, who loved and keenly felt beauty when I was very little, could see how perfect her features were. But they were very small, and her face had grown so fat and large, with two scollops of chin, that everything seemed to be crowded together, a tiny knot of eyes, nose and mouth, in a big, round expanse of white, like a clock dial. Her eyes were a deep violet colour, but there was a disagreeable fulness round them, and as she put black stuff on her short eyelashes, there were always dark, greasy smudges underneath. In each corner, white dots would come, especially when she laughed hard, and I longed for her to wipe them away, but she never did. They were invariably there.

We slept in a back room at the top of the house. Ma had a wide bed, with yellowish sheets and pillow-cases that were hardly ever changed if the house was full, as there were only just enough to go round. When her husband was at home he slept with her, but he was away most of the time. Rose said that he was a "drummer." I thought this must mean that

he had to beat a drum, as men did in processions which passed sometimes, but I found out that he travelled to other cities, and small towns, selling things. That was being a "drummer," though I couldn't see why. No one ever called him Pa. He was younger than Ma, or looked younger; thin and dark, with black eyes close together, which twinkled when he was pleased, but snapped like a cross dog's eyes when anything annoyed him. He used to be ill sometimes, when his face was purplish instead of yellowish-brown, and then he always smelled of liquor. I knew that smell as soon as I knew anything, for people in the house had a good deal of whisky and brandy in their rooms, in bottles. Everybody called Ma's husband Henry, or Hennery. He was kind to me, but I was sorry when he came home, because he snored at night, and made strange, dreadful noises in his throat that sickened me with fear in the dark. Although I knew it was he who made them, I could not help thinking that wicked, indescribable animals were under the bed, and might crawl out to eat me up in my low crib. Sometimes I imagined their warm breath on my face in the darkness. And it was still worse when Rose told me Bible stories about people who were possessed with devils. I thought then that perhaps Henry was possessed with devils, and it was they inside him who roared and grunted in the night.

Rose was very religious, and read the Bible at night, but she was wicked, too, and it was her greatest pleasure to torture me. I was sent to her in the kitchen every day at one time or another, and her round black face with its huge rolling eyes, had all the fascination for me that a black cat has for a young mouse. She said that, after death, I would be black

and she white. The thought of dying (though I did not know exactly what death meant) and of turning black frightened me horribly. The idea was in my mind every night when I went to bed. Once a sweet woman who stayed in our house a whole month taught me a prayer: "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen." After Rose told me I would turn black when I died, I stopped saying the prayer, because I thought it would be better not to remind God of my dying in the night before I waked. I hoped if I let Him alone, He would forget me; but it made me feel restless and uneasy not saying the prayer I had been used to repeat. And I was glad to be roused up in the morning, very early, by the shaking of the house with the great traffic which began at that hour; immense carts laden with iron rails, or beer-vans, or a procession of big horses, going I knew not where. Now I know that what I used to think the end of the world was a ferry, and our street was a thoroughfare between one river on the west and another on the east, at the opposite sides of New York.

In Ma's room we could not see the street, but only backs of other houses, and roofs where cats fought and squalled. Once or twice in summer, however, everyone got up before five to be ready for some excursion; so I knew what kind of things went by along the street. If I had not known, I should have been miserable with curiosity, or even fear, when the house shook so early in the morning.

It was a red brick building, with green blinds, and a narrow iron balcony running across the front. Everything was shabby about the house. The windows were not washed more than once a year, and

the blinds were grey with dust—grey in little blotches, showing where rain had fallen on thick dust. There were a number of narrow steps which went up to the front door, and in summer Ma, and any boarders not working, sat on the steps in the evenings.

There was a whole row of houses exactly like ours, and just as shabby. People sat on those steps, too, and often they called out to each other and laughed and made jokes. But then a car would come booming along in the midst, and the end of the joke would be lost.

In the twilight it was not bad sitting there, though smells of food came up from the basements. But it was dreadful to open the front door on some of those hot August mornings, just like opening the door of an oven; and the pavement seemed to fly up at your face, in a swift flame, hitting you in the eyes.

Ma kept a boarding-house for actors and actresses. I thought then that all grown-up people were "on the stage," and even most children, though no little girls or boys ever came to stay in our house while I was there. Several of those I played with in the street went to the theatre every night, and I knew very well what the theatre was, because more than once I had been taken there to "walk on," or rather to be carried on, for it was when I was too young to be given a speaking part, and I appeared as a baby. But it was an experience not to forget. The lights and music, and all the faces looking up made a picture in my mind whenever I heard the word "theatre" or "stage." Besides, at the theatre one had lemon sticks and caramels given one, to keep one quiet.

On the hot summer evenings those who were "resting," and trying to get engagements, sat on the front steps with palm leaf fans in their damp hands, waiting

for those who were "working" to come home. Then there was talk, with beer or gingerpop, and lemonade, with cheese, sandwiches, and other things to eat, mostly in tins, like sardines, or devilled ham. On the can of the ham there was a picture of a little red devil, which I liked very much. I always thought of him if anyone said, "Oh, the devil!" or "Go to hell!" which were favourite exclamations among the boarders, even the ladies. My idea of hell was a red place, inhabited by quantities of devilled ham devils, and I thought it would be rather fun to go there, if one had not to die first, and turn black, after being born white in this world.

I was allowed to sit up late on those nights. That is, no one noticed me or thought of sending me away, unless I made a noise. And sometimes one of the ladies took a fancy to me. When this happened it was very nice. She would let me come to her room, bring in her letters, and search for hairpins and collar buttons which she dropped on the floor. I used to find extraordinary things occasionally, coloured beads and balls of chewing gum, so it was quite exciting, though the dust on the faded old carpets made me sneeze. On the front steps, at night, if it were not too hot, my loved one would let me hold her hand, to look at her rings, and go to sleep against her shoulder when it was so late that I couldn't keep awake.

I can't remember the time when anyone dressed or undressed me. Before I went upstairs to bed, if I went alone, somebody unbuttoned my dress behind. That was all. The rest I had to do for myself. And in the morning I came downstairs in my petticoat, with my frock over my arm. Ma, or one of the boarders would fasten it up for me, in the basement

dining-room at breakfast; but it was not everyone who came down to breakfast. Husbands carried up plates and cups to their wives, or young men to the girls they were in love with. If a lady had no husband and no lover, but could afford seventy cents extra a week, she gave Rose ten cents a day to take something up to her room, so it was only the ugliest or poorest ones who came down to the basement in the morning.

No wonder people did not like coming down, even apart from being sleepy after a late night, for the dining-room, shut up for many hours, smelt of cockroaches. Later, the odour of different foods overpowered the other, except in the kitchen. Nobody who has not seen that kitchen, or another of the same type, can imagine what it was like at night. The walls and floor were a moving black mass of insects, and Rose threatened to throw them at me, even to make me eat them, if I ever complained of anything she did or said.

I suppose there are such houses and such people in England, but you cannot imagine them; your life has been so different—with all the difference between heaven and hell. But I hardly knew that I was wretched, for I took everything for granted as it came. When I was between four and five I began to learn things about myself.

One day I was in my favourite room, which was empty. No boarder had been there for a week, but on the table were some carnations, not quite faded yet. I had taken them out of the old yellow-green water, and finding the stems gummy, had begun to dry them on a soiled towel, when the door was flung open and Ma came into the room with a strange lady.

"You nasty little thing—what a start you gave

me!" she exclaimed. "How dare you sneak into this room! You've been slapped for it often enough."

"Oh, don't slap her now," said the lady. "I love children. I lost a little girl of my own last year, just about her size. How old is she?"

"I don't know exactly. She must be nearly five," said Ma.

They both looked at me, as I stood with the flowers in my hand. I had dropped the towel, but Ma whisked it up off the floor and made it into a ball, which she tossed out through the open door.

"Oh, isn't she yours?" asked the lady, from whose face I had hardly taken my eyes. I thought she was beautiful, but different from most of those who came to our house. Their hair was usually gold colour, or red, or a bright auburn, but hers was just brown, not even bronze, and she wore it parted in the middle, which gave her brown eyes a gentle expression. Her eyebrows had a lovely arch, though they were no darker than her hair. Most eyebrows at our house were very black, and so were eyelashes, but I thought hers pretty, for a change. She was like the picture of a Madonna, which an Irish Catholic girl, before Rose, had left in the kitchen. I knew it would be nice to have a mother with such eyes and such a smile. Some of the children in our street had real mothers, and cried for them to come if they fell down or were hurt.

"No, she ain't mine. I never had a child," Ma hurried to say, as if she could not bear the idea. "I don't take much interest in children. Did you ever hear of the Love Birds? That's what they call her father and mother in the profession. They care for nobody except each other. She's their child; lived with a grandmother; but the grandmother died when

the kid was two. That was just the time when her parents had work in New York. They were boarding here, and had to send for the kid. When they went on the road again, they couldn't take her, of course, so they left her with me. A queer toad she is, but we get along with her somehow, among us all. You know how it is. Folks are good-natured. Her papa and mamma expected to be back before this, or I wouldn't have kept her, but I've got used to her now. The worst of it is, they haven't sent me a nickel for three months, nor written neither. I don't hardly know what to do."

"I expect you'll keep her," said the lady. "My! what big black eyes you have, little girlie. Glorious eyes, aren't they?"

"They'd be handsome with yellow hair," Ma answered. "She's a regular little gipsy."

"A dear little gipsy," exclaimed the lady. "She shall come to me when I'm not busy, and I'll tell her stories, for I'm going to live here for awhile."

Then she turned to Ma, and said that she had decided to take the room. They talked about the price, and the lady paid ten dollars for the first week in advance, as strangers always did. People in the profession recommended boarding-houses to each other, and someone this lady knew in California had sent her to Ma, someone whose photograph was on the parlour mantelpiece among a hundred others, growing yellow and stained by flies and time.

My new friend (she was Mrs., not Miss, even on the stage) had never been to New York before. She was a San Francisco woman, I heard her say to Ma. She had gone on the stage when her husband died, and had made a success in a stock company. Her friends had advised her to come to New York and try

her luck. She had some letters of introduction to managers, but the journey had cost a good deal. She wanted to economise until she found an engagement, but she believed she would be comfortable in this room, and she was glad there was a little girl in the house.

I had never been so happy as I was in the next few weeks. I don't know how many weeks they were; but summer was over when my dear friend came, and there was snow on the ground when she left me.

That room was a different place while she was in it. She asked for a broom the first day, before she unpacked, and swept the floor herself. Then she dusted, letting me help with the chairs, using an old but clean grease towel from the theatre. The weather was cold, and it rained often, but she kept a window open at the top, night and day. She said no one could be well or good without fresh air. I never forgot that. Also she talked to me about washing myself. "Think how sorry your mamma would be if she saw you with dirty hands and face," she would say. "My little girl used to be bathed all over every morning."

There was an old-fashioned bathroom in the house, and she gave me baths there. She washed my hair, too, and curled it. Then she would comb the curls out, and let the hair fall in loose waves, telling me that it was very pretty, and people would admire it as much as though it were golden if I kept it neat. She bought me a brush and comb of my own, and I enjoyed using them. Before that, I had only Ma's things, which I hated and hardly ever touched, so my hair was usually all in thick tangles, unless one of the boarders took pity on me, and combed out the knots. It was very long hair for a little girl to have,

my dear lady said. Even in those days it came nearly down to my waist; and when she used to take me out for walks, as she often did, people in the street spoke to each other of my eyes and hair.

One day we met a man she knew, and they talked about me. My friend explained that he was a kind of artist, who made dolls' heads, and he wanted to use me as a model for a new doll. "Why, does he think I am pretty?" I asked. Then they both laughed, but did not answer my question. He gave me five cents, and said, "There, that's for yourself. You needn't put it in the missionary box." But I had never heard of a missionary box, and wanted to know what he meant.

"Poor lamb, she's a perfect little heathen," said my lady. And she asked if I would like her to take me to church some day. When she told me there was singing, and that I should see beautiful glass pictures in the windows, I said yes. So she took me the next Sunday; but when I saw a plate full of money going round, I thought it was meant for me to help myself, and I picked up two handfuls. My dear friend turned red, and made me put it all down instantly. People tittered, and stared at us, whispering. That made me very angry, and I said out aloud: "I hate church. I'll never come again."

It was in this same week that the artist called to model a doll's head from mine. I had never thought before about being pretty, but now the idea was in my mind constantly. I looked at myself earnestly in every mirror I passed, and winked my eyelashes, or tossed my hair to see how long it was. I began to be a vain little thing, yet I don't know that my vanity did me much harm, for it gave me a feeling of pride in keeping clean and neat, which I had never had.

The artist came two or three times, and everyone in the house was interested about the doll. They all began to call me "Dolly," which I liked much better than "Kid," the name most popular in the household. But it was a blow, when the model was made, to hear the artist say it would be unlike me in one way. It was to have yellow hair. Dolls with dark hair never sold well, he explained. The young men boarders teased me about this so much, that I was glad when eventually they forgot the history of the doll.

My lady used to cut figures from fashion plates for me, and I played with them in her room. She taught me to fold layer after layer of paper one upon the other, and then cut out some shape: a cat, a dog, or even a girl or boy. It was thrilling to unfold the layers at last, and see how a whole procession of the shape I had chosen would appear, each figure attached to the other. She made me pockets in my dresses, too, and gave me little handkerchiefs to put in them. I loved her desperately. And when she had found out how Rose was torturing me in secret, and persuaded Ma to send the cruel girl away, I worshipped her so for her goodness, I could have died for her, even though in dying I would have to turn black. She taught me a new prayer, and told me about angels. I used to try and see them at night. Then, by and by, I began to think I really did see them, or almost think it. And once, when I was ill, and Ma had to get up in the night with me, I hoped to make her believe me a wonderful child by crying out that there were angels in the room. I expected her to weep, but she only remarked, "I guess you must be going crazy." After that I never again mentioned the angels.

It almost killed me when my dear lady went away.

A long time passed before she found an engagement, and even then it was not in New York, as she had wished. Nearly all her money was spent, so she dared not refuse an offer, though it was to go out to Chicago; and the part she had to play was not one that she liked. She kissed me a great many times, and called me "poor baby, poor, lonely little baby." Then she ran down the steps with a bag in her hand, and across the street to catch a car that was coming.

I had hardly realised what it would be like to have her go until I saw her running with the bag. Then I knew that she would be carried away from me forever. I thought of our walks, of the soft clasp of her hand on mine. Everything came back to me in a flash, and at the same time an awful sensation of breaking. I gave a scream, and would have run after my precious friend, perhaps to fall under the car and be killed, if somebody had not snatched me back. I heard a little sharp sound—the gathers of my dress tearing as I pulled, trying to escape. Then I remember no more.

I don't know if I fainted, or whether a child can faint; but when I opened my eyes I was lying on a horsehair covered sofa in the parlour. It was the horsehair pricking my cheek which seemed to wake me up, and my face was wet.

Ma was saying, "My! a regular little tragedy actress!"

For days afterwards I hardly ate anything. Whenever I put food into my mouth I thought of my lost friend, and my throat shut up so that I nearly choked. I cried in her room till I was half blind; but when the new servant girl found me there, Ma jerked me out and locked the door until the next boarder came.

II.

ONE night that winter, Henry was at home, after being away longer than usual. He came in the afternoon, when Ma was at a matinee. He ran up to his room and changed his clothes, then hurried out, leaving word with Maud, the new servant, that he had an engagement with some friends. He might not be back till late. He must have been in a hurry, for he left his things scattered about the room, although he was a neat man in his ways, and always packed and unpacked for himself very carefully. His travelling bag, which he called his "grip," was invariably locked. It stood on the floor in our room, in a corner, behind a chair, as if he preferred not to have it noticed. I had seen Ma try to open it sometimes with keys of her own, but they would never fit. She explained to me once, when I came in while she was on her knees by the bag, that she wanted to see if Henry had anything there which ought to be washed, but I must not tell him she was looking, as he might be silly enough to feel annoyed.

This time he forgot to lock the bag. Ma did not go upstairs till after dinner. Then she took me, because everyone was saying my face was red and queer, as if I were sickening for something. There was scarlet fever in the street, and Ma said she would undress me to see if I had any spots. If I had she

would get the doctor, and maybe he would send me away to a hospital. She couldn't have me giving diseases to her boarders, especially as my father and mother owed her six months' money for me.

I was excited, and hoped I should come out in spots, because I thought it would be interesting to be taken away by a doctor, and to see new things. But when Henry's bag, unlocked and in the middle of the floor, caught Ma's eye, she forgot me and squatted down with an eager, fierce expression on her face. She looked like a person who is very, very hungry, and suddenly sees food, which must be eaten at once or not at all.

She did not take the things out of the bag, but fumbled among them. In a cigar-box, nearly full of pink writing paper and envelopes, was one sheet with something written on it. Ma read with the same eager haste she had shown in searching. "Aha!" she said. "I knew it! I've got him now. Beast—beast!"

I had never heard her speak like that. Generally she was jolly and laughing, except when she had a headache; but this was a dreadful voice, as if she hated Henry, and would like to kill him.

She was hardly ever really cross to me, except for a minute or two, when she would cuff my head and push my shoulder, if I were in her way, or if I asked questions which she could not be bothered to answer. But now, when she had gone all through the bag and ransacked the pockets of Henry's coat, which sprawled on the bed, she turned to me and spoke in the same wicked-sounding voice. If a snake could speak, I think its voice would be like that. She said, "Stop staring and gaping, you little saucer-eyed owl. Get to bed. I don't care whether you have scarlet fever or not, or whether you give it to every d — fool in

the house. I wish they were all dead. I wish Henry was dead. I'll make him wish it, too!" Then she swore a good deal, but it did not shock me in the least. I was used to such words. They were in everyone's mouth. If I wanted to make people laugh, I would swear, too; at least, before my dear lady came. Now, when I stopped to think in time, I never did it, because she had asked me not, as a favour, if I loved her.

I began to unbutton my dress behind, but it was difficult to do, so I was slow and clumsy. With some impatient exclamation, Ma pushed my hands down, and tore the buttons out of the buttonholes, so savagely that several buttons, already loose, flew off and fell on the floor. She was in such a strange mood that I was afraid of her, and putting my nightgown over my head without fastening it, I jumped into bed with my clothes on. She did not notice, or else did not care. In a minute she subsided heavily on a trunk, which had been hers ever since she was a young woman on the stage, and had still some of the old theatrical labels clinging to it. As a seat, it must have left much to be desired, but she had a sullen air of wishing to be uncomfortable. She sat looking at the partly written letter and a photograph she had found. It was unmounted, and curled up at the edges. Sometimes she mumbled to herself, and I caught the word "Beast!" blurted out over and over again.

I was sorry for Henry, though I did not understand what he had done. I wished I could have got up and waited for him to come into the house, so that I might warn him to go quietly away again. Not that I had any love for Henry. He was never unkind, yet there was something about him that disgusted me. Still, I felt a desire to protect him now.

It must have been about nine o'clock when Ma

brought me up, which was only the beginning of the evening at our house, but she did not go down again. She sat glaring and muttering for a long time. Then, as Henry did not come, she began to undress. She pulled off the dusty puffs, and wrapped two strands of hair between the ears and temples round large curling pins. Then she got rid of her gown, which was of green velveteen, and began to move about aimlessly, changing the position of things in the room. She was in her chemise and corsets and petticoat; and perhaps it was a strange thought for a child to have, but as I lay with my head almost hidden with blanket and quilt, I wondered how such a woman could expect a man to love her, she was so horrid to look at, like that. You see, I heard a good deal of talk in the house, about husbands who liked other women, if they were prettier than their own wives.

The crocheted trimming on Ma's chemise was torn, and some flannel, long-sleeved thing she wore underneath was a purplish-red, shrunk and hardened by washing. It was pinned across her fat bust with a large black safety pin. Her corsets were of blue sateen, very dirty, and her petticoat, which hung crookedly round her squeezed-in waist, was black cotton at the top, with a flounce of flowered silk. There was lace in the flounce, torn off here and there as if it had been bitten. In other places it was held up with pins. She wore boots, with more than half the buttons off, above the ankles, and she trod her heels over to the outside, which gave her an odd, waddling walk.

Just as I was beginning to wonder if I had dreamed about the paper and the photograph, and Ma's anger, the door opened and Henry came in. The one gas

jet, unshaded, was flaring very high, with a slight popping noise; and the light quivered on Henry's face, seeming to make his black eyes twinkle more than ever for an instant. But Ma turned, and his eyes twinkled no more. She sprang at him, with the paper and photograph in her hand. Henry grabbed at them, she resisting. But he got what he wanted by twisting her wrist, and as he crumpled paper and photograph together, she fought to wrench them out from between his fingers. When she could not do that, she snatched at his collar, as if she meant to choke him.

Then they began calling each other strange names, such as I had never heard, names of animals, and neither of them remembered me. They wrestled together, the floor creaking under their feet, and Ma began to cry and laugh, gasping for breath, like the little boy next door, who could be heard through the wall when he had croup.

"Shut up!" Henry panted. "You don't want the whole house to know, do you?"

"That's just what I do want," she shrieked.

"Take that, then!" and he slapped her with the flat of his hand across the bare shoulders, that were mottled with the cold in purple blotches. The slap made a strange sound, like the splash of a stone falling from high up, on the surface of water.

Ma screamed as if she had been stabbed, and, bounding to the door, threw it open before Henry could stop her. She ran out, screaming "Murder! Police!" but she must have forgotten how close was the door to the head of the stairs, for she fell, her yells of rage turning to muffled moans of fear and pain. It seemed as if the thudding of her body on step after step would never stop. At last came one sharp scream, which broke off short.

Doors flew open, and banged against walls. People cried out to know what had happened, and exclaimed at something they saw. But Henry stood still, yellow pale, his hands hanging at his sides, twitching at each of the horrid bumping sounds. He did not stir until someone called, "Henry—Henry—are you up there?"

Then he shot from the room, straight as an arrow, and I heard him running quickly downstairs. After that there was a buzzing of voices. A woman began to sob and laugh in the same way that Ma had sobbed and laughed a few minutes ago. I knew that it was Miss St. Clare, a friend of Ma's, of about her age. "Oh, poor dear!" she shrilled out. "Oh, what an awful thing. She's dead—she's dead!"

I felt as if a shower of icicles had fallen on my naked body. Hardly knowing what I did, I tumbled out of my crib, in my nightgown, which I had put on over my clothes, and ran to the top of the stairs. I had kicked off my stockings in bed, and the oilcloth in the passage felt cold to my feet, and rough where it was in holes. But almost I was glad to be cold, as I think Ma had been when she took off her dress and walked about the room, muttering, before Henry came. The world seemed dark with horror and suffering, and to have the feet chilled to the bone was like sharing the general misery, if I could not help. Child as I was, vaguely I felt this.

Although I ran to the head of the stairs, I did not go down. Something seemed to stop me at the top. I stood there, grasping the baluster with my little hand, and I could hardly believe that the loud, pounding noise in my ears came from my own breast.

I thought that perhaps someone would come up to me, but no one did. Looking down, I could see eight or ten people, some partly undressed, some,

who had just got back from the theatre, in hats and coats. They were all grouped together under a flaring gas jet, which had been turned high, and blew in the wind from an open door or window. Perhaps the front door had been left open. Something was tapping constantly, though not regularly, a window blind, I thought. It seemed to make everything that had happened much worse, and more incredible.

At last I began creeping slowly down, step by step, hanging on to the baluster rail. I was afraid of what I should see at the bottom of the stairs, yet I had to know what was there.

Just as I set my half frozen foot on the lowest step, there was a loud bang of a door below. Then there was no more tapping, and the gas jet ceased to flare. Two men came hurrying up to the floor where the people were; one I knew, a thin, sad-faced, very funny comedian, with hardly any hair. The other was a stranger, who carried a small, square black bag.

Everyone moved away, to stand against the wall, as this second man appeared, and then I saw that Ma was lying on the floor, near the foot of the stairs on which I stood. She lay on her face, with her head doubled under her shoulders in a queer way, which made her look headless and somehow not human. No one had dared move her. Her big body was limp, yet round, like a bag of flour thrown down anyhow.

Afterwards the thought of death was more than ever fearful to me, because of the hideous grotesqueness I could not help associating with it. When people spoke of death, instantly a picture would spring to my eyes of Ma waddling about the room in her horrid blue corsets and torn petticoat; then lying in a huddled heap on the floor, under the gas jet.

III.

MA had broken her neck.

Hardly anyone left the boarding-house, only Miss St. Clare and another woman who had never got on with Henry, but always quarrelled with him sharply at the table. The rest stayed, and all went to the funeral. A sister of Henry's came to run the house, but she made a great favour of leaving her husband and children in Jersey City, and said she could not stop long. She looked like Henry, dark and yellow; and also like pincushion dolls I had seen, with nut heads and hair painted on with India ink. She had a very flat breast and round shoulders, so that I wondered if her head could have been put on wrong side in front. Her husband was a grocer, and she knew hardly anything about the stage, she kept telling everyone. Nobody liked her, and I think the house would soon have been almost empty, if Henry had not brought a widow from Chicago to manage it. She was handsome and young, with red hair, and freckles that ran together on her apple-red cheeks. She had a child, two years old, a girl, and we three slept in the room Ma and I had shared. Henry, when he was at home, took any room that happened to be free.

The widow was Mrs. Sage, and the little girl was Sellawese, a name obtained from running Sarah and Louise together.

Mrs. Sage had a loud voice which you could hear

all over the house, and she never went up or down stairs without running very fast. People talked about her a good deal, and I often heard what they said. She came from a railway restaurant in a town of Ohio, and was a great friend of Henry's, the very one, according to the ladies (stage-whispering with their heads together), of whom Ma had been jealous. Anonymous letters had reached Ma, it seemed, and she had been watching. Then "things had come to a head"—whatever that meant. Now, they all prophesied that Henry would marry Mrs. Sage as soon as it was "decent," if not before.

What their idea of decency was I don't know; but Henry did marry her in the spring. I remember, because there was no more snow after that, and the winds were warm and sweet like a perfumed breath.

Mrs. Sage was never cross to me, until after the wedding. Then she changed almost at once. Before that she had seemed quite pleased to have me play with Sellawese, and keep the child quiet; but when she and Henry were married, the bride said there was now no place for me to sleep. Three in a room were enough. If Hen were determined to keep me, I would have to be put with Maud; but her advice was to send me to some orphan asylum, as my parents had paid nothing for nearly a year.

I heard the new husband and wife talking on the day of their wedding, in the parlour, which was given up to them for the afternoon, by consent of all the boarders. I had brought Sellawese in to her mother, because she was naughty and I could do nothing with her.

"I won't sleep with Maud," I said. "Maud's a black girl."

"She's not black. She's a pale brown," Henry's

new wife snapped back. "Besides, beggars mustn't be choosers. You'll sleep in her room this very night, or you'll go out of this house—see?"

But a pretty soubrette, one of the boarders, took pity on me, and let my crib be put in her room. She had been making rather a pet of me ever since she came to the house. She detested Sellawese, who was spoiled by her mother, and always whining. Everyone liked Daisy. She had beautiful pale brown hair, and used to come down to breakfast with it hanging over the shoulders of her dressing-gown, when she came down at all; but generally the men boarders would dispute among themselves which should take up her coffee and sausage, or fried egg. At night there were suppers in Daisy's room, after the theatre. Each person contributed something. Men and girls sat on trunks, or on the bed, or the floor, eating raw oysters, with the girls' hairpins for forks, and drinking beer (brought in the water-jug) out of the cup in which Daisy brushed her teeth. She had a small back room under the one where I had slept, but sometimes, from eleven thirty to one o'clock, there were as many as eight or ten people eating and drinking there, not counting me in my crib—or out of it.

I learned through talk in the house that Henry had put an advertisement in a theatrical paper which was read by everyone in travelling companies. It was addressed to my father and mother by name, informing them that, if they neither fetched me nor paid my board, I would be placed in an institution for the children of impoverished actors.

IV.

I USED to think that it would be splendid to have another child in the same house, but Sellawese made my life a misery.

She was a pasty-faced little thing, with weak eyes and light reddish hair; and as Mrs. Henry let her eat whatever she liked, she suffered dreadfully with indigestion. Always after meals a pain came on, which she called "the rat." Only she could not say "r" in the right place, so she pronounced it "yat," which was peculiarly offensive to my ears. "The yat—the yat!" she would squeal, and instantly lie down to roll on the ground, no matter where she might be. Then she would roar to be picked up and carried, and this business fell to my lot, as I had come to be her unpaid nurse. If I refused to let her ride on my back, with her sharp little finger-nails sticking in my throat, just under my chin, she would yell for her mother, and say that I had slapped or pinched her. She would even pinch her own cheek or arm, and show the mark, saying "Bad Doll did that. Punish bad Doll." And Mrs. Sage would pull the lobes of my ears until they felt long and red, like a cock's comb.

I was staggering up the front steps with Sellawese on my back, one warm afternoon in May, when suddenly I heard a patter of feet on the pavement behind me, and a woman's voice—sounding young and fresh—calling out, "My little girl!"

Involuntarily I tried to turn my head. Sellawese dug her fingers so deep into my throat that I choked and turned giddy. I wavered, and would have fallen with my load, if someone had not steadied me. Strong arms swung me off the steps and set me down on the pavement at the foot of the stairs. I felt unreasonably happy and comforted. It was a little thin man who had caught me, quite young I think he must have been, though all grown-up people seem old to children; not good-looking, because his mouth was wide, with a long upper lip, and his nostrils large and quivering, like those of a nervous horse; but his dark blue eyes struck me with their beauty and beaming kindness. They were the colour of sapphires in contrast with his thick black lashes, bushy black eyebrows, and curly hair which might have been dipped in ink. Though he was neatly shaven, his beard was so strong that his deeply cleft chin and long upper lip were nearly as blue as his eyes. He had splendid white teeth, which showed in his wide mouth in a long, straight line, as he bent over me with a charming smile.

I have always observed things quickly, and they stick in my memory; so in one look at this kind, beaming man, his features, his expression, his attitude were photographed on my mind. Since that day I have always been able to see him exactly as he looked then, stooping down, with a tweed travelling cap pushed far back on his thick curls. I was grateful to him, and knew I could love him dearly, yet my eyes and my thoughts flew from him to the woman whose fresh voice had cried out, "My little girl!" She seemed to me prettier than anyone I had ever seen, like a beautiful doll come alive; and it was with a shock of joy that I saw her shake Sellawese violently, after

tearing loose the little hands clutched round my throat.

"Oh, say, dearie, I guess that's enough!" the man pleaded.

But the pretty woman shook Sellawese again, and everything in me that was cruel and revengeful rejoiced. The spoiled little girl, who was never scolded, much less punished, by her mother, was horrified into silence for a second. Then she burst into a hoarse roar of rage, which sounded too big and old for her babyish body. It seemed as strong as a grown-up woman's voice; but her mother was out; and there was no one else in the house who would not have revelled in the scene.

"Take that, you little brute!" snapped the woman, with a pretty viciousness, which seemed to me adorable because it was shown in my defence, and for a long time there had been no one to defend me. "Nasty little tyrant, I'd like to spank you squint-eyed!"

"There, there, drop the little goblin," said the man. "It's all our fault, leaving the kid the way we did."

This turned the woman's attention to me. She let the wriggling Sellawese go, and as the child scuttled up the steps into the house, the lovely grown-up doll squatted down and drew me into her arms, as if she had forgotten or did not care that we were in the street, with a crowd of children collecting, and passers-by slowing their steps to linger and stare.

She was not tall, though she had an inch or two advantage of the man; and squatting close to the brick pavement, her face came just on a level with mine. A pair of immense brown eyes swam with sparkling tears which, as they gathered and fell,

carried with them faint black streaks from the remarkably long lashes. But I was used to that effect, for ladies often cried a little at our house, and nearly always damaged their complexions in this way, unless they could gingerly dab their eyes in time with a handkerchief, if they happened to have one, or flick the tears away with a finger if they had not. This lady had smooth pink and white cheeks with a few little golden freckles that showed through the powder. Her cheeks were delicately rosy, like the inside of a conch shell which was a valued possession of mine, a gift from the sailor brother of a boarder. She had a tiny mouth, with curving lips, painted in the shape of a bow; and though her eyes were so dark, and her arched brows black, her hair was a pale gold, with rippling waves that glittered. The only fault in her oval face was that the chin receded a little. A large navy blue hat was a frame for the shining hair, and her white throat rose like a long stem of a flower out from her turned-down collar.

"Do you know you're our baby daughter?" she asked me, in a cooing voice. "Oh, you poor wee thing, those nasty creatures let you go looking like a rag-bag."

I flung my arms around her and squeezed her tightly, while she laughed and gurgled, hugging me to her full, hard bosom. She smelled very good, like scented grease-paint and powder, and seemed more than ever like a wax doll which Sellawese owned, and would never let me play with. I felt it was too wonderful to be true, that these could be my father and mother.

"You'll take me away with you, won't you?" I said. And my father laughed a nervous little laugh,

answering, "Well, I guess we'll have to manage some way or another. But come on in now. We can't stay in the street all day."

He picked me up in his arms and carried me into the house, while my beautiful mother followed with a good-sized hand-bag they had brought. No one was in the parlour, and I showed them in there, for it seemed the only thing to do. The shutters were bowed and the windows were closed to keep out the heat. My father sat down in an armchair that had a castor on one side and tilted over to one side. He took me between his knees and smoothed my hair, which was almost as tangled as it used to be before my dear Californian friend came into my life. Mother looked at herself in the fly-specked glass over the mantelpiece, moistening her handkerchief and dabbing the faint black streaks off her cheeks, then dusting on powder from a tiny round box in a pocket of her coat. She laughed at the stacks of faded photographs. "My," she said, "the same photos—even the same fly-specks, I bet. Everything the same as last time."

"Except this," added my father, nodding at me.

"Except this," she repeated, and came to perch on the arm of the green rep covered chair. This made it tilt more than ever. She lost her balance, and he quickly threw an arm round her. They both laughed, and kissed each other. Then they kissed me, too, and though I felt instinctively that I was a second thought with them, and always would be, I was so happy that a kind of giddiness seized me. My knees trembled, and my father snatched me up into his lap. My mother knelt beside the chair, pressing her head against my arm. She had taken off her hat, and as her golden hair glittered under my eyes, I saw that there was a brownish line along the roots. This dis-

appointed me faintly, because it made her seem a little more like every other woman, not quite so unique as I had thought her.

It was thus that we were found by Henry's wife, who threw open the door suddenly and came in with several paper parcels dangling from her fingers by strings. She had not waited to put away her purchases, for Sellawese, appearing cautiously behind her skirts, had doubtless incited her to vengeance.

There was a volley of recriminations on both sides, and the words "my child" were sharply repeated by both women again and again, but at last my father succeeded in making peace. He had a rich, low voice, which was curiously soothing and pleasant. Even Mrs. Henry could not resist it long.

Listening in silence, I understood most of the conversation. There was much talk about the money owing for my keep, but when tones grew shrill, my father explained quietly that he would now settle everything. He had had rheumatic fever, and their savings had gone while he was out of an engagement, and there had been doctors' bills to pay. At last they had found another "job" together, though otherwise not very good; and they had had to wait before coming to fetch me, until the tour brought them east, within fifty miles of New York. They had planned to wipe off part of their debt and board at Henry's house, looking for a summer engagement, but now they said that they would go somewhere else at once, and take me with them. They gave Mrs. Henry what money they had to spare, which my mother turned aside to get out of her stocking. How much it was I don't know, though I saw several creased twenty-dollar bills counted by all three; but there was not enough, and my father had to give the woman a diamond ring he

was wearing before she would consent to hand me over with my belongings.

I had seen such transactions in the house before when some boarder lacked money to pay outstanding debts, for it was the fashion among actors and actresses to invest their savings in diamond ornaments. Then, if they were in difficulties, they had something to fall back upon. My father liked his ring, and looked at it wistfully. He suggested pawning it, but Mrs. Henry, who had evidently calculated just what was owing, said he "wouldn't get enough within fifty dollars." At this, he reluctantly gave up the ring, and she stuck it on one of her own fingers. The stone was yellow, though of a good size, and made her hand look red and coarse; but under an air of mispraisal she could not hide her pleasure.

I had hardly any clothes, for it was now so long since money had been received, that no new ones had been bought, and I had outgrown most of my old things. Such possessions as I had, including the pink conch shell, were made into a bundle by my mother and Mrs. Henry, who went upstairs together, while my father and I remained in the parlour. The house was not very full just then, and there was no one in it for whom I cared. Even Henry was away on one of his business trips, so there were few good-byes to say, except to Maud, Rose's successor, and a thin black cat named "Mascotte," who often frightened me by jumping into the window at night. Maud had a bad temper, but was not cruel like Rose. Sometimes she combed tangles out of my hair, when I could not manage them myself, and though she did not care how much she pulled or hurt me, I was rather sorry to think that I should never see her again. I went down into the kitchen, and gave her as a parting

present a new piece of chewing-gum in paper, which my father had just found in his pocket for me. I hated even to shake hands with Maud, because her palms were so pink that they made me feel sick, just as it did to touch the hand of an organ-grinder's monkey. But it was far worse when suddenly she snatched me up and kissed me full on the mouth with her moist lips. It was all I could do not to scream and writhe myself free, but it flashed into my head that I would be sorry afterwards if I hurt her feelings. I had never realised any fastidiousness in myself before; yet now it seemed that no washing could ever make me clean and sweet again. I was afraid to tell my mother, for fear she might never give me more of her fragrant kisses, if she knew how I had been defiled. For days I kept the secret, which weighed on my breast and made me start out of my sleep early in the morning with a confused sense of disaster; but at last I confessed to father. It was a relief, and yet a shock, to hear him burst out laughing. Then I went on to tell him about white people turning black when they died, and he said that was a damned lie, except about very bad ones. If I were good, I should always be as white as I was at that minute, maybe whiter.

When we left the boarding-house, we walked along our street—I between my father and mother, holding a hand of each—till we came to an apparently endless avenue. We went down this for several blocks, and then began to visit different addresses which they knew about, in search of what my father called a "perch." Three or four houses were full, except for rooms that were too expensive; but at last we found a place, farther east and noticeably shabbier than my old home. We were all to sleep in a back room at

the top, but I was happy and excited. It was a fascinating room to my eyes, because it had no window but a skylight, and there was a patchwork calico quilt on the bed, made to represent the American flag.

The baggage was still to come, and father had left word about it at the other house, which already seemed to me remote, as if it belonged to another world I had been snatched away from, and could never by any possibility visit again. Mother was anxious about the trunk, fearing "that woman" would be malicious enough to keep it, or send it back, when it arrived from the "depôt" whence it was to be forwarded. Meanwhile, however, she busied herself with unpacking the big travelling bag they had carried in their hands. She hummed little gay tunes in a light, pretty voice as she took out the contents, scattering them wildly about. She let me look on, and even help her to find nooks and crannies for the things. "What a handy little body it is!" she said; and that enchanted me.

It was wonderful how much the bag contained, and what an extraordinary collection had been stuffed into it. Among other things, there were a good many bottles, one of which had been broken, and my mother cut her hand with a piece of glass. But father washed the place, and "kissed it to make it well." Then I remembered how Ma had talked about them both to my dear friend from California, calling them the "Love Birds," and saying that they cared for nobody in the world but each other. I thought, if only I knew any prayer except "Now I lay me down to sleep" and "Our Father," I should like to pray to God that they might care for me. But even "Now I lay me" and "Our Father" I had not said for a long time. I

imagined that God was angry because I had wanted Him to forget me in the night, so it would be no use asking Him for blessings, supposing I had known how. I dimly imagined Him living in great state in the church to which my dear lady had taken me, and being always there, if people went to call on Him, though by some miracle He could not be seen.

My father—whom I soon learned to call "Boy," my mother's name for him—went out when things began to be a little settled, because there was no time to waste. He was going to "have a chin with B—," who was, I learned afterwards, a second or third-rate theatrical agent. Also he promised to see Mrs. Henry, and find out if the trunk had come. When he was gone, mother drew me to her and began to run her hands through my tangled crop of dark curls.

"My, what a mop you've got, Midget!" she said. "It would be scrumptious if it was blonde. Goodness, what it *would* be like, with your eyes! Mine wouldn't be *in* it, compared with them."

Then she thought a minute, and gave a little laugh. "Say, would you like to have hair the colour mine is?" she asked.

"Oh, yes!" I exclaimed. "I would love it!"

"Then you shall," she replied. "I guess I've got per-ox enough to begin with anyhow. But it'll need a lot of doing. Ginks, what fun having everybody say you take after me! Folks will think mine's natural, if yours is the same, and our eyes so dark."

She was as much amused as a child with a new doll. Seating me on a chair (made higher by means of a hard pillow from the bed), she tied a towel round my shoulders. Emptying the contents of a bottle, nearly full, into the wash bowl, she began to wet my hair with the colourless liquid, using a nail brush at the

roots. As she did this, she hummed different airs, and chewed gum, which at last she took out of her mouth and stuck on the wall, till she should want it again. When my whole head was thoroughly wet, she rinsed my long hair in what was left of the liquid in the bowl. I did not like the odour of the stuff, but it was very familiar. Most of the ladies in our house smelled of it in the mornings, at least once a week; and I was passionately interested in what would happen to me after the application.

At first, no difference could be seen. But when my hair dried, I squeaked with excitement at discovering that, from very dark reddish-brown, it had turned a bright auburn. This stage had been reached about the time that Boy returned, to announce that the trunk was at the door. He had run up four flights of stairs to bring the glad tidings as quickly as possible, and his face looked odd and drawn. There were white streaks under his eyes, and his lips were bluish.

"Dearie" (his name for mother) clapped her hands with joy about the trunk. Then her smile seemed to be caught away from her face, rather than to fade. "You mustn't gallop upstairs like that!" she exclaimed crossly. "Don't you remember what the doctor said. Oh, Boy, you *shall* be careful."

"It's all right," he said, and his colour began to creep back, though his breast heaved. Then he saw me, as I stole up to him, and shouted at sight of my changed hair. Like all the other men I had known, his unfailing ejaculation was, "My God!" "What have you done to her?" he wanted to know.

"It's going to be 'like mother, like child' when she's finished," Dearie explained. He laughed till tears ran down his cheeks, as I soon learned that he

did at most of her fancies, and though he said it was "a sort of pity," he did not appear to disapprove.

We slept three in one bed, in the little room under the roof, and it was very hot and close, because we could not keep the skylight more than a crack open at night, for fear of a sudden rainstorm while we were asleep.

Next morning Dearie sent Boy out to buy more "per-ox" (for it seemed that there was still a little private hoard of money), and another stage in my development was attained. My hair became a shade lighter. That same afternoon it was soaked again, and then I was in ecstasies of admiration, for all the crisp masses of waves and curls were of a gorgeous red gold. In contrast, my big eyes were like black holes in my small olive face. It cannot have been becoming really, for my complexion was too dark for red hair, but I thought the effect magnificent, and so did Dearie and Boy. Everyone in the house admired me, too (there were not many at the moment), and in the street, when Dearie took me out, people nearly always turned to look back after us. I grew to expect this, and was mortified for us both if it did not happen. Dearie grew quite proud of me, and made me several dresses out of old ones of her own. She dampened the roots of my hair very often, and when she brushed it, kissed me. I was perfectly happy.

This state of things went on for three or four weeks, until it began to seem that I had always lived with Boy and Dearie—except in dreams, when I was invariably back in the old house with Ma or Mrs. Henry.

They tried untiringly to get an engagement, and I knew from their low-voiced discussions in bed, when they supposed me asleep, that they were falling into

debt. Dearie had had a diamond ring, better than Boy's, but that, too, was gone now. Only to the pawnbroker's, however; and they did not much mind, because they felt sure of getting it back again. They were great optimists, and always hoped for the best, hating even to think of disagreeable happenings.

I can imagine your wondering how they could have kept those rings and left me so long, like an unclaimed parcel, at Henry's house; but knowing them, as I know them now in retrospect, I can well understand. Out of sight was to be practically out of mind with the Love Birds. They had each other, and contrived to be happy through all their worries "on the road." They could not make pictures in their minds, as I have done always, or else they shut their eyes upon disagreeable ones. It was only the sight of me, ragged and tangled and dirty, that startled the lovers, and opened their hearts, which were really warm and kind, though without much permanent love to spare for a little third person. Seeing me, wanting to rescue me, they were impulsively ready to part with Boy's diamond, which they could hardly have borne to sell for my sake, when at a distance. As for writing to Ma or Henry, and apologising or explaining things, of course they would not do that, being their happy-go-lucky selves. Perhaps they never received Ma's letters, or if they did reach them, still they would not answer, because all unpleasant duties were duties to put off. And duties put off were dissipated in air, like smoke.

V.

ONE summer day Boy came home from the agent's, wildly happy. He raced upstairs, and had to be scolded before he was allowed to tell his news. Then he told it panting, he was in such haste to get it out. He had obtained an engagement for them both, in vaudeville. Together they had written a tiny, quarter-hour play, and there was an offer to do it, at a downtown theatre, while it "attracted." This was a vague time limit, but they were satisfied, and had no fears. At best, they had not dreamed of a New York engagement in summer. They had thought that, even with luck, they would have to go on the road, playing in small towns.

The two lovers hugged each other, and danced round the room, which made the floor creak dangerously, though they were both so small, and Boy so thin. Then at last they remembered me, and I was duly kissed, and made to share the rejoicings.

After that followed a few rehearsals, not more than two or three, and Boy and Dearie were ready with their "turn." The first night they came back happy, and too much excited to try not to disturb my sleep. When I opened my eyes they flew at me, and we had a splendid pillow-fight. "We've made a hit, Miss Mouse! A hit—a hit!" said Boy. "Pity you don't know what a hit is, unless it's a slap. But you will some day."

I assured him that I did know, which was true, for I had heard too much talk of the theatre not to understand most of the jargon. And my definition of the word's meaning tickled my parents so exquisitely, that they let me sit up in bed and help eat the supper they had bought to celebrate their great success. They must have been very extravagant, for we had expensive soft-shell crabs, which they had bought at a restaurant ready cooked, in a paper box, sandwiches, and a basket of strawberries. There was also a bottle of English beer, or ale, which Boy pronounced the best in the world, and darn the cost!

It was true their little entertainment must have pleased the public, for the manager of the cheap theatre (I know now it was one of the cheapest) prolonged their engagement. They were delighted, and appeared to be enjoying life ecstatically, though a heat wave brooded over the city, like a hen that sits on her nest, covering her chickens with lazy wings. But they lay late in bed, sleeping through the hot mornings, and I, too, had to lie there, very still, for fear of rousing them. I used to be tortured with cramps in my legs, growing pains probably, and it was almost unbearable to keep myself rigidly stretched out between the two passive forms, hour after hour, staring up at the skylight (over which Boy had tacked green paper muslin), wondering if they would ever wake up.

Dearie looked pretty and young in bed, though her face was shiny with cold cream; and the black stuff was never completely washed off her eyes after coming home from the theatre. But Boy slept with his mouth open, and his dry white lips, and the dark hollows that were coming in his cheeks, made him seem much older than when he was awake and animated, smiling his kind, beaming smile.

Dearie did not bother about bleaching my hair any more, now that she was busy in the evenings, and tired in the mornings. Such energy as the heat left her by day she used in helping Boy to write another short vaudeville play, to be ready in case the first failed to attract. Even this mental effort bored her, and often she would doze in the midst. A dark streak grew out from the roots of my hair, appearing dead black in contrast with the red gold of the long curls, and I looked a dilapidated, uncared-for little object, even more forlorn than in Mrs. Henry's day. I saw that myself, in the mirror, where the growth of the dark streak interested me intensely, but not pleasantly. But Boy had brought me home a handsome doll, which opened and shut its eyes, so that I did not grieve deeply over my neglected hair, until one day a boy in the street yelled at me, shouting out, "Zebra!"

The landlady of this house kept no servant, except a very old black man who waited on the boarders at table, for she had two daughters, and the family of three managed the work between them. Her "girls," as she called them, were plain, and rather cross, with long, narrow faces. They seemed very old to me, and they were not on the stage, which was odd in their world. I don't think they approved of actors and actresses, and the boarders felt that they "put on airs." They and their mother were pleasanter to us, however, than to any of the others, perhaps because Boy and Dearie were so jolly and winning that it was impossible to feel hard towards such happy creatures, or perhaps because they were in a good engagement. Many of the rooms were unoccupied, and my father and mother were offered one at a less price than had been asked at first. They talked it over, but decided to stay where they were. This was not through motives of

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economy, which never bothered them when they were flush. Simply, it was too much trouble to move their things, and they had grown fond of the green gloom under the paper muslined skylight.

At night, when Boy and Dearie were away at the theatre, "doing their turn," the two old maid daughters of the house looked after me a little, unfastening my dress and sending me upstairs to bed when they thought it time. After four or five weeks, however, one of them went away on a visit. Her sister fell ill with some mysterious malady, and a servant was engaged. To my horror, it proved to be my old enemy Rose, who made goggling eyes when she saw me peering at her through the kitchen door. I confided my fears of her to Boy, though I found myself inarticulate when I tried to go into details of the tortures she had inflicted on me.

Somehow, when there was anything to confide, it was to Boy that I went, never to Dearie. I felt instinctively that I bored her; but even to him, with his beautiful eyes, I could not speak all that was in my heart. There seems to exist a mysterious wall between children and grown people, which cannot be broken down or passed, no matter how well the big and the little ones may love each other. Since that time I have often felt the existence of this wall. It is as strong and indefinable as the barrier between sexes, which keeps men and women from ever understanding each other completely.

Still, it was enough for Boy to know that I was afraid of Rose, and he proposed taking me to the theatre at night. The servant's room was next ours, and I was sure Rose would come in some time, when I was in bed, and frighten me to death.

Dearie did not mind doing as Boy suggested; and

that very evening I went with them. It was a long time since I had been in a theatre, but at once I felt at home there, and used to sit quietly in the dressing-room, cutting out paper dolls, as my dear friend had taught me to do. I was told that I must make no noise, and never run out into the corridor. If I disobeyed I would never be brought again, so I did my best to deserve Boy's pet name for me, "Mousie."

The partitions which divided their dressing-room from those adjoining did not go up to the ceiling. There was a long row of little cells on either side the narrow corridor, more like stalls in a stable than rooms, but the actors thought themselves lucky to have such good accommodation. Everything said in one dressing-room could be heard in the next, unless the speakers dropped their voices to whispers, which they seldom troubled to do. Before the performance began, and after it ended, when there was no need for silence, people shouted to each other across the partitions, as they made up for their parts, or wiped the make-up off to go home.

As Boy and Dearie were in the theatre not much more than an hour, their dressing-room did not belong exclusively to them. Their "turn" came about half-way through the entertainment, and a "lady acrobat" had the room before we arrived. There was a shelf for her make-up, which those who came later did not touch. An enormous, spotted grease towel always covered it; and the mingling tints of red, blue, brown, purple and black made me think of a story my Californian friend had told me. It was about Joseph and his coat of many colours. I imagined that to have resembled a glorified grease rag, of great size. Though the things on the shelf were hidden, there

were other possessions of the lady acrobat which I was free to examine and admire. She did her turn in spangled tights, covered as thickly with sequins as the skin of a snake with scales; and there were close-fitting jackets and trunks to match. She had several suits, with which to change when she liked; shimmery crimson spangles on green; gold on blue, and different shades of green on purple. As she was careless, and trusted Boy and Dearie, she left her finery hanging on the wall. I used to sit and stare up at its glitter, fascinated. The twinkling flash and sparkle hypnotised me into a pleasant sleepiness. I cultivated the sensation when I had tired of my paper dolls; and by the time Boy and Dearie came bouncing in upon me, ready to dress for home, I was half-way along the road to dreamland.

Their laughing voices outside in the corridor roused me up, and I always had the same sensation of gladness at hearing them, in remembering that I had someone to love and take care of me now. But one night the voices were different. I woke up with a start, not sure whether it were a dream or true, that Dearie was crying.

The next minute I knew that it was true. "Oh, help me get him in," she whimpered. "I don't know what's the matter. What shall I do? Will they send for a doctor?"

A man I did not know flung open the door so violently that it banged against the thin wooden partition. Another man, dressed like a clown, with wild black eyebrows half-way up his forehead, a whitened face and great red lips, was helping Dearie lead Boy into the room. And Boy seemed strangely dazed and weak. His eyes were open, but dim, as I had seen Ma's once, when she got up and walked in her

sleep. The man had his arm round Boy's waist, and Boy's head was resting on his shoulder.

Dearie rushed ahead of the others into the room, and without looking at me, began tearing her street clothes and Boy's from their hooks on the wall, and throwing them in a heap on the floor. She was dressed like a little girl, in a short white frock, with blue silk stockings and a blue sash. Her fluffy hair hung down under a frilled white sunbonnet. She had looked like a big child; but now her face was old and drawn, so that it was painful to see, framed in the babyish sunbonnet. My father wore the costume of an Eton boy, with a wide white collar, but the silk hat with which he made great play in his sketch was missing, and his hair was ruffled.

"Lay him down here," said Dearie in a choked voice; and the two men—the clown and the other—gently laid Boy on the pile of things she had tossed onto the floor. He gave a sigh as his head came to rest, and his muscles relaxed feebly. His shut eyes opened once more, searched for Dearie, found her, and smiled their beautiful, beaming smile, though his lips did not move. Then his eyelids drooped, slowly, until they were almost closed, but not quite. A line of white showed between his black lashes, and his face was paler than I had ever seen it, even when he ran up four flights of stairs too fast. It had a grey whiteness, like burnt-out ashes, and his lips hung apart.

Dearie fell on her knees beside him, and caught his hand up between both hers, to her breast. She bent over him, sobbing strangled sobs, and begging him to speak. But he did not answer, or open his eyes again.

For a minute the two men stood just inside the open door, and out in the corridor a crowd was collect-

ing, people in stage clothes, or half dressed for the street, men in wigbands, women whose faces were plastered with vaseline. Over the partitions I could hear voices asking each other questions and answering them, in solemn tones such as people take involuntarily when they read the Bible aloud. "What's up? Oh, taken sick, is he? Poor chap—poor girl! Why doesn't the doctor come?"

There was no swearing or joking over the partitions now. I don't know why, but I thought about my Sunday in the dim church, and remembered the throb and thrill of the organ.

An old woman came into our room, pushing past the men, and tried to coax me, in whispers, to come with her, while my mother prayed out loud and dropped tears on the white face she loved. But when I struggled, and opened my mouth as if to cry, the woman let my arm fall instantly. "Better come away, and give him more air," she half whispered to the men, and pushed them before her, neither resisting. Then she shut the door, carefully and noiselessly. We three were left alone.

I should think that prayers had never been heard over the partitions before; but now, the actors who listened awestruck in their dressing-rooms, and crowded outside our door in the corridor, must have heard Dearie praying out aloud. She prayed in a monotonous voice, not like her own, nor any real voice. It reminded me of a phonograph doll in a toy-shop, where Boy had taken me, and the thought that I could not help being reminded of that was dimly horrible. I did not dare to go near Dearie, nor even to cry so that she could hear me, but my cheeks were wet with tears that burned in my wide-open eyes.

"Oh God let Boy live Oh God don't let him die

and leave me alone Oh God spare him spare him," she was praying, without any stops between her words. And outside the room were no more sounds, except those far away on the stage; now and then a muffled roar of distant laughter from the audience, and a thunderous clapping of hands; but that was in another world. I did not know which was real, yet it seemed that both could not be true. It was not like being alive, to crouch there unseen, as if I were invisible, hearing that strange, crooning voice that went on and on, while Boy, who had loved it as he had loved life, lay still and gave no answer.

A long time seemed to pass, though it may not have been fifteen minutes, before the door opened softly, and the man who had helped the clown to bring my father in, returned with a doctor. I was sure he must be a doctor, because of a bag exactly like the bag I associated with Ma's death.

One or two other people silently followed them in, but I hardly noticed anyone except the man with the bag. He had a strong, tired face, with deep-set eyes and a prominent chin. I felt that whatever he said would be true, and whatever he did would be best.

Ever since Boy had been brought in, I had stood in a corner, crushed against the acrobat's spangled tights, which hung on the wall like a row of Blue-beard's wives. But I grew conscious that I was standing only when the doctor came. Suddenly I felt deadly weak, as if I should fall, and I clasped my hands tightly over my heart. They were ice cold, though the night was hot and the room close.

The doctor did not ask Dearie to move, but went down rather stiffly on one knee on the other side of Boy. His back was turned to me, and I could not see

all he did, except that he bent his head very low. He looked wide and squat, for he was a stout man, but somehow noble, and the whole room seemed changed by the dignity of his importance. Just as he got slowly up there came echoing in one of those great bursts of applause from the audience, and he started slightly, looking up as if he expected the ceiling to fall. But he asked no question.

"My poor little woman," he said to Dearie, laying his square hand on her head, "your husband——"

He got no further. Dearie uttered a shriek, and throwing up her arms, flung herself face down across my father's body.

So she lay, writhing and moaning, until the doctor lifted her in his arms, though she struggled like an animal in a trap. For an instant I caught sight of her face, and it was not her sweet doll's face at all, but that of a desperate woman, whose eyes had already gone mad.

Once there had been a dog running, swiftly and strangely, along our street, and when it came near where I played with a little boy, who jerked me aside, it lifted its head. There was foam in its mouth, and in its eyes the same blind, wild look of savage pain that was in Dearie's now.

"Give her the chloroform," said the doctor, holding her up in his arms.

The old woman who had come before, took me by the shoulder, and urged me towards my mother.

Dearie's head was shaking from side to side, her fair hair streaming over her face, and she took no notice of me until I was made to touch her. Then, with a sharp cry, she pushed me back with both hands, so that I fell against the woman.

"Take her away—I don't care for her—I don't want

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her," she wailed. "I hate her—I hate everyone. I'm going to kill myself."

She made as if to scratch out her eyes, but the doctor caught her hands, and gathering her up in his arms like a child, carried her from the room.

Everybody else went too, as if expecting something to happen which they must see. When the old woman came back, with the doctor and no one else, I was kneeling on the floor beside Boy.

It seemed right to kneel. I had been saying, "Now I lay me down to sleep," and I knew that Boy was dead.

VI.

THEY had to drag me away from Boy, for I could not bear to leave him lying there alone, without Dearie, whom he had loved so much. The old woman tried, but I was so strong and fierce she could not hold me, and a man threw his coat round me to keep me from moving my arms and legs. The coat smelt of tobacco and perspiration, and was rolled round me so closely that it pulled my head back by my long hair. I was furious, as at a shameful indignity; still, I had been so trained since babyhood never to make a noise in the theatre, that I did not scream.

"See here," said the woman, walking by the man's side, as he carried me in a bundle hastily along the corridor, "no one wants to hurt you. I'm going to take you home with me for to-night. You can't stay in the theatre. They'll be getting your father away. And your mother's been taken to a hospital. She's out of her head, and can't think about you. Be good, and I'll do the best I can for you, until somebody else comes along. I like little girls."

She was not very old really, but she looked old. because her dull eyes seemed to have died in her face; and it was very white, very flabby, as if the bones had all been cooked, and the flesh had jellied on them. I knew she had to do with the theatrical wardrobes, and I had heard the lady acrobat tell Dearie that she

was "Someone" in the theatre, because she had been the manager's mistress when she was young. She was known by an abbreviation of her surname, which sounded like "Touey." It was not that, but I will call her so, here.

Outside the stage door the man set me down, releasing me from his coat, and Touey caught my hand, fearing that I might try to run back. To do that did not occur to me, until her start put the idea into my head. But even then I made no such move. I knew that it would be useless, and that I should never see Boy again. I went with Touey, crying quietly, thinking of his beautiful kind eyes and his last smile that had been for Dearie.

The woman lived only a short distance from the theatre, not in a boarding-house, but in a little flat at the top of a building which smelled very old, as we went up the narrow stairs. She had two rooms, a bedroom and a tiny dark kitchen, like a cupboard. The bedroom was small, too, and looked smaller than it was, being stuffed full of parlour furniture, much too large for it, which must have come from a bigger house. Pictures of actors and actresses and photographs without frames were stuck all over the walls, as high as a hand could reach to nail them up. There was one window, but it came within two feet of another house, so that it was always twilight, except at night when the gas flared.

Touey struck a match when she had unlocked the door, and lit the gas when she brought me in. We entered opposite a mantelpiece, and the first thing that caught my eye was the life-size portrait—head and bust—of a beautiful woman, done in crayon, as if it had been enlarged from a photograph.

The woman in the picture seemed young, and I

thought of Touey as old; yet there was a likeness between the two.

The portrait was taken in profile, looking over the shoulder, and the straight line between the forehead and nose, the curve of the lips, and the way of dressing the hair in a bunch of curls, made it look like one of the "plaster ladies," as I called them, copies of Greek statues, used as property decorations at the theatre. Then I realised that the faded Touey was like that, too, only she was a dissipated, broken statue.

The "somebody else" she had spoken of, who would look after me by-and-by, did not come to claim me. No one ever came to Touey's rooms, except a woman who did a little cleaning once a week; and Touey never would go out, all day long, till evening, just before the "show." Then the forlorn statue seemed to come alive, and waking up did some necessary shopping. I was taken with her, as she could not leave me alone in her rooms; and so, going back to the theatre again, I heard much talk. Touey made no friends, and did not speak of herself or her own affairs; but she listened to gossip, with a dead look in her eyes as if her soul had been sent off on a distant errand. I heard that I had no relations, except Dearie, and she was still in hospital. People whispered to each other that she had tried to kill herself, but others were of opinion that she was too soft for anything of that kind. She might mope, but she would never have the courage to hurt her pretty body. She could not act much, I heard it said, but Boy had been a fine actor, and might have climbed to the "top of the tree" if he had had any ambition.

Living with Touey, never having any real exercise or sunlight, eating anything she chose to give me out of tins, since she hated cooking, induced me to

a curious state for a child. I was passionately homesick for Boy and Dearie at first, but by-and-by, as my vitality ebbed, I felt as if I had never had a father and mother, except in dreams. My despair died down into apathy. It did not matter to me whether I stayed indoors or went out. I never wished to play, and though Touey was kind in her weary fashion, buying me striped sticks of candy and chocolate mice when she shopped, I shrank from her ungratefully.

Something strange was the matter with Touey. I did not know what, and had little curiosity about it, though I thought of it often, and wondered if, whatever it was, I should get it too. I began to think that I was growing like her, and stared into my eyes in the greenish mirror over the bureau to see if they were dying in my face, or if my flesh looked white and baggy.

All over her arms and legs were queer marks, which came from sticking the needle-point of a little syringe into her skin. She did this every night after coming home from the theatre, and two or three times in the day besides. After she had done it she seemed happier, and her eyes were not so dead.

When I first came she tried to hide the little syringe and what she did with it, from me; but I was always with her in the bed-sitting-room, and soon she grew not to care. I dare say she thought me too small to notice, not remembering that the younger the child, past babyhood, the more interested is it in everything new and strange.

I shared the bed with her, and slept badly, for she mumbled constantly in her sleep, and often groaned or even screamed. She would say over and over again in the dark, "Oh, my God, my God, what have I come to? What am I good for?" and the bed

would shake and creak with her sobs. But if I spoke she never answered, and I should have thought she was talking in her sleep, if on these nights of her agony she had not got stealthily up, and lighting a match, not the gas, pricked herself somewhere with the needle. Then she would lie down again and be quiet.

She suffered from such lassitude in the morning that, when she rose to dress for the day, which was seldom before eleven or twelve o'clock, she would not even trouble to make coffee, but heating some milk for herself and me, into her portion she would pour nearly half a small bottle of black coffee essence. She advised me to taste this when I complained of being tired, saying it would brace me up, as it did her; but one sip was enough. The taste was very bitter, and sugar made it worse rather than improved it.

Lying in bed late was not the same penance to me that it had been when with Dearie and Boy, for now I was so listless that I cared for nothing, and it did not matter whether I were up or in bed all day. If it had not been for the Irishwoman who came in every week, we should both have been very dirty, but she was a brisk, wholesome person supporting a large family of children, of whom she continually talked, and it was on her conscience to rouse Touey to "a sense of responsibility." She pulled the sheets and pillow-cases off the bed to wash them, and my only pleasure was to go with her up a little stairway to the roof, where they, and other people's things, were dried. She took away our underclothes, too, and gave us clean ones, or we should have changed seldom. Occasionally she mended for me, too, my things which had come from the house where I used to live with Dearie and Boy.

It was not in me, just at this time, to be very fond of anyone, but I had a dim sense of gratitude and affection for Mrs. Ryan, and it was faintly cheering to see her arrive, even though she scolded me for a "lazy little gyurl." After a few weeks with Touey, Mrs. Ryan brought in, on one of her mornings, a basket. "This is for you, mavourneen," she said.

In the basket was a fat white ball of a kitten, with mild blue eyes and a tiny pink nose. Life was ebbing low in me, but my blood stirred in my veins at the sight of the little live thing; and I believe that the interest I took in it saved me from illness. The kitten slept in its basket by the side of the bed at night, but when I woke up in the grey twilight, which was all the morning light we had, I would take my pet up and play with it, under the sheet and blanket. Before it was given me by Mrs. Ryan I watched the coming of day by the glimmer of a bald spot in the midst of Touey's long, grizzled hair, for she lay with her back to me. I had hated the look of that yellowish-white circle, but I never thought of it again after the kitten became my bed-fellow.

When I had been with Touey for five or six weeks, one afternoon while we were eating a meal, there came a loud knocking at the door, a thing that had never happened in my experience. No one called except Mrs. Ryan, who had a key, as that saved Touey getting up if she were in bed.

I looked at Touey to see what she would do, but to my surprise she did not seem to be astonished. Some kind of emotion she did feel, for the blood slowly and faintly coloured her waxy skin. Her dead eyes lighted, as when a lamp is held at the door of a dark room, and she got up, quickly for her, from the table.

The key was always turned in the lock, so that nobody could walk in from outside. Touey twisted it squeakily back, and let a beautiful, charmingly dressed woman come in. I knew at once that this was the original of the big portrait which reigned over the room.

"It's like the black hole of Calcutta here!" was the first thing she said.

I sat still at the table, staring at the beautiful lady with as much interest as I was able to feel in anything.

"So this is the child!" she went on, when Touey said nothing in defence of the room.

"Yes, poor little thing," returned Touey.

"Not so poor as she would have been, if you hadn't taken her in," said the other. She had a rich, throaty voice, but did not modulate her words as musically as Touey did, unless she stopped to think about it. Touey had the slow, grand way of speaking, of one who had once been a good actress.

"I don't know," said Touey. "Perhaps I have done her harm. But I meant for the best. There seemed nothing else for the little creature. You know I always liked children, though I had no way with them."

They talked before me as if I were a piece of furniture.

The beautiful woman sat down on the sofa, near the table, and what light there was fell on her face. She noticed that my eyes were fixed upon her.

"Are you thinking that I'm like your friend Touey?" she inquired, speaking in the tone she would have used to a grown-up person.

"Yes," I said. "Only you are pretty."

"She was much prettier once. We're sisters. Would you think she's only twelve years older than I am?"

"I don't know," I answered shyly. I had all a child's vagueness about difference in age among grown people.

"What's the good of talking to her like that, Maggie?" Touey asked, her eyes dead and her face pallid again.

"Only for something to say," Maggie answered. "What is the matter with your hair, little girl? It's dark on your head, and the rest's red. Is it a disease, or did you try to bleach it?"

"My mamma bleached it," I said, feeling hot and uncomfortable, for beautiful as the lady was, she had hard eyes.

"Oh!" she turned to Touey, ignoring me again, "have you heard the latest news of her mother?"

"I know Belle Amory went to call on her at the hospital. They were talking about it last night, over there." She nodded in the direction of the theatre.

"Nothing else?"

"No. They hadn't seen Belle since."

"She came to my house this morning on business. That's what made me think of looking in on you to-day. Belle said the poor girl was well enough to be moved, but in a queer state, almost like a half-witted person; doesn't even take any interest in her looks. Wouldn't hear anything about—*this*." They both stared at me, Maggie with interest, Touey wearily.

"I thought she'd have been crazy to get the little one back, by this time, or I wouldn't have taken it," said Touey. "Not that the little thing is any trouble. I like having her, for my own sake. But this is no place for a child."

"She looks sick," Maggie said. "No wonder. Nobody but you could stand it here."

"It agrees with me," Touey replied hastily, as if she were afraid of being advised to change. "As well as anything does," she added.

"If the kiddie dies in this den of yours, you may get the police in," said her sister. "I'll take her for awhile, if you like. I wouldn't mind. It might amuse me. I'm so sick and tired of everything, I'm almost scared."

"What—scared that you'll get like me?" Touey said, with a smile that showed black teeth—one of the reasons for her looking old.

"No, I'd never come to that, whatever happened," the other answered quickly. "But there are—several things. I hate my life. The more money I make, the more I hate it, because my money doesn't give me the things I want."

"I know how that is," Touey muttered. "I could have plenty of money, if I asked it. But I don't care. I have enough to get me everything I need."

Maggie threw her a strange look, with raised eyebrows. Then she turned to me. "Would you like to come and live at my home?" she inquired. "I've got a whole house for you to run about in, with plenty of light and air, and a backyard where you can play. I'll make a pretty little girl of you, maybe."

"Can I take my white kitten?" I asked.

"Yes, for all I care."

I looked at Touey, realising faintly that she had been kind, as kind as she knew how to be. "Do you want me to go?"

Her strange face had an extraordinary sweetness of expression as she smiled at me, almost gratefully, before answering. "Yes, dear," she said, slowly. "I think it would be the best thing for you to go, and my sister Maggie will take care of you, better than I can."

"You can call me 'Auntie' if you like," the beautiful woman suggested. "I guess I'll take her this afternoon, otherwise I may change my mind."

"I'll get her things ready," said Touey, pulling herself up heavily. But Maggie stopped her. "You needn't! If the rest are like the samples, I wouldn't be seen dead with her wearing any of them. And heavens, that hair! I shall have to take a hack to get her home. There's one thing, I can afford it."

A few minutes later, Maggie led me downstairs, with my head wrapped in a scarf of hers, and the kitten in its basket on my arm. I had not kissed Touey goodbye, yet I felt sad and even reluctant to leave her at the last. I had but little curiosity as to my next home. I suppose I had become too anæmic to care.

I never saw Touey again, but a few weeks later Mrs. Ryan found her dead in bed. Maggie, whom I knew by that time as Madame St. Clare, the beauty specialist, told me her sister had died suddenly, and I think she arranged a funeral. But it was years before I ever heard any more about Touey. Even then, I never learned exactly how she had fallen into that state of degradation, while her younger sister thrived. Nor could anyone tell me why her real name had been turned into Touey. All that people could say was that once she had been a fine actress, and had had good opportunities. I have always believed that she was trying to kill some gnawing memory. And somehow I think of her often lately.

VII.

I SUPPOSE a child cannot be sad for long. I was not, though I had moments of dumb yearning for Boy's kind eyes, and the feel of his arm round my neck, while I sat on his lap, listening to fairy stories. If I walked behind a young, blonde woman in the street, and saw the sun touch her hair, my heart flew back to Dearie, and I was sick with longing for her petting, for the sound of the "Love Birds'" laughter together, in the hot room of the skylight. But the pain would pass, and the luxury of my new life would take hold of me again.

Madame's house was like what I imagined Paradise to be, judging by the rapturous descriptions of a future state I had heard from Rose and Maud. Heaven, as pictured by negroes, blazes with colour, and Rose, in comparatively benevolent moments, loved to paint for my envy the house of many mansions in which she expected to be an honoured guest. It was to have the loveliest silk walls and curtains imaginable, and all the furniture was to be of gold. Almost I believed that I was entering celestial regions, when Madame took me by the hand and led me through her newly varnished front door.

Outside, nothing was new except the door and the paint; but everything was new within, from basement to attic.

It was darkening to twilight when we arrived, in a cab; for after leaving Touey's, Madame had shopped for me till the closing hour of the big department store where she bought everything. She fitted me out with a ready-made wardrobe, each garment good and expensive, after its kind; for not only was she generous, but her vanity made her dislike asking a shop assistant for anything that was cheap. "I work hard for my success and my money," she was fond of remarking, "and I have a right to enjoy spending. It's one of the few pleasures I have."

I think it was a real delight for her to see my awed admiration of her house and its decorations. Her great grievance was that, although she was handsomer than most of the rich clients who paid her to give them beauty, and though she had begun to make money enough to compete with them in clothes and jewels, no women of society would have anything to do with her outside business hours. Actresses and other Bohemian women would gladly have been her friends, but those she did not want. She wanted only the best, or what she thought the best. Less than this she would not have, preferring glorious isolation. Therefore she made few friends, and was always alone when her business was done, except for one man, a German Jew, who was clever, and knew about pictures and music.

I learned these peculiarities, and others, as time went on, for Madame opened her heart to me, as freely as if I had been a grown woman; all her troubles, all her ambitions and disappointments she recounted; everything except her early history, and the story of her elder sister, Touey. Without doubt, it was for the sake of companionship, and the relief of having someone always ready to be talked to, that she kept me on.

I am sure she had known few happier hours since

success enabled her to buy and to decorate this house, than that in which she led me from room to room, mentioning what she had paid for the furniture of each. Money was an unknown quantity to me, but I drew in a vague impression of splendour and luxury. I was flattered, too, in a childish way, that she should think me capable of understanding, just as I was flattered in months and years to come, with her frank confidence concerning men who admired and made strange proposals to her; men "society women" angled after in vain.

Madame's house was on the fringe of a good neighbourhood, in a quiet cross street, midway between uptown and downtown; for that, she explained, was necessary for business. Thus she caught both publics.

Her own taste, she said, was too Oriental to be trusted. She had given a decorator "carte blanche" to make her place pretty, and attractive to women. Evidently he was a clever decorator. He had known what beauty of surroundings to give ladies in search of beauty for their faces. Madame's great speciality was to have all her preparations smothered in roses. Bags were of rose brocaded silk, tied with rose-coloured ribbons. Paper boxes for powder were patterned with roses. Bottles had golden roses pasted on their sides. Creams and elixirs were perfumed with roses. The whole house smelled of roses; and the two first floors, with the showroom, reception and consulting rooms, and all the little cubicles for different processes of beautifying, had rose pink carpets, rose silk curtains, and wall-papers trailing roses.

In the basement the work-girls dined. There were more than a dozen of these young women. Those who attended the clients were daintily uniformed in pink and white, and were chosen for the beauty of their

complexion and hair. They were called the "young ladies." The others were the "girls." There were two dining-rooms downstairs: one for the "young ladies," one for the "girls," whose work was the filling of bottles and boxes and bags, the pasting-on of labels, the tying of ribbons, and arranging of shelves in the showroom. Up at the top of the house these young women did their work, in a big front room; and at the back was another room, full of exquisite smells, where Madame herself superintended the mixing of her patent preparations, the secret things which were making her name and fortune as a beauty doctor. Never would she trust any of these secret recipes even to her head assistant. She was afraid that they might be stolen, and that the thief would start a rival establishment.

In her pamphlets and other advertisements she assured the public that she had obtained her "marvellous specialities" in the Far East, where, in travelling, she had "visited the harems of Eastern sovereigns and learned the secrets of women famous for their alluring charms of face and figure." But her Jewish friend, Mr. Heinrich, and I knew that she had never been farther east than Nantucket, where once she had spent part of a summer.

On the top floor there was also a small kitchen, which Madame had installed there for her own benefit, with her own cook in attendance—a more accomplished and highly-paid cook than the sharp-tongued old woman who worked for the girls, in the basement. Madame's private suite was on the third floor, above the pink-curtained cubicles, and there I lived with her, not being encouraged to wander up or down during business hours, between nine and five, or from nine till two on Saturdays. She did not like me to talk much with the "girls," or even with the "young ladies," fearing

perhaps that they might "pump" me about her affairs, and knowing also that their conversation was not always suitable for a child's ears. As it happened, I had already heard most things supposed to be unsuitable for a child; but as they were not forbidden, and nobody had ever cared whether I knew them or not, I had paid slight attention. Things which Madame would have considered "disgusting" went in at one ear with me, and out at the other, when they were mentioned in my hearing.

Madame's suite consisted of a bedroom with a bath, a dining-room and a small parlour which she called her boudoir, without any clear idea of the word's meaning or pronunciation. Touey would have pronounced it perfectly, after hearing it correctly spoken once, but Madame had no more music than temperament, therefore it was difficult for her to remember the sound of words. Her rooms imitated Marie Antoinette's in the Petit Trianon, how crudely I have only found out in the last few years, and she was proud of them. It was a real grief to her that none of the "swell women" she treated ever came to visit her there, socially. She would sit in front of her expensive mirror, and gaze at herself, with tears in her big eyes. "I am beautiful!" she would say. "Look at me. They get their complexions and busts out of my bottles. I get mine from God. Yet what good are my beauties to me? What good are these rooms, or my pretty gowns, or anything I've got in the world?"

But her things were of great good to me, and I was not half grateful enough for them. Like the little animal I was (and almost all children of that age are animals) I soon began to take everything I had from Madame for granted. The delicious bath in a large porcelain tub, such as I had never dreamed of; the

soft bed, all to myself, in a white and gold crib, with pink blankets, which Madame bought for me the day I came to her; the pretty clothes, the good food, the sunshine in the little backyard, and toys to play with there. In an incredibly short time I let the old life of sordidness drop out of my thoughts, as if it had been lived by someone else who had told me about it. I accepted everything I had as my right, though I had no claim on Madame. It was only by the accident of her fancying me that any of these luxuries had come to be mine. Worse than all, I never loved her. I admired her beauty, and when it occurred to me, I was spasmodically grateful; but even as a very small child I was curiously critical of her, I don't know why, unless it may have been because she did not love me—because I felt instinctively that she made a convenience of me. I was chaperon, companion, confidant; I could be roused at any time of night to be told things which Madame wished to talk about, things of no significance to a child.

My affairs never interested her, and if she were anxious that I should be well, it was because she had a morbid fear of any contagious disease in the house, which might injure her business or which she might take from me. She was frank about all this. I could not help knowing how she felt; and though she pretended a great deal to her clients, she never pretended to me. The fact that she need not pretend was one reason why I was of importance. She liked to be called "Auntie," as "Madame" was her professional name; but she did not seem like an aunt, and the word always came from my lips with an effort.

To her clients she pretended to be older than she was, though it must have pained her vanity. She was about thirty-six when I went to her, I think; but she

would tell ladies of over forty, in strict confidence, that she was of their age, or more, and that she kept her hair thick, her bust firm, and her complexion without a line or spot, all by the use of her own "discoveries."

She would describe to me her scenes with these women, and I would listen, but vaguely taking in the sense of her stories, yet feeling the bitterness with which she related them. The night I left Touey, Madame cut off my hair at the dark line which had grown out, and the long, red-gold curls shorn away were used in the special department for making up what Madame called "sanitary transformations." The hair she sold was guaranteed to be healthy, and Madame charged enormous prices for it, as she did for all her preparations and contrivances. Her theory was, that if women were made to pay high for things, they valued them accordingly, and perhaps she was right. In any case, she was sought after by the most fashionable women in New York, as well as the actresses and *demi monde*. She made medicated masks, and straps to smooth out wrinkles, and some sort of depilatory which was supposed to be permanent in its effects. There was a glass machine with a rubber bulb to be squeezed, which caused the bust to grow; but one of the work-girls used this invention on herself, and produced, or thought she produced, some strange disease, which frightened the other employees, and made them whisper ominously together. Besides these, there were fifty other patents: things to take down flesh and keep the chin firm; to change the shape of the nose and to fill out hollows in sunken cheeks, or remove the shadows from tired eyes. But the most inviolate secret of all was the use of raw veal to brighten faded complexions and prevent wrinkles. Neither the work-girls, nor the "young ladies" were in the secret, for

only Madame herself gave the treatment, in the biggest of the cubicles, with the door locked. She charged ten dollars for the cure, therefore it was vital to keep people from finding out, because veal was cheap, and could be applied at home. Even those undergoing the treatment did not know what was put on their faces, except that it was something cold and damp, with strips of linen laid on top, highly perfumed with attar of rose. Without the perfume, they might have smelt the raw meat; and in a bright light they might have seen it; but the effect of the medicine was supposed to be enhanced by darkness, therefore the pink cubicle was unlit, except by a transom over the door. The patient was made to lie on a sofa for two hours, with strips of lean veal on her forehead, nose and cheeks; then the juicy dampness would be wiped away with a soft rag; some soothing lotion of Madame's was sprayed on the face to destroy the tell-tale odour; and last of all, a velvety powder was dusted on. The veal was intended to supply some valuable quality, lacking in the skin after the first youth of a woman; and Madame must have had faith in it, for it was the only one of her prescriptions which she used for herself. She employed it with great care, in her own room, once every week, in the evening before bedtime; and when she had known me long enough to be sure that I could be trusted never to repeat anything, she told me the whole history of the treatment.

This trustworthiness was hardly a virtue, for I never felt the temptation, even as a very small child, to be loose-tongued about myself or others. Occasionally, when I was a little girl, I made up dramatic stories about my own doings, because I had wanted the things I described to happen; and the next best thing was to tell them to someone as if they had happened.

Otherwise I was reticent. I cultivated the quality of reserve, when I heard it praised by Madame to Mr. Heinrich, who was faintly interested in me, as Madame's "experiment."

Things I have thought of most, or have felt most deeply, have always been the things hardest for me to speak of; and I do not believe I could have told you intelligibly what I am trying to tell you now, except in this way, on paper.

Often I longed in those days to question Madame about Dearie, but the words would not come. Just when I had brought myself to the point I would tremble, and all my muscles would be tense. I would have a sensation as if a hand were pressed over my lips, and I was forced to be silent, even if Madame were waiting for me to speak.

Of her own accord, after I had been in the house for about two months, she told me one day that my mother was better, and had left the hospital.

"Will she come and take me?" I asked, half hopefully, half fearfully.

"O, dear no!" said Madame. "It seems she can't bear to hear your name. It makes her too sad. She's gone out west again, to visit an old friend of hers who thinks she can get her into a stock company. I expect she'll marry before long. She's just the kind that does—and I say it's the best compliment a man or woman can pay to the first; it shows the sample was a success."

Madame's theorising was unintelligible as Greek to me; but I pondered over her words so earnestly and often, that they were imprinted on my mind. Always I was waiting, after that, for other news to follow, though the same dumbness bound me in silence. Then three or four months passed, and no echo came

back from that vague "west," which had swallowed up my pretty mother. I was forgetting to wonder, when Madame, reading a theatrical paper she took in, exclaimed, "There! I told you so! Your mother's married. Another actor, of course—some western man, I suppose. I never saw his name. They won't see New York again."

By-and-by some insignificant client of Madame's, who wished to rejuvenate her complexion after a season of "one night stands," brought further tidings of Dearie. The two had met in a town where Dearie was playing with a company of "barnstormers," managed by her new husband. Madame's client, who knew the old name of "Love Birds," asked how she had made up her mind to marry again so soon—she who nearly went insane from grief at the death of her Boy.

"I couldn't help it. I had to have someone to love me, so it was better to be married," was the answer, which I have never forgotten.

It was characteristic of Dearie. She could not live without petting. Yes, it was better that she should marry, for she had to love and be loved. A child was to her an accident. A man was her world. The new husband drank, and struck her sometimes in the intervals of loving, I learned a few years later. Then, there would be reconciliations, and so it went on, till he died, and the next week she married the leading man of the barn-storming company.

To me, she never wrote or sent any message, though she must have heard, or could have heard if she had cared, that Madame had informally adopted me. I felt no bitterness towards her, for I knew too little about other mothers, or what the love of a woman born to be a mother might be like—such a woman as my dear lady of California. And I feel no bitterness in recalling

her. I understand that to Dearie the thought of me meant sad memories, and sadness was as death to her heart of a butterfly. Now she is dead. She died of pneumonia, far off in the west, when I was fourteen. But that was after Madame, too, had gone out of my life.

Though I knew that Madame did not like me to be with the girls in the workroom, I was tempted there sometimes, when she was busy in her consulting-room, or giving the veal treatment, advertised as the "Sultana Rose Cure," or in superintending the so-called "mustard and electric," an application to the spine, which was supposed to renew the youth of a patient in a mysterious and marvellous way.

When I first came to the house I was a novelty. The girls wanted to see me, to find out who I was, and why Madame had taken me to live with her. I picked up the idea, from their sly hints to each other, that they believed me to be her own child; but the little that they were able to tear from me about Dearie and Boy must have shattered this theory and disappointed their desire to dig up some scandalous secret.

Later, they tried to catechise me about Madame's life after business hours. Did she dine out with gentlemen? Did many "gentlemen friends" come to see her? Did she get presents of jewellery? Did she go to the theatre and stay out to supper nearly every night?

Instinctively, I was loyal to Madame. The little there was to tell concerning Mr. Heinrich, I did not tell. I did not wish to tell, though the girls bribed me with candy and compliments. They, escaped from rosy bags and boxes, saw Madame sometimes driving in the park, at the fashionable hour, in the handsome Victoria she had bought; and, though she was never

disagreeable in her manner to them, they seemed maliciously pleased that, in spite of her fine "turn-out" and beautiful clothes from Paris, none of the grand ladies whose names were in the newspapers ever bowed to her in passing.

Even when they must have realised that there was very little to "get out of me," the girls used to try and lure me into the room, perhaps because my imitations of animals, and of the two servants, and the "faces" I could make, amused them; or perhaps because there was a spice in tempting me to disobey the mistress of the house.

As for me, having nothing to do, it was an excitement to sit on the floor of the workroom, when Madame was safely out of the way, listening to the girls' gossip, while I toyed with cut ends of ribbon and scraps of the famous rose-patterned brocade or paper.

Voices would drop to a whisper when a group discussed a topic of peculiar interest, and then, because I guessed it was something I ought not to hear, I hung on their words with open ears. If their favourite conversation was as "disgusting" as Madame pronounced it, the worst things they said must have passed me by, for I got no lasting harm from workroom chatter. All that lingered in my mind, and, maybe, influenced my life, was the girls' tireless talk about love and lovers, their own and other people's.

At the old boarding-house, my first home, the young actresses who used to meet in each other's rooms hardly ever dwelt with interest on the subject of men, except as newspaper critics, theatrical managers, or actors, good or bad. Their never-failing topic was "shop": the "hits" they had made, or hoped to make, the "notices" they got for their acting, the way in which "stars" behaved to them on the stage. Love

was apparently an affair of secondary importance to those girls of the theatre, but to these who earned their living differently, it was everything. They all had "gentlemen friends" who took them out in the evening, and their tongues never flagged in the repetition of the word "he—he—he."

I voted this tiresome at first; but by and bye I felt in it the far-off call of romance. I began to ask myself what there was in "being in love," which interested all these grown-up girls so intensely. "Boys," as they called their own special young men, in telling of their conquests, were of incredible importance. The love they talked of was not the same as the love of fathers and mothers, or of one girl for another. It belonged entirely to "boys," creatures with short hair who wore trousers, and could have hair growing on their faces if they liked, when they were big. I wondered so much and so often, that at last the mysterious subject of love and boys, which seemed to be inseparable, was at the back of all my thoughts, like the fragment of a tune one tries to catch.

I found it interesting to know that I was a girl, and that there were boys in the world; that just because they were different, boys would care about me in some odd way, because I was a girl, and that I would care about them.

I had never wasted much thought upon boys, when I lived at Ma's, or with my father and mother, though I often played with them in the street. The only difference I knew was that boys were stronger and rougher, and made fun of girls for liking dolls. Now I saw boys with new eyes, but instinctively I scorned the little ones of my own age. They did not exist for me. They hardly seemed to be boys. But the house next door was taken at this time by a widow

with two sons. The elder was twelve, which for me, at six, was to be almost grown up; and the younger was ten. They both had bullet heads, with very short brown hair, bright, bold eyes, and blunt noses. They were a good deal alike, but it was with Lenny, the elder, that I decided to fall in love, perhaps because he was already in long trousers, like a man, and his brother Freddy in short knickerbockers.

The first time I saw these boys was before they had come to live in the house next door, and while the furniture was arriving in big vans. They stood in the street, looking on, whistling, with their hands in their pockets.

I did not know their names then, but afterwards I heard them shouting to each other in the back-yard, which was exactly like Madame's and most of the other houses on our side of the street. There were high wooden fences between the yards, and the day of the moving in, being Saturday, the boys were at home. They climbed up on their side of the fence to look over, staring gravely at me. It was early summer, and I was playing menagerie with some earth-worms I had dug up out of the damp ground. I called the worms snakes, and kept them in penny wooden tubs. (Afterwards one died and dried into a crisp little corpse, because I had covered the tub, and forgotten it for days. I repented my neglect with sick horror, and felt that I was a murderess, who would perhaps go to hell—the hell of red fire which Rose described.)

"You're a funny girl, playing with worms," Lenny called down from his high perch.

"They're not worms," I said. "They're snakes. This is a menagerie."

"Pooh!" said Lenny. "Did you ever see a menagerie?"

"Yes," I was proud to answer truthfully. "My father took me to one."

"Where's your father now?" asked Freddy.

"He's dead," I returned, stiffening.

"Is it your mother you live with?" he went on. "Our girl says she's a quack."

"I don't know what a quack is, but she isn't it," I assured him. "I stay with her. I'm not any relation, but she's my aunt."

"She can't be your aunt, stupid, if you're no relation," Freddy sneered, while Lenny kept silence, looking with more interest at the yard than at me. It was a mean strip of grass, but Madame had planted roses to climb up the fence, and there were no clotheslines, as in the next door yard. She hated unsightly things, and went to the expense of sending her linen to a laundry.

"She is my aunt!" I persisted, though I knew she was not. But I felt that Madame and I were being attacked.

"I don't believe it. And anyhow, you're Protestants. I wouldn't be a Protestant!" Freddy taunted me.

Suddenly I hated him, and longed to do him a mischief. But Lenny took his brother by the collar, and, catching him unawares, made him lose hold on the fence and tumble over on the other side. "Serve you right!" grumbled my champion. "What's the good of teasing a kid?"

My heart went out to Lenny. I decided to fall in love with him. "At last I know what love is," I said to myself. And I remember the thrill I felt as I trembled with joy. I thought Lenny's brown, short-nosed face the handsomest I had ever seen. The glorious difference between a boy and a girl was

revealed to me. A boy was a hero, and you worshipped him. I longed to have my idol love me as I loved him, but I did not know how to make him do it. I adored him for protecting me, and for knocking Freddy off the fence, but I was ashamed that he had called me a kid. I envied girls who were bigger than I, envied them so desperately that I hated them, the whole world over. Not the grown-up ones, for they were already old, and did not count, but girls of Lenny's age, whom he would respect.

"I'm not a Protestant!" I exclaimed, not knowing what the word meant, except that it was intended as an insult.

"Aren't you? We don't care two cents whether you are or not," he said, indifferently, and slid grandly off the fence, on his own side, disappearing from my sight.

I never received any further civilities from Lenny, except that, when Freddy would begin to yell "Protestant!" from the depths of his own yard, his voice would break off abruptly, as if a hand were pressed over his mouth. Still, Lenny remained my hero, and I built up an exquisite romance, like a wall shutting us both away from the outer world. I told myself stories, better than those with which the work-girls regaled each other. I whispered them to my pillow at night, after I had gone to bed, before Madame came up, and especially when she was out with her Jewish friend, at the theatre. The thrilling tales of our love would often be continued, sometimes improved upon, in my dreams, until almost I believed that they were true.

On the days when the romance seemed most real, I would climb up on my side of the fence, to gaze wistfully at Lenny's yard; and if the boys were there

I was invariably snubbed. Lenny pretended not to notice so small and unimportant a thing, and Freddy derided me ruthlessly. Once, however, when the younger boy had been insulting, to make up for it Lenny held out a new stick of chewing gum. "Catch!" he said shortly. I did catch, and toppled over backwards in the act, but without hurting myself seriously. For days I lived on this memory. As I splashed in my bath (one of the great pleasures of my new life), I would sing to myself, "I'm in love with Lenny! I'm in love with Lenny!" As I walked, my feet kept time to that refrain. It was a beautiful and distinguished thing to be in love with a boy.

For weeks I was satisfied with this secret joy, but at last I began to need more fuel for the fire. I wanted Lenny to be in love with me; wanted it so much that it had to be, or seem to be. When I went to the workroom where the girls talked of love, I talked of mine; and their surprised interest tempted me out of my old reserve. In a kind of madness I invented anecdotes about the next-door boy and myself. I said that he loved me, and spent all his money in buying me candy, quantities of candy, wonderful, unheard-of candy, made to look like fruit and flowers and jewels. Nearly every day he brought me some, I went on; but when the girls asked to see a sample, I had to say that Lenny had ordered me to eat every crumb myself, and never, never to show his presents to anyone, for if I did he would not speak to me again. That very night, as if in punishment, something disagreed with me, and I was so ill that the doctor was sent for. I was kept in bed next morning, and one of the girls retailed the story of the candy to her employer, suggesting that it had upset me.

Madame, astonished, came to me with questions. Cold with terror and remorse, I refused to answer. She then, before my eyes, scribbled off a note to the lady next door, requesting that the boys should give no more candy to her little niece. The letter was sent across by hand. Lenny and Freddy, confronted with it, swore that they had never given me anything, or had anything whatever to do with me. On hearing this from their mother, Madame forced me to confess that I had fibbed; and my sense of disgrace and shame was such that, if I had known how, I would have killed myself. Never again, though I lived with Madame till I was thirteen, was I quite happy or light-hearted in my play. The back yard was spoiled as a playground by my own wrong-doing. Out of school hours and on holidays I avoided it, after the day when my sin found me out, and I seldom ventured into the street without a guilty beating of the heart, lest I might meet the boy whose name I had taken in vain. If I did come across him, or Freddy, I hung my head and hurried past nervously, with my eyes on the ground, smarting under the sting of the fancied scorn and reproach, which, probably, the boys were too indifferent to feel.

I think that no jilted girl ever suffered sharper pain than I, at seven years old. Grown-up people forget the tragic despair of children.

Yet, if it had not been for Lenny and Freddy, I believe that Madame would have let me live on in ignorance, without any schooling. She had brought me into the house, and kept me there, for the same reason that people keep canaries, or sleeve dogs. Apart from her own use for me, she did not think of me at all, unless thoughts were put into her head by others.



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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It was a taunt from Freddy which made me want to go to school. "Who doesn't know how to read or spell?" he shouted at me, as I hung over the fence. "Who doesn't even know its letters?"

He had hit upon the truth. I was seven years old, and had never been taught the alphabet. Lenny and Freddy had no doubt been going to school for years, and there were girls in the street who trotted away with books under their arms, every morning, except Saturday and Sunday. I was ashamed of my ignorance, and that night when Madame came to bed earlier than usual, I was crying. She asked me, somewhat crossly, what was the matter, and I whimpered that I wanted to go to school, like other children. Then she laughed, saying it was just the contrary with most girls and boys. They cried because they were obliged to go to school. Still, she seemed impressed, and after she had taken down her hair and put on her nightgown (an elaborate and expensive one, like everything she wore), she promised that she would "see about it." Next morning, when she found me awake, staring at her from the white crib that was already too short, she said that she had been thinking over the idea of my going to school. There was no one to take or bring me back, so she did not see how I could possibly go, but if I wanted to begin learning things, I could do so. There was a nice old lady, who had taught her to play the piano when she was a young girl, and once in a while they saw each other to this day. She would send a note to Miss Minnie, who would be only too glad to come to lunch, and "perhaps the poor old thing knew enough to be a governess."

I should have preferred school, because there I could have played with other children. Still, there

was the awful thought that I might by accident have been put in the one attended by Lenny and Freddy. Even if not, I might have met them in the street, coming and going, as perhaps all schools began and let out at the same hour. Altogether, there were compensations in having a governess, as the principal thing was to learn spelling and reading, so as to deserve no longer Freddy's reproach of being a dunce.

I was afraid Madame might forget her promise, but she did not. As usual, when she made up her mind to do a thing she was prompt and business-like, which was one secret of her success. Miss Minnie came to lunch next day, with Madame and me, in the rose-coloured dining-room, which was like an exaggerated bonbon box. Evidently the visitor had seen the house before, yet she was exclamatory in praises, and cooed humbly but affectionately over Madame, whom she called Maggie. As she had been acquainted with Madame for years, she must have known all about the subject which was a mystery for the workgirls. They wondered, in whispers, which I occasionally overheard, whether Madame was a real widow or a "grass widow," or whether she was unmarried, and "Madame" only by courtesy, or because it was the "smart thing" in her business. If Miss Minnie knew any secrets which her patroness wished to keep hidden, I am sure she would have had her tongue cut out rather than tell, for her humble soul was as loyal as that of some devoted animal, and one had only to watch her gazing at "dear Maggie" with her big eyes, to read her faithful love and admiration.

Those eyes of Miss Minnie's were like the eyes of the monkeys I had seen at my one menagerie, and never forgotten. In shape they were like, with the

roundness, and tight corners, and in their light yellow-brown colour, under large lids, with thin, scarcely visible eyelashes. Her face was like a monkey's, too, with a low forehead, a flat, turned-up nose, and a long upper lip, with prominent teeth, and gums which showed when she laughed—as she did very heartily, about nothing. Only, the monkey she resembled must have been an affectionate and devoted one, who had been a pet, and perhaps deserted, so that it had become wistful and sad.

She was grateful for the smallest favour, and was in raptures over the present of a dress and hat from Madame, the day when she came to luncheon. The things had been beautiful, and becoming to Madame, but they had been half-spoiled in a rainstorm, so that Madame would have scorned to wear them again. To Miss Minnie they seemed a dream of Paris perfection. She almost cried with joy at the thought of their being hers, and as she tried them on before one of Madame's long mirrors, I felt for her something of pity, something of the hard contempt children have for their elders who make themselves ridiculous.

The big picture hat which had framed Madame's brown hair graciously was ludicrous on her locks, that were thin, and had begun to turn from pale auburn to grey. The æsthetically made gown gave her round-shouldered, flat-breasted figure the look of a scarecrow, especially with the feathered hat fallen on one side.

I think that Madame had a vague fondness for the little woman, and would perhaps have taken her for a hired companion, if Miss Minnie had not been so unattractive to look at, and so spasmodic in her manner. As she was, she would have "got on Madame's nerves," if constantly about, and she was

too dowdy to live in so decorative a house. But as a governess for me she was suitable, and Madame was not obliged to have her continually under her eyes. She was engaged to teach me, between nine-thirty and twelve. These were Madame's business hours, which she spent with her clients, but occasionally, when she was particularly good-natured, or something had made her happy, she would raise Miss Minnie to the seventh heaven by inviting her to lunch, and talking, with some slight reserve, of old times.

Miss Minnie knew very little about music, very little about anything, and what she did know she had not the art of imparting to others. All her methods were old-fashioned, such as she had been accustomed to in her youth, and she had no idea of any changes since. But she was so kind, and so grieved at anything which she felt was failure on her part, that I grew fond of her, and always did my best. At least, she was a lady, and had a refined manner which was not made up of affectations, such as Madame assumed to impress her clients. But the thing which most interested me in her was her ability to read upside down.

She had learned the letters thus, standing at her teacher's knee, so that reading upside down was more natural to her than the right way, which she had been obliged to pick up later. She was ashamed if she were caught holding a book with the top of the page towards her, and laughed uneasily, as if she had been doing something wrong.

About my grammar she was very particular, which was fortunate, as Madame had no ear for it.

"A little girl who doesn't speak correctly is as bad as one who doesn't brush her teeth," Miss Minnie laid down as law. After that, I was punctilious in

conquering my mistakes, for I had a horror of bad teeth, and the comparison she made caught my imagination. Also she assured me that if I made slips in grammar I should never get a husband; and my great desire at that time was to grow up and marry a big boy handsomer and richer and cleverer than Lenny. I wanted to drive past Lenny with my husband and two beautiful children, a boy and a girl, in a splendid carriage, while Lenny and Freddy walked wistfully by on the sidewalk. Then they would be sorry for everything they had made me suffer, and Lenny would regret all his life that he had not really given me the candy.

Eager to learn the alphabet, and how to spell and read, and so no longer to deserve the taunt which rankled in my mind, I put my whole soul to my work. After a month of poor Miss Minnie's amateur instruction, I could read sentences of words with one syllable, and could add up to six times six. By and by came geography, which I insisted on learning from a globe, and a miniature one was bought for me. But the moment it came, Miss Minnie happened to mention that our world was a unit among many others revolving round the sun, and after that I could think of nothing except astronomy. Madame allowed Miss Minnie to buy a book for me, called "The Heavens through a Child's Eyes," and the door of a great, blue, star-paved fairyland was opened for me. Still later, we took up history, reading such plays of Shakespeare's as concerned the periods I had to study. But that did not begin till I was twelve, and soon after, all my new interests were brought to an end so suddenly that my mental development was arrested, as if blinds had been drawn down over the windows of my brain. In the rooms within, which

had just begun to be furnished, the work of the decorators was stopped. Dust and moth corrupted all, and after a long time, when the windows were thrown open to light and air, nearly everything had to be done over again.

Meanwhile, I was happy with Miss Minnie, learning eagerly what she could teach, except music, which I could not master. I could play by ear, and if a note were wrong I felt it jarring through nerve after nerve, yet I could not learn to play the piano by rule.

Miss Minnie, who had set her heart on teaching me all she knew herself, would not give up easily. "If you could just play for your friends to dance, when you get to be a young lady, you'd thank me on your bended knees!" she repeated so often that I was tired of the phrase, especially the part about the "bended knees," which somehow irritated me unspeakably. But I never tired of hearing her strum her old-fashioned, favourite waltzes, mostly by Strauss.

I could not help dancing when the "Beautiful Blue Danube" rippled under her little blunt fingers. It was nothing to me that it was old-fashioned. I thought it beautiful, and danced to it so instinctively that kind Miss Minnie said I ought to have lessons.

She knew a dancing teacher, who was, in her eyes, a great genius. In fact, she lived in the same boarding-house with him, and played the dance music for his pupils, for a tiny fee. But I am sure she would gladly have worked for nothing, for the poor lady was in love with Mr. Fanning. Unknown to himself, he supplied the element of romance in her life.

She lived up at the top of the house in Gramercy Park, and did not mind a box of a room at the back,

because it was a "good address." Her hard sofa was a bed by night, and she had a Japanese screen in front of her washstand, also Japanese fans dotting the faded wall-paper like gigantic butterflies.

"You see, it really isn't uncomfortable, and it gives me a parlour of my own," she explained to me proudly, as I visited her, and ate very dry cake out of a box ornamented with shells and sea beans. "I couldn't possibly receive gentlemen in my bedroom; but here I can have Mr. Fanning, and any pupil who may wish to make inquiries, come and call upon me."

Madame was willing to pay for my dancing lessons, and Miss Minnie took me to the class, twice a week in the afternoon. It was a wonderful excitement to me, for there were more than a dozen pupils, boys and girls; and when I was sure that Lenny and Freddy were not among them, I looked forward to the dancing days so eagerly that I hardly slept the night before.

Miss Minnie thought Mr. Fanning "such a distinguished looking man, and so like Cardinal Richelieu, being French on his mother's side." But I saw in him only a very thin, rather short, yellow-faced man with oily black hair, beady eyes, a hook nose, a black pointed beard, and jerky limbs, that were like those of a "Jumping Jack" when he danced. He had polite manners, affecting a French roll of the "r," and though his classes were held between three and five in the afternoon, he was always in full evening dress. There were spots on his coat sometimes, which worried Miss Minnie because he had no one to attend to him properly, and she could not muster up courage to point out the spots or offer to wash them off with benzene. We could tell, by the same signs, how long he wore his stiff dress shirt,

and before he discarded his ready-made white ties they would turn a pale grey.

Miss Minnie suffered tortures of jealousy because of the eldest pupil, a rich grocer's daughter, who was sixteen and had black eyebrows with light brown hair, and round cheeks like apples. Children know such things by instinct, I suppose. I knew, and was sorry for her, because my unfortunate love for the scornful Lenny had taught me to be sympathetic. When Miss Minnie asked me anxiously if I thought Nella a beauty, I answered no; that she was a common-looking girl, with horrid big ankles. Then Miss Minnie would be almost happy till the day of the next dancing class, when she could not help seeing Mr. Fanning pinch Nella's arm as they finished a "two-step."

He would dance with all his girl pupils in turn, to criticise their progress, but most often with those he liked best. Nella was his favourite because she was a big girl, and flirted with him; but I came next, for I was light on my feet, and he never had to tell me things twice. But some of the smallest girls were so shy that they could not help crying when he led them out before the whole class. One, named Jenny Elmore, was my dearest friend, though we never saw each other except at Mr. Fanning's. She was like a timid little fawn, but was able to keep back her tears, she confided to me, by thinking very hard of the Bible, before they had begun to fall.

I had never read the Bible, had indeed hardly ever heard it spoken of, but I was so interested to know it had power to keep one from crying, that I begged Miss Minnie to lend me hers. She had one on the table in her room, where it always lay between the shell box and a copy of "East Lynne." It was a

cheap Bible, but old, and the date of Miss Minnie's birth was scratched out in it. The print was so bad, and the leaves so thin, it was hard to read; yet I did read all, except what I called the "dry part, full of names." Though I was interested in much that I read, and asked Miss Minnie a great many questions about the Old and New Testaments, I was never able to understand why thinking of the Bible could keep Jenny Elmore from crying. Nevertheless I never forgot the recipe, and often I have successfully kept back tears by remembering Jenny Elmore and the Bible at the critical instant.

Jenny had a big brother, Clarence, who was thirteen when I was ten. He had the same fawn eyes as his sister, and a slow, beautiful smile that kept time with the graceful laziness of his movements. I loved him as an art student loves a highly prized masterpiece in a dealer's window. Never did I tire of looking at him from under my eyelashes, and the hope died hard that he would ask me to dance. It was Mr. Fanning who ordered him to do so once, and even that was a suffocating joy. But Clarence cared for nobody in the school except Nella, and I heard him say to her, "I shan't come any more if he makes me dance with those kids."

My ears tingled at the words, and I began to long to grow up.

VIII.

OFTEN I have wondered what I would have turned out to be, if I had grown up under Madame's care. With her, I should have had a certain amount of luxury, and she would have sheltered me as well as she could without giving herself trouble. None of the things which made my life hardest to write about would have happened, and yet—I doubt if you would have loved me. I think my soul could never have waked up. It must have been stifled by Madame's rose perfumes. If I might go back again, and choose, I hardly know which I should choose. It does not bear thinking about.

My life in Madame's exotic bower of roses was an interlude. If I got no other good from it—except the saving of my health, and a smattering of education—at least I learned a love of cleanliness which no other experience could ever kill. And yet the sensuous pleasure in sweet, clean things, and the memory of daintiness I carried away with me from Madame's house, put an edge on temptation for me later.

I said that Madame had one friend, whom she allowed to call, and with whom she went to restaurant dinners and to plays. He was a Jew, who seemed old to me, but he was probably not much over forty. He had a great deal of money, but so had other men who admired Madame, and with them she would have nothing to do because they were "common."

HE WHO PASSED

Mr. Heinrich was not common, and at home, in Germany, he was a baron, he told her. He had a wife, from whom he was separated, but not divorced. I used to hear him talking about his wife to Madame, when he came to take her out in the evening. "That woman!" he would say bitterly, in his guttural, yet agreeable voice, which had a foreign roll of the "r" that was very different from Mr. Fanning's. I knew, somehow, that if the woman died, he and Madame would be married.

When I was between twelve and thirteen, Madame was going to take me to a *matinée*. I had a new dress and hat, and was very happy. Besides, it was May, and that brought a stirring in the blood which intoxicated me with joy which I never understood, though I looked for and expected it in the spring. Just as we were starting out, a boy ran up the steps and handed Madame a telegram. She read it, and I, watching her, saw her face covered with a flush, which grew brighter and brighter. She stopped in the doorway for a minute, the telegram in her hand. When she did not speak, I grew half frightened, and impatient, for we were starting late.

"Do come!" I said. "It's nothing bad, is it?"

"It's—it's something good," she answered, slowly. "But I can't come. We won't go to the *matinée* after all."

It was a play that I wanted to see, for the work-girls talked about it, and said it was the "sweetest thing" they had ever seen. It made them all cry, and there was a little girl in it about my age.

I begged Madame to go, but she hardly listened. Without paying any attention to me, she turned and went indoors. She had the tickets, so I followed, still hoping.

"Do go!" I begged. "Or if you can't, let Wilhelmina take me." Wilhelmina was the good-natured one of the two cooks, who let me stir her cake for her, and eat the scrapings with an enormous iron spoon.

Suddenly Madame turned on me. "Oh, shut up!" she said, sharply. "I want to think! A good many worse things may happen to you than missing a silly old matinée. Go away and let me alone."

I turned without another word, and went upstairs to the top floor, into the deserted workroom, for it was Saturday, after two o'clock, and all the girls had gone. Madame had sat down in the empty show-room, which was nearest to the front door. I thought she would stay there a long time, poring over her mysterious telegram, and I wanted to be as far away from her as possible.

In all the years I had been with Madame, she had hardly ever been cross, at worst only a little snappish, if I bothered her, or if I were ill, for she loathed illness, and had no patience with it. But now I felt deeply injured. I thought she was cruel, and wicked, to speak to me like that, and to keep me from going out in my new things to the matinée. I wished that I could make her sorry, by fainting away, or even dying, all alone in the workroom, where the curtains were drawn down.

The air was stuffy there, for the girls had left the windows shut, and there was a heavy odour of humanity, mingled with the luscious scents used in Madame's preparations. It seemed as if it would be easy to faint, but I could not, though I held my breath, and rolled up my eyes, trying to make myself giddy.

I grew very tired of sitting there, but I wanted so

much to frighten Madame, and make her sorry for her cruelty, that I would not go down. I sat in the close workroom, with the door shut, not stirring, but with my ears pricked up, listening for some sound on the stairs—Madame coming in search of me. A second thought made me throw myself on a long bare bench which ran along the wall. I thought if Madame found me prostrate there, she would repent, and perhaps apologise for her wickedness. As I lay on my face, with my new hat pushed back, my hair, which had grown very long again, trailed on the floor among the scraps of paper and ribbon which the girls had left lying about. It looked abandoned and sad, like the hair of some drowned creature in a picture; but I forgot my sulkiness for a little while, in admiring its length and thickness, and the way it curled at the ends. I did not care for its colour, but people walking behind me in the street often said, "What wonderful hair that child's got," so I knew it must be pretty.

The afternoon passed away, very slowly. Still I would not move, hoping that Madame would come. At last it was evening, and in the twilight the workroom was full of strange echoes and little squeakings, such as never came by day. I was very hungry, and a little afraid. I remembered in what an odd tone Madame had said, "A great many worse things may happen to you than missing a matinée."

Her voice sounded ominous, like a warning, as I recalled it. I thought that perhaps the worse things had begun to happen already, that perhaps she had meant something in particular. I could bear my exile no longer; and cramped from lying so long in one position, my new dress creased, I went slowly and with dignity downstairs. Sounds of voices came

to me from the boudoir. I recognised the voice of Mr. Heinrich talking in an earnest, even excited tone, with Madame. But he hardly ever appeared so early. I could not remember his coming until time to dine, or take Madame out to dinner, unless they went first to look at an exhibition or sale of pictures. For Mr. Heinrich was a judge of pictures, as well as of music. He would say, "They are my two passions—after one other which comes above all." And he would look at Madame with what I thought a silly look in his handsome, almond-shaped eyes.

Nearly always I had seen him in evening things, for Madame was very exacting, and I had heard her tell him she expected to be treated with as much respect as if she were a queen. Now, however, he was in day clothes. They two were sitting together in the boudoir, both leaning their elbows on the table. Mr. Heinrich was showing Madame some papers, and their heads were close to each other. His was large, and looked heavy, for his throat was rather long and thin, and would have seemed thinner, if it had not been well hidden by a thick black beard. Usually he had a stately, leisured manner, and in an evening overcoat he had, with a long flowing cape, he looked patriarchal, like a Biblical figure. But this evening his gestures were excited and hurried. Suddenly he bent forward, seized Madame's face between his hands, and kissed her.

I shivered a little at sight of the kiss, for he had a long aquiline nose with a cold tip, as I knew, for he had once kissed me, a long time ago. And he had very full, red lips between his straggling moustache and beard. It was the thought of the fat, soft lips that set me shivering, for ever since Maud had seized and kissed me at the old boarding house,

fat red lips had seemed no less than horrible to me. I had read a story in the "Arabian Nights" about a ghou, who ate grains of rice by day, and bodies at night, and I knew she must have had thick, blood-filled lips like Rose, and Maud, and other black people—and Mr. Heinrich.

Madame laughed a stifled laugh, under the kiss, and tried to push his hands down from her face, as they sat at opposite sides of the little round table. I saw on the third finger of her left hand a splendid new ring, diamonds and rubies, her favourite stones.

Then, as if my fascinated stare signalled them, they both turned and looked round at me, as I stood in the door. I thought for an instant that Madame would be angry, but she smiled quite pleasantly. She had forgotten all about her burst of crossness and my resentment, and she had never missed me. My long martyrdom in the workroom had been all in vain.

Mr. Heinrich rather liked me, as he did not know what I felt about his cold nose and red lips. He smiled, too, and did not appear to mind my having seen him kiss Madame.

"Come here and wish us joy, little Missy," he said. "Your dear Madame is going to be my Baroness. I'm a baron, you know, and now I'm a happy widower. Everything is going to be all right at last."

As he spoke, Madame good-naturedly made room for me on the big lounge on which she sat, by the little table. She gave me her left hand, with its manicured pink nails, and let me examine her new ring. I had not forgiven her about the *matinée*, but I was afraid I would forgive her by and by, and was annoyed at my own softness, because I wished to be angry for a long time.

"Do you think I shall make a nice baroness, dear?" she asked.

"Yes," I said, though I did not know what it was to be a baroness. And I was too hungry and tired to wonder what would become of me when she married Mr. Heinrich.

Weeks passed, and though the Baron came every day, nothing was settled about the wedding; or if it were settled, everyone outside was kept in the dark. Madame did not speak to me of her plans before getting up in the morning as she had done. There was something on her mind, which she did not care to talk over with me, and I felt uneasily that whatever it was, I was connected with it. She had long conversations after closing time with Miss Smith, the manageress, or head assistant, the oldest, but handsomest, of the "young ladies," who was closeted with Madame for hours in the consulting-room every day. One Saturday afternoon, instead of going out to amuse herself as usual, Madame stayed in the house. Miss Smith stayed too, after lunching with Madame and me, a thing that had never happened before, as Madame stood on her dignity with those she employed. They had half a bottle of champagne, though Madame thought wine and spirits bad for the complexion, and hardly ever drank either.

Miss Smith grew more and more excited, looking handsomer than I had seen her, until I thought her almost as pretty as Madame. Only she was of a Jewish type, and was getting a faint moustache, like a line delicately marked with a crayon on her short upper lip. They touched their glasses together, and Madame said, "Success to the new Madame St. Clare!"

"And to the Baroness!" returned Miss Smith.

Immediately after luncheon, which lasted longer

than when we were alone, there was a loud ring at the bell, and the maid who opened the door for clients came to announce that two gentlemen had called. They had sent up cards, but neither Madame nor Miss Smith looked at them. They did not appear surprised that visitors had come.

The maid, Clara, who was pretty, like everyone in Madame's employ, went on to say that the gentlemen were in the reception-room. She had wonderfully bright, inquisitive eyes, which seemed to pierce through things as gimlets do.

"Bring them to my boodore," said Madame, smiling at Miss Smith, who turned red under the film of White Rose Balm, which she used to make her dark skin fair.

Presently I saw the two visitors coming upstairs. One was very smartly dressed, and wore a tall silk hat that glittered beautifully. He was a Jew, and youngish, much younger than Madame's Baron. The other might have been a Jew also, but he looked like a business man, and had a small packet of folded papers in his hand.

"Go and tell Wilhelmina to make you some peach ice cream for dinner," Madame said to me. "I shall be going out. And you can have jelly cake with it, if you want to."

I liked ice cream and jelly cake better than anything else to eat, and I liked Wilhelmina. But I was not elated, for I knew very well that I was being sent out of the way.

Clara was in the upstairs kitchen with Wilhelmina when I arrived. They were talking so eagerly that they did not hear me at the door, and I caught the words "Jew backer, putting up money to take over the business," before they turned and saw me.

"What is a Jew backer?" I asked.

"Oh, he might be a gentleman friend of Miss Smith's—I mean the new Madame," said Wilhelmina, who was less discreet than Clara.

"Is Miss Smith going to be married?" I went on.

They both laughed, a cackling kind of laugh, and looked at each other.

"Ask us something easier," returned Clara.

I was a little irritated at being laughed at, for I thought my question a simple one, and not at all funny.

"You said she'd be the new Madame," I reminded them.

"Anybody can be Madame who wants to be, so far as I can tell," Wilhelmina explained. "It's good for business. Now, you can just run away, or else say what you want. Clara and I have got something better to do than answer silly questions."

I was too proud to persist. Besides, suddenly I seemed to see quite clearly behind their innuendoes. Miss Smith was going to call herself Madame St. Clare and take the business when our Madame married. This proved that what I had vaguely suspected was true. Madame meant to go away.

The visitors stayed a long time. It must have been two hours later when I heard loud laughing and talking in the corridor outside Madame's rooms. By that time I was in the bedroom, lying down with a novel which was very exciting, but not exciting enough to keep my thoughts from wandering to Madame and her plans.

When the voices were silent, the door of the bedroom was thrown open, and Madame came in. She looked flushed and tired, yet pleased.

"Ah, that's a good thing," she exclaimed, with a

long-drawn sigh of relief. "They've gone." She flung out her arms, and stretched herself, standing. "Get up and unhook me, that's a good girl," she went on.

For the last three years I had helped her a good deal about dressing and undressing, for she had no maid of her own. There would hardly have been room in the house to put one up comfortably, owing to the space given to clients, and, besides, Madame was so brisk and vigorous that she liked to do most things for herself, all but mending, which Clara did.

I unhooked her frock behind, and when she had taken off her satin corsets, she got me to help her into a lace dressing-gown. Then she lay down, flat on her back, on her wide, springy bed, which had the softest pillows I have ever known.

"Scratch my arms," she said, "and I'll tell you lots of interesting things that you'll like to hear."

I drew a chair close to the bed, and making my lap higher with a sofa cushion from the adjoining boudoir, I laid one of her beautiful bare arms on it.

It was no new thing to be asked to scratch her arms, though usually it was later, just before she was ready to dress for dinner, or in the night if she had what she called "the jumps," and could not sleep. I scratched very gently, drawing my fingers slowly up and down the whole length of the arm, from shoulder to wrist, and over the back of the hand. Slowly, too, she would turn her arm round, so that I might end up with the inner side of it, and the upturned palm. This operation soothed and rested her, as rubbing soothes a cat, and she loved to have me scratch her legs too, from the knee down to the ankle, and over the instep. She would get me to pull off her thin silk stockings, which were like a delicate, shiny film over the pale pink

flesh; and as I scratched she would look with never-failing pleasure at her bare feet, of which she was very proud, because the toes were not deformed; and every day she reddened and polished their nails.

This time, as I scratched her arm, she lay with closed lids, not speaking for a few minutes; then, without opening her eyes, she began to tell me the things she had promised to tell: how she had been waiting to marry the Baron until her business was settled; how at last it was all arranged. Miss Smith would buy it, and she herself would be free to go with the Baron to Germany for the honeymoon. They would travel in Europe for a year, and, maybe more, and they would live in New York, in future, only part of the time. And then she went on to say that I was to hold her bouquet at the wedding, and have a lovely costume, with dress and hat, and shoes and silk stockings, all of a colour to match.

This pleased me, but not as much as if I had not had other important things to talk of.

"Are you going to take me with you to Europe?" I asked; and I thought that my voice sounded queer, like Dearie's used to sound when it trembled as she told Boy not to run up and down stairs.

"Oh, no," she said. "The Baron thinks you're a very nice little girl, but he wouldn't care for that." She loved to speak of Mr. Heinrich as "The Baron."

"Then I am going to live with Miss Smith?" I asked.

"That wouldn't do, either," Madame went on, still with her eyes shut, as if she did not care to have mine meet hers. "Miss Smith doesn't love children. Besides, she may make changes in the house. The Baron and I have thought of a nice plan for you, which I'm sure you'll like."

I was not so sure, but I waited.

"You've often said you'd love to go on the stage," she began again. "The Baron and I both think you ought to make an actress. You're always mimicking someone or other. I believe you've got real talent, and so does he. I never saw your father, for he didn't act much in New York, but I've heard he could have made a splendid actor if he hadn't been too lazy, and he might have got good New York engagements if he had had any ambition. The trouble is, he didn't know people with influence; but the Baron and I have talked things over, and thought of a Mrs. Fergus—it was a different name really, as will be all the others I shall mention—who takes care of girls who want to go on the stage, and gets them engagements. She used to be an actress herself, long ago. Now she's a dramatic agent. We've arranged for you to live with her. And because you've been a good girl, and I'm fond of you, I'll pay your board there and all your expenses, till you're sixteen, if you don't get an engagement so you can support yourself before that."

At this she opened her eyes and looked at me, for, as Dearie would have said, it was my "cue" to thank her. I was really grateful, for I was old enough now to understand how little claim I had ever had upon Madame, and how I owed everything to her generosity, since my mother would not even hear my name. But because I had never been able to love her, I was more critical than I could have been if affection had glossed over her little faults and peculiarities. Although only a child still, I read Madame with unblinking eyes, through her various affectations.

"Thank you, Auntie," I said, as warmly as I could. "I'm sure I ought to get something to do before that. I'll try hard."

"Sixteen is time enough," she assured me, kindly. "I can afford to pay the little you'll cost, I'm sure, and the Baron approves of the idea. He's got heaps and heaps of money, and I'm not poor myself. When we come back and take a house in New York, or perhaps an apartment in some big hotel, you must come and see me. You'll be almost a young lady by then, for two or three years make a lot of difference at your age."

Then she went on quickly to tell me that Mrs. Fergus was very fond of girls, and had three daughters living with her. There had been others, but they had gone on the stage, and several had been very successful.

In my mind I saw Mrs. Fergus, like the "Old Woman in the Shoe," a living representative of whom I had once seen at a bazaar: a big child dressed up in cap and spectacles, and a crossed fichu, a switch in her hand with which to strike the brood of dolls that were crowded with her into a Titanic slipper.

The idea of a great change in my life, of living with other girls, and of learning how to be an actress was very exciting, and made me feel almost grown up. I had just been reading a delightful book, with a heroine at a boarding-school, however, and I would have much preferred being sent to such a school as was glowingly described. But perhaps, I thought, it would cost more, and besides I could not learn at a boarding-school to go on the stage and support myself. I knew I should hate to be a governess, like Miss Minnie. Anything would be better than that, even to be a cook; though lately I had been praying again, at Miss Minnie's request, and had added to a prayer of praise from some old volume, "Thank God I am not deformed, or a cook."

I was too keenly interested in the unknown future and in picturing what it would be like, to feel actively unhappy. Yet Miss Minnie's face of distress when she heard what was to happen to me, and that I was to have no more teaching except for the stage, saddened me somewhat. Besides, I loved Madame's rose-haunted house, and realised dimly that there would be nothing half as beautiful in my new life. At night I would wake up with a start, and a weight of depression would lie upon my breast, till slowly I slipped away into sleep again. At those dark moments it seemed to me that I had instead of a heart a great, misshapen, cold boiled beet, exactly like those I often saw, very red and floating in purplish vinegar, in Wilhelmina's kitchen.

The thought that I was going to be "flower girl" at Madame's wedding did not comfort me.

IX.

MADAME was married in the afternoon, not in church, but in her own boudoir, where a shocked Congregationalist minister performed the ceremony, looking, in his severe black, like a crow in a rose garden. The Baron was a crow too, but sleek and well-fed. I was used to the sight of him in that pink bower.

He had sent at least a bushel of roses, and Miss Minnie and Clara and I had decorated the boudoir. I wore a pink silk dress, and a Leghorn hat smothered in roses. For the first time I had silk stockings, and they were pink, too, matching my pink shoes, which were ornamented with huge silver buckles that reflected all the pink things, and looked as if they also were pink.

Only the Baron and the younger Jew who was Miss Smith's "gentleman friend," Miss Smith herself, now to be known as Madame St. Clare, the new Baroness's successor, and Miss Minnie—red-nosed, blotched with tears, awful to behold in a green dress of Madame's—were invited to the wedding. A splendid feast came from a confectioner's, and there were piles of white, silver-tied boxes of wedding-cake, one for each of the guests, one for each of the "young ladies" and work-girls, who were to be kept on by Miss Smith.

My things, as well as the bride's, were already packed. Her trousseau—such finery as she cared to buy before reaching Paris—wrapped in tissue paper and sachet bags, was folded away in beautiful new trunks, with her initials and a baron's coronet on the ends. There were coronets embroidered on her under-linen and handkerchiefs; and one of the Baron's wedding presents was a huge dressing-bag fitted with gold-topped bottles and gold-backed brushes, all monogrammed and coroneted. I never saw Madame look so happy as when she gazed at her display of coronets, a few days before the wedding. I think she was picturing her future return to New York as a Baroness, when her career as "Madame St. Clare" would be forgotten by society, or condoned because of her husband's title and fortune.

I had not yet seen Mrs. Fergus, with whom I was to make my home for the next two or three years. Madame had said it would be better to meet her for the first time after the wedding; and when I saw her, I guessed why.

It was Saturday, and the house was quiet. When the bride and groom had gone, Miss Smith and her friend went too. I was left alone with Miss Minnie, who had cried continuously during the ceremony, and had soaked two very small handkerchiefs. She helped Clara put away the boxes of cake that were for the "young ladies" and the "girls"; and while she was fussily engaged in this work, sniffing every moment, the door-bell rang.

We had known it would ring, for Mrs. Fergus had promised to call for me before five o'clock; still, Miss Minnie seemed as much surprised and flustered as if she were upset by something entirely unexpected.

After all, it was not Mrs. Fergus who had arrived,

It was her husband, of whom Madame had never spoken. He would not come upstairs, but sat waiting for me just inside the front door.

I took a last look at the pretty rooms on the floor where I had lived with Madame, and with a lump in my throat, kissed Miss Minnie goodbye.

"Remember you're to come and see me when you can," she said, tears streaming down her cheeks, making a kind of glaze over the reddened skin. "I'm always at home on Sundays."

"Yes, I'll try to come, and tell you all about everything," I answered, hugging her. But I never did go. Everything was different. Already my dancing lessons had been stopped; and Miss Minnie and I drifted out of each other's lives.

She accompanied me timidly downstairs, to put me in charge of Mr. Fergus, whose existence was of so little importance that I had not even been told of it.

He was sitting on a chair in the vestibule; a small, thin man, hollow-chested, and dressed with extreme neatness in the worst possible taste. He wore a short alpaca coat, over a white waistcoat, which was frayed along the edges, and on his almost bald head a tall silk hat, which came down nearly as far as his prominent ears. Afterwards, when I knew him better, I observed that his hat rose on his head, like a boat on the tide, when his hair remained uncut for a long time. That day was his monthly date for having it almost shaved.

Once I had seen a face carved out of a turnip, done by a boy in our street, who was clever at vegetable sculpture. Mr. Fergus's narrow white face reminded me of the turnip, with its flat nose and long chin, and little dim eyes like holes scooped out. He spoke in

a low, mumbling voice, explaining that he had come in his wife's place, to take me home.

Miss Minnie and I kissed each other again. I shook hands with Clara; and Annie, whom I had bidden farewell, waved at me from the workroom window as I looked up from the street.

My trunk was to be sent; but Mr. Fergus carried my bag, a present from Madame, which had once been hers. We walked until we came to a street where there were trolley cars. In one of these we went across town, and then, changing to the "elevated," dashed down town for a number of blocks. I sat beside Mr. Fergus, but he made no attempt at conversation, and though his jaws worked constantly, showing a play of muscles in his thin cheeks, as if he were chewing something, he did not open his lips except to tell me when it was time to alight from the train, or which way to turn in the street. Neither did he look at me, as though I were a person with features to be remembered if he wanted to recognise me again. When his eyes turned in my direction for any reason, their gaze seemed to slide over and past my face, as water slides over a round, polished surface without leaving any drops. He sat gazing straight ahead, as the trolley car took us across town, and again in the crowded elevated, his jaws working just perceptibly, and an expression even more remote from the world than mere absent-mindedness. The notion flitted into my mind that it was the look a ghost's face might have, in haunting the place where it had lived in the body, as Rose and Maud had told me many spirits did: a look of knowing that it was for ever out of human affairs, and that nothing of any interest or joy could possibly come to it in this world.

I was not hurt that Mr. Fergus did not talk to me, or

appear to know that I was with him. Without understanding why, I pitied him deeply.

His first words were spoken when we had walked a short distance, after the quick rush in the elevator. "Here we are. We go upstairs," he said in a thin, scraping voice, at the corner of a noisy street where there were shops and offices, some of which were closed, because it was Saturday afternoon.

We had stopped in front of a brick building, where a florist did business on the ground floor; and above, many names were painted on large or small signboards; names of lawyers; doctors who cured diseases by means of patent medicines or electricity; dress-makers and corset-makers, and others that I have forgotten. But my eye quickly picked out among them the name of Mrs. Fergus, Dramatic Agent.

Over a side door was another, smaller signboard, with her advertisement instructing the public to enter there and find her offices on the second floor.

"Is this only the office, or is it your house?" I dared to ask, as Mr. Fergus opened the door.

"It's both," he said, and stood aside with patient, weary politeness, for me to go first up the dirty wooden stairway. The thought came to me that this man was used to standing aside for everyone to go ahead of him; and that it was not good for men, or even for women, to have lost all self-assertion.

At sight of those stairs, and as the close smell of the house (a smell made up from many faded odours) struck into my lungs, memories crowded back to me. The old sordidness of life, as it had been when I was a child, seemed to take form and rise before my eyes like a huge, smoke-wreath Geni boiling up out of a bottle. Details of existence in the two theatrical boarding-houses, features of the houses themselves,

which I had seemed to forget, turned themselves over in my memory, as one comes upon old dresses tucked away in trunks that have stood for years in a garret.

My interest in the future collapsed, like a child's balloon when it is pricked. I felt as if I must run away, and get back to Madame's at once. But there was no longer a Madame for me. She was a Baroness, on her way to Europe, and nothing was left of her except the clothes she had given me, and the address of a banker in Paris. I told myself, with a stab of homesickness, as if for a home burnt down and destroyed off the face of the earth, that I would have to make the best of things here for awhile. Then, when there came a sting of tears behind my eyes, I thought of Jenny Elmore and the Bible. As usual, the recipe answered its purpose, and by the time we had got to the second floor the tears had dried.

It was very hot, and smelt of leaking gas, in the narrow corridor outside Mrs. Fergus's rooms. Also, it was dim with a perpetual, dusty twilight, for there was no other light except what filtered through a dirty transom over the front door, and a little that found its way up from below.

The front room was an office of the agency, and had a great deal of black lettering on a yellow door. Farther on was another door, with Mrs. Fergus's name on it again, and the one word, "Private." Beyond, were three more doors, two along the side of the corridor, and one at the end. On these there was no lettering; but many names and sentences were scrawled in pencil, and there were quantities of rough sketches, caricatures of men and women with big heads, or enormous feet, lovers embracing each other, and goblin children with thumbs to their noses, or tongues sticking out. I had time to study these for a

moment, dark on the dirty yellow paint, as Mr. Fergus fumbled to unlock one of the doors with a latchkey he wore on a black tape, like a wide shoe-string.

There was silence on the other side, and when he had got the door open, I saw that the room into which it led was empty.

It might almost have been the parlour in one of my old homes, except that it was evidently a dining as well as a living room. There was a queer family resemblance in the furniture of this room, to others once familiar to me. Even the smell was the same. It was like getting back into the past through the door of a dream. Often, at night, I had gone back through that door, though each year less often, as the memories were blurred by new impressions; but always I was relieved to wake up and find that I had been dreaming. Now, it was all real, and there was no door through which I could run away, and escape to something better.

The window looked out on the side street. There was a red blind, half pulled down, and hanging crooked, because the roller was coming out at one end. In the middle of the room was a table, covered with a spotted red cloth, which could be washed, but evidently had not been for some time. In the middle was a pile of little fringed napkins of the same colour, lying crumpled up. There were books and illustrated papers, too, in confusion, and some had fallen on the floor. I saw pictures of policemen arresting black men, and women being murdered. There was a huddle of chairs and sofas, covered with torn *reps* and horse-hair; tiny tables pushed against the wall, with dishes piled on bound volumes of magazines; and there were a number of old-fashioned cabinets and cupboards, filled to overflowing with all kinds of indescribable

things that protruded through half-open glass doors. Photographs, big and little, framed and unframed, but all of actors and actresses, were hung or tacked on the walls, mostly crooked, and stuck round the frame of the mantelpiece mirror, just as they had been in the old boarding-houses. On chairs and sofas hats and jackets had been flung, and were trailing on the floor, that was covered with greyish carpet from which the pattern was almost worn away. So full was the room with furniture and fallen odds and ends, that there was hardly space to move.

Mr. Fergus opened a door into an untidy bedroom, with one bed, that had been half made up in a hurry. Since then, someone had evidently lain on it, for there was a deep dent in the middle, which showed that the bed was of feathers. The clothing of a man and a woman hung from hooks on the wall, and nothing was in order.

Through this room I was led to another, of about the same size, and of much the same appearance, except that there were two beds, close together; and hanging or lying about, a quantity of light-coloured dresses and hats such as young girls might wear. There was only one bureau or dressing-table, and a very small washstand, littered with bottles. Besides these objects, there was no other furniture, with the exception of a trunk covered with a red tablecloth, and two chairs, one of which had the back broken off. A faint, stale smell of drainage, and of unaired woollen things, pervaded the whole flat.

"Mrs. Fergus and the girls will be in before long, I guess," my guide said, in his remote voice; and set down my bag on one of the beds, neither of which had been properly made.

I had to think again of Jenny Elmore and the Bible.

But in my heart resentment stirred against Madame. Always I had known that she did not love me, and more than once I had been glad, because of my unconquerable coldness for her. But at this minute I realised, as I never had before, how indifferent she was to me, when her need of me was past. When I had been with her, a part of the picture in which she was the central figure, Madame had grudged no expense for me. Now, it would matter nothing to her if I degenerated in body and mind, taking on the colour of my surroundings, like a chameleon: her eyes would not be offended by the disgusting sight. If she had sent me to boarding-school I should have been a burden on her and the Baron. With Mrs. Fergus and her daughters, I would be removed to a different world.

These thoughts filled my heart with bitterness. I was hardly thirteen; but as I stood alone in the frowsy room which I was to share with Mrs. Fergus's girls, I felt old, and as if I would grow up to be wicked.

X.

I DID not want to make the best of things. I could not bear to begin unpacking my bag, and I left it on the bed where it had been put by Mr. Fergus. Feeling the dumb anger of one who has been shut up in prison without having committed a crime, I sat on the chair without a back, waiting for I knew not what. By and by I ceased to feel at all. A huge fly was bumping against the window-pane, and my whole interest in life concentrated in him. I thought that he was very silly, trying to get out, when nothing he could do would help him, and I said to myself that, if God were looking at me, He would not have to think scornfully of me as I was thinking of the fly. I did not mean to try and get out.

Half an hour may have passed while I watched the fly, dully, and then the door opened, without a knock. A woman stood looking at me. She was so tall and stout, and her big black hat had such a spreading tuft of feathers, that she seemed a giantess, filling the whole doorway.

For a minute neither she nor I spoke. We were judging each other, I less deliberately than she. My eyes told me that she was a mountain of flesh and good-nature; but something behind my eyes said that she was terrible. I felt the thrill of what she hid under the

smiling wrinkles round her eyes, as a sensitive person might feel a cat crouching behind a velvet curtain. Her eyes were pale as moonstones, and expressionless beneath long, prominent lids like a crocodile's. Under her big hat, her hair was thin and streaked with grey. Though her clothes were suitable only for a young woman, she seemed to have no vanity, for she was not made up at all, and she stooped forward so that her double chin appeared to melt into her great bust. Her silk mantle and elaborately trimmed dress looked expensive, like her hat; yet they had the air of not being made for her. Afterwards I found out that she got everything from a superior second-hand clothes dealer, who bought from ladies' maids, and did a large business with theatrical people.

I knew that this must be Mrs. Fergus, and I thought that the dislike I conceived for her was because of her white fat, and her great eyelids and double chin; for always I have disliked double chins more than any other disfigurement on man or woman. Yet I felt dimly that there was some other reason, more mysterious. One is not afraid of double chins; and I was afraid of Mrs. Fergus. I felt dominated by her.

"Well," she said, in a deep voice, "so you've come? My girls ought to be in pretty soon. I guess they've been around on an ice-cream hunt with some of their friends, after the matinée."

I had no other greeting from Mrs. Fergus. She did not say that she was glad to see me, or that she hoped I would be happy. I realised that personally I was of slight importance to her, and that she saw no necessity to put herself out for me. Still, she lingered, unfastening her cream silk mantle, and taking the pins out of her hat, which instantly fell to one side on her thin hair. When she moved, her body billowed all over,

with every slow step. I thought of Mr. Fergus, and wondered why they had married each other.

"Was it a nice wedding?" she inquired, in a careless tone, as if she had known me a long time.

I said yes, it was very pretty, and was surprised at my shyness, for I was not used to being shy and self-conscious, even with strangers. She hardly listened, and had apparently lost interest in the subject, for immediately she went on to say that I was tall and well-developed for my age. "I expect we'll get you something to do before long," she added.

"Do you mean on the stage?" I asked. Her eyes were fascinating me. They were almost white, with thin dark rings round the iris, and very small pupils, like little black holes pricked with pins in the pale grey. It was difficult to look away from them.

"Yes, of course. That's what my business is, to put folks on the stage and get them places once they're on," she explained. "My dramatic agency mayn't be the swellest in New York, but there ain't another that can beat it. I'm too busy to train you, or any of my girls, but I see that you get training. They're all in good summer engagements now."

"Is it three daughters you've got, Mrs. Fergus?" I asked, almost stammering in my queer new timidity.

"Ye-es," she replied, drawling. And she gave me a strange look from under the corners of her drooping eyelids.

Just then two girls came in. They were both rather pretty, and much older than I had expected, because Madame had told me that they were about my age. I thought that they must be at least fifteen, and it struck me as odd that neither one should look older nor younger than the other. Yet they were so unlike, it did not occur to me that they might be twins. One

was dark and thin, with bright eyes and a face like an eager bird. The other was plump, with frizzy brown hair, and the deepest dimples I ever saw. Her mouth pursed itself constantly, so as to display them. Both girls were rouged and powdered, and had their eyelashes blackened. They wore their hair down their backs, under frilled, childish hats, though their dresses came nearly to their insteps. They seemed to be great friends, and I felt like an outsider, very young and insignificant. I longed to be as old as they were, and have a large bust and a squeezed-in waist. I made up my mind that it would be delightful to wear a corset.

Mrs. Fergus and the girls did not speak to each other, not even to give a cheery "hello," such as Madame usually threw to me when she came in. They glanced at each other coolly, and I thought the girls' eyes looked insolent. But as soon as Mrs. Fergus had gone slowly billowing out, shutting the door loudly, their faces changed. They smiled at me, with hardly any condescension. "New Kid" they called me, and asked each other "which side I would be on."

Although they did not put the question to me, they looked at me as if they expected me to answer, and, as I was longing to know what they meant, I ventured to inquire. Then they both laughed.

"I wonder if we can trust her?" they said, again to each other.

"Yes, you can," I replied emphatically.

"Well, you'll have to take sides here," said Julia, the dark one. "Kit and I've been betting whether you'll be on ours or the enemy's. But I warn you, you won't get much good out of the enemy. They're all for themselves."

"Who is the enemy?" I begged her to tell me.

"The old cat and the young one," said Julia.

"She means Mrs. F—— and Fifi," Kitty explained. But there was no time to explain more, if she had intended to go on, because at that minute the door opened, and a third girl came in, whistling a tune sweetly and cleverly.

She stopped whistling when she saw me, but began again, taking up the air where she had left off. She, too, appeared to be exactly the same age as the others. A bunch of black curls was tied back with a butterfly bow of red ribbon. She had a drooping Leghorn hat, with a wreath of poppies, and a white lace dress, slightly soiled, but more expensive-looking than Julia's or Kitty's frocks. She was inclined to be too fat already, but her waist was slender, and, as she could breathe only at the top of her lungs, her full breast rose and fell like a wave. I thought that very attractive; but, though this girl was handsomer than the others, I disliked her at once. She was dark, darker than many Spanish women I have seen since, and had moist lips as red and polished as coral; yet there was an indefinable likeness between her and Mrs. Fergus.

Julia and Kitty stopped talking for an instant when she broke in; but began again, in loud voices, as if to drown her whistling. She scattered her hat, her long white silk gloves, her handkerchief, and bag about the untidy room, and then sauntered to the door, but checked herself there, as if on a sudden thought.

"You've got to take her in with you, Kit," she said. "It's no good pretending to forget, 'cause I'm not going to have a strange girl in my bed, that's settled."

"You're a selfish cat, Fifi," said Kit. "You know perfectly well that our bed's smaller than yours. You want the earth."

"I won't change beds, and I won't have a stranger, so if Julia don't want to sleep with me, you can all

three squash in together," was the answer; and I no longer had any difficulty in deciding which "side" I would be on.

I expected the other two to make a firm stand against the "enemy," but to my surprise, Kitty turned away, and Julia shrugged her shoulders, merely saying, "Have it your own way, pig."

Fifi took up her whistling again, and skipped out of the room, giving the door a bang.

"Sweet angel, isn't she?" said Julia.

"Sometimes I think it wouldn't be murder to smother her with a pillow, and sit on her face," added Kitty, looking fierce in spite of the dimples.

They both glared at the door, which had hardly ceased quivering after the slam. From the next room came the sound of loud laughter, Mrs. Fergus's voice and Fifi's together. The two voices were oddly alike.

"Well, what are you thinking?" Julia asked me.

"I was wondering why you let her have her own way," I admitted frankly, for I was not afraid of Julia or Kitty. Already we were allies, and it was necessary to understand the situation.

"Because, when you know a thing's got to be, you look like a fool if you make a fuss," Julia answered. "What Fifi wants, goes in this house. The old cow would only come in and roar and raise hell, and we'd have to give in."

Kitty burst out laughing. "The kid is shocked," she chuckled, putting the thumb and third finger of her right hand into her two dimples, in a way she had when she wished to break a laugh off in the middle.

"No, I'm not," I contradicted her, eagerly. "Only it's funny to hear you talk about your mother and sister the way you do."

"Mother—and sister!" they both echoed, scornfully.

"Well—aren't they?" I inquired.

"Good lord!" Julia exclaimed. "I didn't know you were as green as *that!*"

I hurried to tell her that my information came from Madame. "She said Mrs. Fergus had three daughters."

"She's had a lot of daughters like us, and will have more, I guess," said Julia, with cutting sharpness. "How old do you suppose I am?"

"Fifteen," I guessed.

"You've hit it. And Kitty? She's fifteen too. So's the pig, Fifi. Now did you ever hear of three sisters being all the same age, unless they were triplets?"

"No—o," I replied, ashamed of what seemed like stupidity.

"Neither did anyone else. I thought you'd know what everybody knows. Kitty and I are no relation to each other, or to the Ferguses. Fifi's the only child the old cow ever had, so far as I've heard, and she's no relation to the gentleman of the house. The cow was good-looking once, they say. Fifi's father was a Portuguese opera singer. He's disappeared into space, about fifteen years ago, I should think."

I tried to look as if these explanations of family affairs did not surprise me, for I was sure that not to know about such things would make me ridiculously childish in the eyes of these girls.

"Did Mrs. Fergus adopt you both when you were babies?" I asked as boldly as I could.

"Yes, she loved babies so much, she thought no home was complete without 'em," said Julia; but Kitty scolded her for teasing me, and advised her to tell me the facts plainly, if she wanted me to know them.

"I don't care much whether she knows them or not," Julia grumbled. However, she went on in her bitter, strident way, to explain that Mrs. Fergus had another business, separate from her dramatic agency, yet indirectly connected with it. Between the two girls, who kept on interrupting one another, each flinging a few disjointed facts at me, I was able to piece fragments together. I made out that actresses who were not married occasionally had babies. That when there were no relatives to take the babies, they could be adopted by women like Mrs. Fergus. She, and others in the same line of business, would for a certain sum of money take charge of the children, and bring them up after a fashion. Mrs. Fergus had been doing this for a great many years, ever since she grew too fat to sing in opera, and married Mr. Fergus. Some people said that they were not really married. Others said he had been paid to marry her, and get her out of the way of a rich man she had blackmailed. Anyway, Mr. Fergus dared not call his soul his own. He was a dead man, except that she made him work, kept his nose to the grindstone, and grudged him tobacco. She grudged things to everybody, except Fifi, her idol. For Fifi the sun rose and set. Mrs. Fergus had sacrificed all girls to her own girl, since Fifi was born. There had been six or seven others, daughters of women not married, with one or two exceptions; now and then a widow wanted to take a second husband, and had to find a home for a troublesome baby. The girls were all on the stage. Some were successful; others had gone west and disappeared. One had died, after a scandal which had caused a "society divorce." Julia and Kitty were not supposed to know the names of their mothers, but they did know, or thought they knew, and did not hesitate to mention names. Indeed, they seemed

proud, rather than ashamed, for both women were successful. One was still "starring," and I had seen her act. The other had married, and left the stage. I could hardly believe that the story the girls told me concerning Mrs. Fergus and themselves was true, but I did not dare suggest that they were mistaken. I still think that many details must have been embroidered by their imagination.

We spoke in low tones, and paused sometimes to listen for the laughter and murmur of voices in the next room. I half expected Mrs. Fergus to break in upon us, and say that she knew what we were talking about, but Julia and Kitty, who saw my eyes wander to the door, assured me that "Mrs. Fergus" would not mind what they told me.

"She ain't ashamed of anything," Julia said. "She doesn't care whether you know or not. What harm can you do to her? We hate her, and she hates us, but we go on living here till we can get an engagement in a road company, because there's nowhere else to go; and you'll have to do just the same. She won't let Fifi take anything out of New York, but she'll find us something on the road as soon as she can, and bring along another girl from the country."

When I asked what the "country" meant they both began wildly talking together again, telling me about a farm which belonged to a brother of Mrs. Fergus. Her "daughters" were kept there, the girls explained, till they were old enough to take children's parts on the stage. Then they were brought to the city, sent to school for awhile, trained to sing or dance if they had talent, or put into "productions" of some sort, so that they might learn to act.

"We've been here, in and out of engagements, for five years," Julia said, "but we've never got anything

decent yet, because Fifi's always had the best child's part the old cow can grab. And outsiders come next; because we're paid for, anyhow, so she goes for a good commission."

I felt deeply, though vaguely, dispirited. The girls made the world seem a horrible place, more horrible than I had known it could be, for at the old boarding-houses, I was too young to be impressed by scandals. I said that, if Julia and Kitty went "on the road," I hoped I might go with them; but they replied indifferently that it was not likely we could all get into the same company. They were old enough to play ingénues now, but I would have to begin at the beginning, and work slowly up.

Already I felt heartsick at the thought of their leaving me alone with Mrs. Fergus and Fifi.

XI.

THE Fergus's flat had been meant for offices, and had few conveniences for family life. There was no proper kitchen, no bath, and no place to keep anything. A woman came in the morning to wash dishes and do a little cooking. Other work we did ourselves, or left undone, such as bed-making. We never swept the floors, but when rolls of dust collected, we brushed them under the beds. Most of the food we ate was sent in ready cooked, or came out of tins, and there were no regular meal times.

I missed the clean white bathroom more than anything else at Madame's pretty house; and having learned to love a hot or cold plunge, I could not be content with a little perfunctory splashing. I spent what seemed to the other girls a ridiculous time in washing; and they laughed at me because, being used of late to dressing alone, I was shy about showing my body. I would build up a screen of the two chairs, draped with my clothes, to hide me as I stood on a towel sponging myself from head to foot. But before many weeks had passed, the jokes made by the others on my "modesty" frightened it away. I tried to be bold, and became so. We three ran about without any clothing on, in the warm weather, and paraded from room to room in our chemises. The girls brought back from the theatre where they were playing queer stories and

scandals, which they explained to me, if there were anything obscure; but I pretended to understand the most baffling "second-meanings," for to be "innocent" was to be affected, or silly, at Mrs. Fergus's. The girls were not bad girls, but there was no vileness of which they were ignorant, and they thought it "swell" to talk as they heard women talk in the dressing-rooms. The theatres where they acted were third-rate, and "Oh, hell!" and "My God!" were the exclamations oftenest on their lips. It was a reminder of old times to hear these expressions, but I had grown fastidious and did not care to pick them up, though I imitated the older girls in many ways.

As a child I had sworn strange oaths when I wished to make the boarders laugh; but when my lady of California said that her little girl would have been whipped rather than swear, I broke myself of the habit. I longed to be like her little girl. Then came the years at Madame's; and with her, though I learned few good things except a love for cleanliness, I grew to value beauty, or what I believed to be beauty, in everything, even in speech. Madame avoided all that was rough or coarse; and it was easy for me to copy the carefully picked up refinement of her ways, because of that natural thirst for beauty which was born in me. Though the girls teased me unmercifully and named me "Primmy," I would not talk in their strange jargon. Fifi was harder upon me than the others were, and often Julia and Kitty joined in defending me from her attacks. It was a principle of theirs to unite in disagreeing with Fifi. As for me, they could count upon me to be on their "side." Yet we were not always quarrelling in our dreary bedroom. No love was lost between us and the "enemy," but when it suited us, we agreed tacitly to a kind of armed truce.

As weeks and months drifted aimlessly on, I accustomed myself to the makeshifts and discomforts at Mrs. Fergus's, and no longer noticed them. I took everything for granted, just as I had learned to take the luxuries at Madame's. Most of the lessons I had learned from Miss Minnie I forgot, or seemed to forget. My intellect was curled up, fast asleep.

Early in the autumn, Mrs. Fergus found me an "engagement." I was to dance with a band of children in a big spectacular production at a cheap but popular theatre; and I revelled in the rehearsals. I never tired or felt bored, as the older people did. I could have gone on for ever. The smell of the theatre excited me, and I was always sorry to leave. Memories rushed back, not only of the time when I used to go behind the scenes every evening with Boy and Dearie, but of older days when I sat in dress-baskets, or slept in them on soft piles of clothing, and was carried on to the stage as a large baby, in somebody's arms.

Julia and Kitty were both in the same "show," as they called it, though in real parts, whereas I had only to dance and sing in a children's chorus. But Fifi was promoted to a fashionable theatre, one of the best in New York, and had several lines to speak. She was a boy, in a costume play, and was mentioned by critics, acquaintances of Mrs. Fergus. We all envied her intensely, though we would have put our hands in the fire rather than she should know. Julia and Kitty said that Fifi could not act, and never would; but photographs of her taken in the new part were very pretty and alluring. Seeing them made me want more than ever to grow up.

Julia, who was thin, rubbed cocoanut oil on her neck, night and morning, to make it fat, and I did the same, hoping that it would force my figure to develop

in a hurry, so that, like Fifi and Kitty, I might have womanly curves and roundnesses. After awhile, the oil really seemed to make a difference in my shape, or I imagined it; and I was delighted to think that my dresses were becoming too tight over my chest.

At the theatre everybody in the big company petted me, and called me "Gipsy," or "Kid." I thought no more of sitting on the young men's laps than if their knees had been chairs. They pulled my long hair, and even pinched my calves sometimes, to see if they were really plump, or if I had on "fats." They liked to make me take out my little bitten wad of chewing-gum, to sip their beer, or beer mixed with gin and lemon, a favourite drink at the theatre, for I would twist my face into funny grimaces at the queer taste; and a very little alcohol flew to my head. Then I would babble silly things, which set the men laughing. But they treated me as a child, and I believe they would have protected me from real harm.

The spectacular piece was a great success; and after running all that winter and early spring in New York, it was sent on the road for the summer. A great many of the chorus people were discharged, to save expense, but to our frantic joy, Julia and Kitty and I were kept on. Mrs. Fergus told us that we must thank her for this, but Julia said it was "no such thing." We were wanted by the management; and anyhow, there would have been no reason for gratitude. Mrs. Fergus took a commission off our salary. Also she would put two other girls from the country in our places, but not three, because Fifi clamoured to have a whole bed to herself in future.

The morning we learned that we were to go, we joined hands and danced round the room, without any

clothes on, like young Bacchantes, our long hair whirling round our naked shoulders.

We played nowhere less than a week when on tour, and were a fortnight in some towns. We three herded together in one room at hotels, and I was so happy that I laughed all day. I began to grow, very fast, and decided to put up my hair, and have my skirts let down. At a town in the middle west I asked our landlady to find a cheap dressmaker who could make me some new frocks; and a Miss Plum came to sew for me, sitting to work in our bedroom. She was only eighteen, but so plain that I knew she could never have fun in her life, as Julia and Kitty and I had. Miss Plum's face was yellow and covered with pimples; but I felt such a passionate pity for her, that when she had finished my work and was going away, I resolved to kiss her good-bye. I hated to do this, because her complexion was disgusting, and I did not really like her at all. But the kiss was to show the poor girl that I thought myself no better than she, and I expected her to be thankful. It was almost a religious rite. On the contrary, she was shocked.

"Well, I never thought I'd live to be kissed by a show actress!" she mumbled, her unwholesome face turning a dark red.

This was the first snub I received on account of the profession I had proudly entered. I could not understand, and I lay awake brooding over it nearly all that night, feeling hurt and ashamed. It was some time before the wound healed, though I never spoke of it to anyone. When I thought of the spotted cheek which I had screwed up courage to kiss, and saw again the outraged look in Miss Plum's boiled gooseberry eyes, I shivered, as superstitious people shiver when someone "walks over their graves." It seems a small thing

now, and preposterously funny; yet I can't help feeling that it was a little pathetic, remembering how miserable it made me then.

Not that I was unhappy long. Almost everything made me want to sing for joy. The bare thought of unhappiness for myself or others was like standing on the edge of a black pit, looking down into unimaginable depths. I was not unselfish in little things, yet I used to fancy that to save anyone else from great sorrow, I would gladly die. And to wake up in the dark night sometimes, with a voice murmuring in my ears: "All the world is full of unhappiness; many people are never happy. Perhaps *you* will fall down into that black pit of despair when you're older," was like death. Such a voice never spoke in the daytime, and if I heard any echo of it in the sunshine I could easily say to myself, "Pooh! it doesn't matter what happens when you are older!" For I was sure that nothing was of the least importance in life, after thirty; and besides, it was too bad to be true, that I could ever be really unhappy.

I enjoyed every minute, except those occasional bad moments in the night, which seemed like presentiments, and they came seldom. I had a queer impression that the dark thoughts were the ghosts of dead bats, which flapped through the window and hovered over my head, until my will was strong enough to drive them out.

Rather strangely, the kiss I gave Miss Plum, and the snub I got from her in return, left a more lasting impression than anything else in my first tour. It is odd that I remember comparatively few events; and in looking back see only a confused jumble, with here and there an incident, like a star that twinkles through a wild mass of cloud rollicking along in the wind.

It is only after we reached Chicago that I see clearly again. ✕

We arrived late, just in time to eat, unpack a little, and go to the theatre, not far from the hotel where Julia and Kitty and I had a room. But next day, for the first time, I put on one of the long dresses which Miss Plum had made two weeks before. I had yearned to wear it ever since it was finished, but had not been able to muster courage, knowing that I would be teased by everyone in the company, I being the youngest, and fair game for all. In thinking it over, I decided to wait till Chicago, for everybody was looking forward to the biggest city of the tour, and would be too busy to pay much attention to me. People would hardly notice the difference at first, I hoped, and afterwards, when remarks were made, I could say, "Why, I've been wearing this dress a long time."

Julia and Kitty knew what was going to happen, beforehand, but were singularly indifferent. I could not believe that their first long skirts had seemed as interesting to them as mine did to me.

Having settled on what to do, I waked early, thinking about the frock, and how I would wear my hair, under my best hat, which was more grown-up looking than the "sailor" I travelled in. I was ready to go for a walk while Julia and Kitty were still in bed, and too sleepy to look at me.

My heart beat fast as I stepped out into the corridor, and I glanced around anxiously, hoping that none of our people would be there. I was relieved to meet no one, except a servant or two of the hotel. They took no notice of me, and I did not know whether to be pleased or disappointed.

On the stair-landing above the first floor was a huge mirror, reaching from the floor nearly to the ceiling,

and framed in faded red velvet. I saw myself in it, "a grown-up young lady" at last.

"Oh, Lily Merritt!" I said involuntarily, under my breath; and was surprised at myself, because it was years since I had played with Lily Merritt, the girl in the glass, or had even thought of her.

"I believe you are *pretty*, Lily Merritt!" I told that girl; and I was suddenly so happy that I did not care who saw me, or who tried to tease me about my done-up hair, or my dress that came down to my insteps. I was sure that I looked nice; and it was glorious to be grown up at fourteen.

In the street, I kept glancing at my reflection in the shop windows, and when young men stared at me, I could have jumped with joy. At last, I was no longer a little girl. No one could call me "Kid." I should have as much fun as Julia and Kitty, and "make mashes," as they did.

To "make a mash" was to have a boy or young man follow you away from the stage entrance, or speak to you in the street, and sometimes send you candy or flowers, at the theatre. Julia and Kitty had a great many such adventures, over which they chuckled in our bedroom at night, and perhaps exaggerated a little. I had never had any yet, and envied the older girls.

That very day came my turn. A young man paused behind me as I looked into a shop window, and asked if I would let him "buy me a hat or something?" I said, "No. Go away!" promptly; yet I tingled with pleasure. My chief reason for wishing such a thing to happen had been that I might report it to Julia and Kitty; but after all I was ashamed to tell what the man had said, for fear they might believe that I was only "making it up."

One night in Chicago, a very pretty girl whom we

had not seen before, came and stood in the wings at the theatre. She seemed much interested in my scenes, and I was flattered, noticing that her eyes were often on me. She stood about with Hellier, the stage manager, and they talked together in whispers, though he always scolded us if we chattered in the wings.

Since leaving New York I had had a part, with two lines to speak, having been promoted for the "road." I was a boy, in tights, and though at first it had been strange and not quite pleasant to show my legs, half the other girls in the company, including Julia, were wearing the same kind of costume, and I soon grew used to it, as I had grown used to bathing before three pairs of eyes, at Mrs. Fergus's. I thought that Mr. Hellier's pretty friend was admiring my pale blue costume, as she looked at it so intently and often; but that night I received a message bidding me to the stage manager's room; and there I was quickly undeceived.

Hellier was a youngish man, dark and small, with one white lock in his black hair. He had a soft manner when he was not angry, but if anything happened to upset him, he raged about the stage, pulling as if at a moustache, though his had been shaved off, and sputtering and swearing. Whenever he was excited, he stammered oddly, and this he began to do as I came to the door. I wondered if I had done anything wrong, and was to be scolded. But he began to speak to me kindly, and I was so interested in his queer stammer, that he had talked for some time before I realised what he was saying. Then, suddenly, I understood that I was not to go on any farther with the company.

Hellier explained that an understudy for several of the principal characters was wanted, and I was too

young to be trusted for such work. Expenses had to be kept down, and the management did not wish to carry an extra person. Now, a girl could be got who would play my part, and do the understudying as well, for the same money. Legally, I could not complain if I were given two weeks' notice, or the equivalent salary; but for Mrs. Fergus's sake, and my own, the management would do better than that for me. A "society girl" was just going out as a star, with a company in repertoire, and wanted an ingénue for several small but good parts. Hellier was a friend of Miss Lester's business manager, and had "fixed it up" with him for me, provided I were approved by the star.

"But there's n-n-nothing in that," he assured me. "Sh-she'll like you all r-right." And he went on to say that he had made an appointment for me to call on Miss Lester the next morning at ten o'clock.

When he was embarrassed, not only did he stutter, but brought in the word "around," over and over again, in a curious and senseless way, which was like a kind of madness.

"You're mighty l-lucky, and—and—a-round," he said, "to g-get such a chance at y-your age, and around. You might have g-gone on for years, and around, w-without s-six l-lines to s-speak. N-now, when you g-get back to New York, and a-round, Mrs. Fergus can m-maybe fit you out w-with a bang up part in a first-rate theatre, right away, and—and around."

The news that I was not to go on with the company was a heavy blow. I had all I could do to keep the tears from my eyes, for I was fond of Julia and Kitty, and liked everybody. But I had a kind of stubborn pride which made me feel that the thing of most importance was not to let Hellier see that I cared. I thought of the inevitable Jenny Elmore, and by and

by, as he went on painting my new prospects in bright colours, I was a little comforted. His soft, wheedling manner hypnotised me into believing that "the management" was really considering my interests. I parted from Hellier almost cheerfully, and by the time I found Julia and Kitty, I was so excited that I hardly knew whether to be sad or glad.

They gave each other a long look, with raised eyebrows.

"It's *settled* then, anyhow," said Julia.

"We might have known it would be the Kid," said Kitty.

The "Kid" was my name in the company, given me by the leading man, a fine actor who need never have left New York, if he had not loved champagne too well.

I begged the girls to tell me what they meant. The mystery was too good to keep, though neither of them really wished to hurt my feelings.

It seemed that the pretty girl who had looked at my scenes from the wings was Mr. Hellier's mistress. He had wanted her to go out with our company, but she had the offer of something better than he could secure for her. She was English, and had sung in London music halls; but for some reason had failed to please Chicago audiences in the vaudeville theatre where she had been engaged. Her story was that the manager made love to her, and "our people" had begun to whisper among themselves, when they saw her in the wings, that "someone would have to go." Julia and Kitty had heard nothing, until after I had been sent for by Hellier. Then one of the other actresses staying in the hotel had told them who the pretty girl was, and what was likely to happen. Each was afraid that she might be the sacrifice. And I could see that, though Julia and Kitty liked me well enough, their relief on

their own account overcame their regret on mine. What they told me about Hellier and the English girl showed me of how little importance I was to the "management," and this talk made me feel that it was an enviable thing to be loved, on any terms, by a man in Hellier's position. I was hurt to the heart that the girls sympathised so slightly with me, and so little minded losing me. But I was too proud to let them see this. I began to pretend that I was glad to go. And I remembered things I had heard Madame say about women; that they never cared truly for each other. Not that I was a woman yet, but I was beginning to think of myself as one. The emotional side of me was developing, and I was glad to realise it. I told myself that I hated the English girl, and imagined a tragic scene between us, in which I dominated her, as Queen Mary dominated Queen Elizabeth in the play of "Mary Stuart." I made up my mind that I would say something terrible to the girl on the stage that night, if she came to watch me again in the wings; that perhaps we would strike each other, while everyone looked on and tried to separate us; that she would cower before me; and the nice leading man, who had named me "the Kid," would say, "There's the making of a great actress in that child! It's a shame she should get the chuck for a d—d foreigner." I knew, of course, if he applied any adjective, it would be "d—d," as that was the stock expression. It was too much trouble to invent anything fresh.

Just as I had expected, the new girl did come into the wings, at the same time as the night before. But she looked so pretty and pleasant that I could not hate her after all. When my scene was over she was alone. Hellier was not with her. This was my opportunity, and I was ashamed of myself because I had no wish to

seize it. I thought that I must be weak, and perhaps even cowardly, not to feel angry when I saw the girl.

My heart seemed to grow very big in my breast when she followed me and spoke my name. I turned on her brusquely, but her gentle eyes and lovely smile disarmed me, in spite of myself. She said that she felt dreadfully at hearing I was leaving on account of her. She had supposed, from what Mr. Hellier said, that there was room for her as understudy, without anyone having to go. Now, she supposed, it was too late to change, but would I please to believe that it wasn't her fault?

She was quite a common girl, with a Cockney accent. She called herself "Mye" instead of "May," and said "stige" for "stage"; yet her tones were sweet and flute-like. I had never met an Englishwoman before, and, after the nasal voices I heard all around me in the company, hers seemed sweet as I imagined a nightingale's to be. I did not know that her accent was bad, and, as I reluctantly softened towards Miss Tooley, I secretly resolved to imitate her soft way of talking. That same night I began to practise what I called a "creamy voice," with long "a's" and less roll of the "r's" than I had.

Forgiving the English girl, and admiring her manner of speaking, did me a great deal of good. I felt soothed, as one feels after taking some quieting medicine to cure a headache.

As my anger died, a little of my first excitement and pleasure in the thought of a real part came back. The next morning I was almost happy again, and in a good mood to go and call upon Miss Lester.

XII.

HELLIER said that Miss Lester was a "society amateur," and I expected to see her in a beautiful home of her own, with an adoring father and mother. I imagined that her parents were rich, and had provided the money to put her on the stage as a star. The picture I painted in my mind was magnificent, and I was disappointed to find that the star lived in a private hotel or boarding-house. But it was a very different boarding-house from any I had known. The hall had an imitation oak wainscoting, and red paper on the walls, nearly covered with blue china plates. A man-servant with a white necktie and black tail-coat, opened the door for me, and I was ushered into a large public sitting-room to wait while my name was sent to Miss Lester.

In a few minutes the man came back. "Miss Lester will see you in her private parlour," he said. I was glad that I had put on my prettiest dress and hat.

"Front room, next floor, right hand side," the servant directed me, as I went upstairs alone. My heart beat fast as I knocked at the door. "Come in," a woman's voice called. I thought it sounded sweet and young, and hoped it was Miss Lester's. The door-knob was hard to turn, and I fumbled at it vainly. Then I felt it being sharply twisted the opposite way, and the door sprang open. It was a small, nervous-

looking man who had come to my help. He had indeterminate features, which might have been modelled of putty, and thick-lidded eyes that blinked constantly, as if an eyelash had been caught in. A lock of brown hair hung straight over his forehead, and catching sight of it, he would squint and push it aside hastily. But it immediately fell back again.

Another man was lounging in a large easy chair. He stared at me, but did not move, as I came in. This did not surprise me, for the men I knew never got up as a sign of politeness to women.

I took an instant dislike to this second man. He was big and loose-limbed, with beautiful hands, of which he seemed to be proud, for he had them spread out on the arms of the red plush chair, and gazed at them with interest. They had filbert-shaped nails, which were bright pink and brilliantly manicured. He might have been about forty-five, and the muscles of his chin had begun to drop. His light hair, parted in the middle, had receded a little from his high forehead. His nose was a beak, and his mouth small and mean. If a girl had such blue eyes and red and white complexion they would be admired, but his seemed disgusting to me. He was well dressed, much better than the little man, and appeared satisfied with everything about himself.

I saw the two men first, because Miss Lester was at a distant part of the room, and had her back half turned to me, as she searched a pile of manuscripts on a table. As I entered, she found what she wanted, and came forward. At once I felt as if I should love to do anything she might ask me to do.

There was about her a vague resemblance to my dear lady of California, whose face and teachings I had never forgotten. Exactly where lay the likeness I could not have told, but I think now it could have existed

only in expression, and the manner of wearing the hair. Besides, my dear friend had been a lady in breeding and Miss Lester was a lady too. I had not met many ladies; hardly any, indeed, except these.

After association with the girls and young women of our travelling company, Miss Lester's way of doing her hair, and her simply-made dress, struck me as almost Quakerish. She had golden-brown hair, not dyed or bleached, which waved naturally, and broke into little rings on her forehead. It was drawn back into a knot at the nape of her neck, as my dear lady had worn hers. She was pale, without any powder that showed. Her nose was finely chiselled and very delicate; her mouth sensitive, and rather large. When she smiled, her eyes, though not remarkable for shape or size, were like blue-grey stars. To me, with her graceful manner and dainty air, she was an ideal of romance come alive. I wondered how old she was, and fancied that she must be about twenty-six. If I were in her place, I thought that I should beam with pride and joy at being a star in a company of my own. But though Miss Lester's smile turned her grey eyes to shining jewels, when her face was in repose it fell into tired lines. She said "Good morning" to me, and asked a few questions in a sweet voice, but it did not sound gay or vital, as a woman's voice should when all her ambitions are granted.

She introduced me to the two gentlemen, and told me that Mr. Stephen (the little man) was the author of a play she was taking out, the only modern one of her repertoire. It was founded on a novel of Chicago life which he had written, for he was a Chicago journalist, and his book had been a success. I had never heard of it, but that was not strange, because the only novels I read were trashy stories in cheap editions, bought in

the train, or borrowed from other girls in the company. I hardly knew that better novels existed, except those of Dickens, which I had read with Miss Minnie.

The big man was Mr. Westingham, and occasionally Miss Lester called him "Harry," hesitating as she spoke the name, as if she could not accustom herself to using it. What he was to her, or the company, I could not make out, but she appealed to him often, and apparently his opinion was of more importance than that of the author. She turned to "Harry" when the smallest thing had to be decided, and there was a pretty deference in her manner, like timidity disguising itself under sprightliness.

I thought that he saw and enjoyed her anxiety to please him, but he took no trouble in return. Sprawling at ease in the big chair, he was like a well-fed lion watching a white gazelle; not wishing to eat it, but amused at its fear of being eaten. If Miss Lester had not called him "Harry," I should have guessed him to be a rich uncle, of whose criticism she was afraid. When she said to him that it seemed as if I might do very nicely in the part of Susie, he replied indifferently, "One amateur more among many, what does it matter?"

Miss Lester blushed so violently that tears came to her eyes. But she smiled, and answered that, at least, amateurs were enthusiastic and anxious to do well.

It was already arranged for me, by our stage manager, that if Miss Lester decided to engage me, I should have the same salary I had been earning in the old company. It was very small, and I should have two new dresses to buy, but I did not worry. I was sure that I could manage somehow, and already I had a feeling of loyalty towards Miss Lester. She apologised for not offering more money, explaining that this was

her first experiment as a star. Her business-manager had luckily secured dates allotted to a favourite actress, whose tour had to be cancelled on account of illness.

As she talked, other members of the company began to arrive. They had rehearsed several times, but the ingénue newly engaged to play Susie had been released to join a larger company. Because she had left at a day's notice, the part was open for me, and something told me that Hellier's friend was the girl in question. Afterwards I learned that this guess was right.

The rehearsals were being held in Miss Lester's sitting-room, until a theatre should be free. I gathered this fact from the stage-manager, who was the first to come, and who talked a good deal to Mr. Westingham and the author, while Miss Lester greeted the assembling company politely, as if each person were her guest. This, I felt instinctively, was the mark and manner of an amateur.

All the others were amateurs, or new recruits to the profession, except Herman Caine, the stage manager and "heavy man." Each mannerism and gesture of his bespoke the actor, sure of himself and his superiority to the rest. He was not more than thirty, but no one else appeared to be over twenty-six, and he was easily the master, by reason of his experience and personality. He gave somewhat the same impression of dominating force that Mrs. Fergus gave, although he was a handsome young man, and she was a middle-aged mountain of womanhood. Herman Caine was six feet tall, broad-shouldered, very fair, but strong-looking, though rather too stout for his age, cold-eyed, with cruel nostrils, and jaws of iron. It was interesting to see how every other member of the company looked up to him and admired him, even the leading man,

Cyril Raven, who was taller, and ten times handsomer than Herman Caine.

Indeed, Cyril Raven was the handsomest man I had ever seen. He was like a great, beautiful girl who had cropped her dark curls short, and disguised herself as a man. His features were perfect as those of a statue; his curved eyelashes were half an inch long, and he had a trick of flickering them, as a flirtatious girl does. Though his hair, his brows and lashes were almost black, his skin was marble fair, and showed no shadow of beard on its clear whiteness. He was not quite an amateur, for he had played small parts during one season, with a Shakespearean star; but evidently he looked up with reverence to Herman Caine.

The two other young men, almost boys, and the three girls were members of a Chicago school of acting, and this engagement would be their first professional experience. They were nice-looking and well-mannered; well dressed, too. I realised in a few minutes that all were of a different world from mine, except Herman Caine. Disliking him, I nevertheless felt that he was nearer to me than any of the others.

I was the youngest, yet my stage experience made me feel older than the three girls who chattered and laughed like school children. They knew each other well, they and the two youths, for they had played together as the pupils of an old actor who had given up the stage to be a teacher. Their clothes were neat and plain; the girls wore small hats and tailor frocks. Instinctively I knew that they had been brought up by fathers and mothers who loved them, in comfortable homes. Compared with these girls, who were between eighteen and twenty, I felt myself to be meretricious and "actressy." My idea of what was desirable to wear suddenly changed, for it had been founded on the taste

of Julia and Kitty, my only friends. I made up my mind that in future I would wear small hats, and not bunch out my hair so much at the sides. I felt ill at ease, and anxious lest these well-brought-up young people might despise, and join together against me, because I was not what they would consider a lady; but to my great relief they were gracious. I began to understand that they respected me because I was already on the stage, just as they respected Herman Caine for his experience.

All the others were well up in their parts. I had to read mine, but I put my soul into it, for I wanted to please Miss Lester, and show the big, sprawling "Harry" that, if I were only "one more amateur among many," I had some idea of acting. At the end of the rehearsal, Miss Lester said that I had done excellently, better than the girl who was to have been Susie. Her words made my heart beat with joy; yet I was not entirely happy. I felt instinctively that the play would not be a success; and I had a conviction that Miss Lester felt this too.

We opened in Chicago, and had poor notices. The papers said that the star was amateurish and monotonous, that Stephen's play was dull and the company "slight-waisted." Everybody tried to pretend that criticisms did not matter, yet all were depressed and nervous about their own acting, except, of course, Herman Caine. His part, that of the villain, had not attracted much attention from the critics, but at least he was not abused. Strange to say, "Susie" pleased them, and I had several lines of praise in most of the papers. Miss Lester generously congratulated me, though she looked sadder and more anxious than before; but Herman Caine said that Chicago newspaper men were fools.

Neither the author of the play nor "Harry" travelled with us, when we started for our tour in the West. Harry saw Miss Lester on, however, and they had a long, whispered conversation in the train. As soon as he was gone, and we had begun to move out of the big railway station, Cyril Raven went and sat by the star, in the compartment which she was to have all to herself. Mine, which I shared with a girl named Katherine Kasper, was near the star's. Inadvertently, I glanced up from a book I was reading, and saw Miss Lester and Cyril gazing at one another. A curious thrill ran through me. I had never seen such a look in human eyes as in theirs, which seemed drowning in each other's light.

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XIII.

THERE can never have been a more emotional company than ours. From the first, the sense of failure hung over us like a cloud, yet the rumour had gone round that there was plenty of money, and that no matter what bad business we did, the tour would not be stopped.

Harry was the "angel," or backer. That secret, if it were a secret, was told me before the opening night, by Charlie Mills, who played Susie's lover. Harry was supposed to be an old friend of Miss Lester's people, who were apparently all dead. And Charlie said that as our "angel" was one of the richest men in Chicago, everything ought to be "all right for us," whatever happened. But as the tour went on, there began to be whisperings. The company feared that just the one thing had happened which might prevent everything else from being "all right."

One evening I heard Herman talking to Cyril in the wings, during a wait they had together. "You're a d—d fool," he said, in his low, vibrating voice. "The old man's sure to find out."

"How will he find out?" asked Cyril. "Who is there would tell him?"

Herman shrugged his shoulders.

It would have been charming to see how those two

—the star, and her handsome stage lover—worshipped each other, if it had not been for that cloud of unnamed fear brooding over us. But the cloud, as if it were electrical, seemed to influence our emotional natures. We were all palpitating with one passion or another. Not one of us had a tranquil hour. ✓

I worshipped Miss Lester, who made a pet of me, and asked me to call her Alma. If I had not adored her, I should have been in love with Cyril, who was so beautiful to look at, that I could hardly keep my eyes away from him. I was fond of drawing, though I had never had lessons, and I could catch a likeness easily. I bought a little book, and nearly filled it with sketches of Cyril Raven. When I had not the book with me, half unconsciously I drew his profile in the air with one finger. That was the beginning of the habit which amused you, when you first knew me. I remember how you asked me what I was doing with my moving finger, and whether I was writing in the air. I was drawing your profile. I wish yours had been the first I drew! But ever since my love of beauty bewitched me with Cyril Raven's features, I have always caught myself drawing in the air profiles of interesting faces. I seem to feel with my finger that the likeness is perfect; but faces I don't care for, or dislike, have no distinct features for my eyes. I cannot hold them in my memory even long enough to sketch them in the air.

I enjoyed cultivating a romantic regret, because I had no right to love Cyril. He belonged to Alma, and it would have been disloyal to want him for myself. But between worship of her and admiration of him, which touched pain, my emotions were played upon like the strings of an Æolian harp by contrary winds. One of the other girls was desperately in love with

Cyril. Another humbly loved Herman, who—had he cared for anyone but himself—would have liked to attract Alma, if only for vanity's sake. Even I could see that, as perhaps my bent for acting made me very observant. I could not help watching people, and speculating about their motives and actions, just as I could not help mimicking them if they were peculiar, or sketching them if they were interesting.

Charlie had fallen in love with me, and I took a wicked pleasure in torturing him, because he was my first victim, and because he was not the beautiful Cyril, who loved our star. Katherine loved Charlie, and Charlie treated her with an almost insulting indifference. We were all playing at cross purposes, all morbidly interested in our own feelings. The girls, including myself, cried very easily. Hardly a night passed that there was not hysterical sobbing in one or other of the dressing-rooms. Alma and Cyril thought only of each other. Their love made them radiant, and it was as if they set a tune to which we all danced. Our own affairs were so absorbing, that we thought comparatively little about our parts; and as we had bad business everywhere, our acting seemed hardly to matter. It was as if we were travelling for our own amusement, not to produce plays.

When we had been touring for a month, Alma began to have strange nervous attacks. She started at every sudden sound, and fainted sometimes between acts at the theatre. Whether she received disturbing letters, or whether she worried over the poor "business," no one knew, but her anxiety was contagious. The atmosphere was electrical. We expected something to happen. She and Cyril were more devoted to each other than ever. They came to the theatre together, and went home together. Herman had the

manners of a sulky bear. He and Cyril hardly spoke to each other, though they had started with an intimacy at first.

One night, in a large town as far west as the Rockies, Mr. Westingham walked into the theatre. We knew that Alma had not been warned of his coming, for, seeing him in the wings, she fainted on the stage, and the curtain was hastily rung down. It was he who picked her up in his arms, carried her to her dressing-room, and shut the door.

I would have thought that nothing could keep Cyril from her; but after all, Herman's hand on his arm was enough to hold him back. And with that magnetic grasp all Herman's old influence on him seemed to return. We could hear Harry's voice, loud and harsh, behind the thin door, when Alma had come to herself. We could hear her sobbing and wailing, but Cyril stayed in his own dressing-room, which he shared with Herman.

The curtain was kept down a long time, until boys began to stamp and whistle, out in front. Then Herman rang up, Cyril by his side, ready to go on, his beautiful face looking frozen. I had a scene to go through with him. He played it without a mistake, his eyes travelling sometimes, as if fascinated, to Herman, who watched him from the wings. Then it was time for me to give Alma her cue to come on. I could see that she was not in her entrance, and I did not know what to do. Slowly I spoke the words which should have brought her on the stage; still she did not appear.

I had not much experience, but I knew enough to say something—anything that came into my head, rather than be silent. Cyril "played up to me," and we "faked" (as actors call it) for a few minutes, wildly, he looking strange and dazed, yet somehow dogged.

Then I saw Alma hurrying towards her entrance. She walked unsteadily, as men walk when they are drunk.

I gave her the cue, and was half afraid she would not take it up, but she did, quickly enough. Her voice sounded old, yet she forgot none of her lines. When she had to speak to Cyril, she lifted her eyes to him in appeal or despair, but he lowered his long eyelashes in the girlish way he had, and would not return her look.

Their great love scene (always so impassioned that romantic girls in the audience applauded it invariably) went for nothing that night. Not one pair of hands was clapped. I, supposed to be asleep in a conservatory, peeped between half-shut lids at the auditorium, and saw Westingham in a box. The theatre was half empty and full of echoing noises. I thought anxiously of his money, and how it was being poured out, with little return.

While I was dressing to go home, at the end of the play, a note was brought me by the call-boy. It was from Alma, scribbled in pencil on a torn bit of programme. She wrote: "Be in my room to-night, and in bed, when I get back. I'll give you time to undress. Will explain afterwards." Her key was wrapped in the paper.

We were all stopping in the same hotel, but Alma had one of the best rooms. Mine was at the top of the house, and very small and hot. I had Katherine for a room-mate, but lately she never spoke to me if she could help it, on account of Charlie.

Katherine was not on in the last act, so when I flew in to get my nightgown and tooth-brush, she had begun to undress. Before I was ready to go, the other girls came, and tried to make me tell them what Alma had written, for they all seemed to know about the

note. But I would not answer. I hurried away, leaving them to talk over the situation. They looked eager, like hungry young birds who have been given a choice morsel of food to divide.

I was in Alma's bed, when she opened the door and switched on the light. Hearing Harry's voice, I pretended to be fast asleep.

"You see," she said, in the odd-sounding voice, which was not like hers. "I told you the truth. Good-night."

"I see what you want me to see, and I've seen a lot more you don't want me to see," he growled. "You've made your own bed, and now you've got to lie in it."

They were talking at the door, and without another word the big man walked away. Alma gave a little gasp, as if she would have called him back, but it broke off short, inarticulately. She must have stood looking after him for a minute, perhaps expecting him to turn back. When he did not, she came in, and softly shut the door. As I heard her locking it, I opened my eyes wide; but I was so frightened at the look on her face that I shut them again, lest it might distress her to think I had seen. She supposed that, after all, I must really be asleep, and moved softly, meaning not to wake me. Then, as if she could bear it no longer, she came to the bed, and laid her hand on mine, which was outside the covering. Hers was burning.

"For God's sake—for God's sake," she stammered in a kind of moaning whisper.

I sat up and wound my arms around her, as she let herself drop limply on the bed. Her head fell on to my shoulder, and as her face pressed against my breast, I felt my nightgown wet with her hot tears.

"What can I do?" I asked; but she did not answer.

For many moments she sobbed, strange sobs, and

then, without my having dared to speak again, she began to falter out a broken story.

In this way she told me things which had been the common gossip of the dressing-rooms. I think Herman Caine had spread the scandal. But he knew only the part concerning "Harry." I heard now, for the first time, how poor and alone Alma had been, and that it was Harry's suggestion to send her out as a star with a company of her own. It was true that he had known her people. He had lent her money to pay for lessons in the dramatic school where Charlie and the girls had studied. Alma was the star pupil, and left soon after the others came. She had tried to find an engagement and failed. Then Harry had offered to finance her, as a star, for a long tour. At first she had not meant things to go beyond friendship between them, but he was stronger than she. By the time the tour was arranged, and the company engaged, he made her see that he meant to have his price. Rather than let everything fall through at the last moment, and lose the chance of being near Cyril, with whom she had fallen in love at first sight, she had paid the price. At first, she was grateful to Harry; yet afterwards she felt nothing but repulsion for him. She feared him, too, and knew that she was in danger, but was ready to risk everything for Cyril. "I would have given up the whole thing before starting out," she said, "if that hadn't meant parting from Cyril, perhaps for ever. I think he cares for me, too, for even Herman can't make him keep away from me, though he tries."

I told her that I hated Herman, and believed he had secretly sent word of what was going on to Westingham. Nobody else in the company would have been so cruel. But Alma did not care what Herman had done. She cared only for what he might do, and forgot her

fear of Harry, and his threats, in her dread that now Herman would take Cyril from her. Harry was returning to Chicago at once. They had had a terrible scene, and he had told her that he would send no more money. Alma had nothing of her own, and did not know what would become of her, or any of us. Still, she repeated that she could bear anything if only Cyril would be true.

I did my best to comfort her, but I felt in my heart that everything was over. I remembered how Cyril had looked down rather than meet her eyes, and how coldly he had played his love scene, though she had begun it more passionately than ever, in spite of Harry's presence. I thought that Cyril was not brave enough, or strong enough, to stand against the rich financier, who could do him harm in his profession. Now that Herman's warnings to him had come true, it seemed to me that Cyril was chilled and cowed by the danger.

I saw no wrong in Alma's being the mistress of a man like Harry. She was the best woman I had ever known, since my lady of California, and whatever she did was right. My idea was that every girl who wanted to succeed must get some man to help her up the ladder, unless she had rich relations. It was part of the game of life, I thought, and my only regret for Alma was that her ladder seemed likely to be pulled down because of Cyril. I began to realise that he was not worth the fall, and, from half loving, I despised him. But I dared not say this to Alma. I saw that it would only make her suffer more.

I wondered if "Mye," the English girl, would fall in love with the leading man in the old company, and if she did, what Hellier would do when he found out. The thought cleared away any resentment that I had

left against "Mye"; and whatever happened, I was glad to be with Alma.

The next few days were terrible for us all. There was not enough money to take us out of town, and when Johnson, our business-manager, telegraphed in desperation to Harry, no answer came. There were no salaries, and we could not pay our hotel bills. The proprietor seized our luggage, and we were unable to make the long "jump" to the next place where we were due to play. Then Johnson, on the pretence of going ahead to arrange ways and means, left us in the lurch, taking such money as he had, to get back to Chicago.

Alma ate nothing, and lived on a little milk. She kept her room, and would not show herself outside the door. Her face fell into hollows, and her beauty and youth were dimmed. None of the girls would come near their once adored star, whom they had caressed and flattered in happier days. She was in black disgrace with the whole company, for what they called her "selfishness." Herman had "warned her of what would happen, but she would not let Cyril alone!" Nobody blamed Cyril. It was all Alma's fault that supplies were stopped. One day she sent me to beg of Cyril that he would come and speak to her, if only for a minute. I went to his door, but Herman was in the room, and sharply refused in Cyril's name. Cyril himself was silent. "Tell her it's impossible," Herman said, in his hard voice. In his grey eyes there was a light that showed a cruel pleasure.

"She must write to Westingham and ask to be forgiven," he went on. "She's treated the fellow damn badly. As for Cyril, she tempted him through his man's weakness. You can say all this to her, from me. And tell Miss Lester everything is over between her

and Cyril. Cyril doesn't wish to look at her again. He's thoroughly disgusted with her, like the rest of us. The only thing she can do, if she doesn't want him to hate her, is to help us out of the scrape she's got us into. We look to her to do that."

I softened the message, but I could not change its meaning. When Alma had heard, she sat quite still for a minute. Then she asked if Cyril had spoken at all. I said no. Or if he had looked at me? I had to say no to that question too. Cyril had pretended to read a book, which trembled in his hand, and had let Herman talk for him.

"Thank you, dear," Alma said suddenly, in a brisk, changed voice. "That's all I wanted to know. Now I've some letters to write. You can run away."

She got up from the bed on which she had been sitting, and taking my face between her two stone-cold hands, kissed me with lips like ice. "Good-bye, my only little friend," she whispered, her voice fading into huskiness again. She put me gently out of the room, and immediately after, as I lingered in the corridor, her key grated in the lock.

I was vaguely frightened, and did not like to leave her; but when, after a few minutes' silence, I heard sounds over the half open transom as of splashing water, I felt relieved. I thought that Alma must have been crying, and if she had stopped to wash off the tears, she must be better.

I went to my own room, but Katherine and the other girls were there, gloomily talking over our troubles and prospects. No one wanted to send home for money. The whole company sympathised with Herman in thinking that the star was to blame; and that it was her duty to save us. I would not listen to the hateful things the girls said of Alma, and, after blurting out

what I thought of their cruelty, I rushed off again, slamming the door to annoy them.

I do not know what drew me back to Alma. She had sent me away. I wanted to go to her, but dared not. Yet I could not rest far from her. Something, about which I was almost superstitious afterwards, took me to her corridor. It was as if a hand grasped my dress and pulled me there. I have no understanding of such things, and no formed theories; but it seems not impossible that a thought-current sent from one mind may have power to draw another mind, already in sympathy with it. You and I spoke a little of that subject once; but we did not get very far. There were so many things that cried to us to talk of them, while there was time.

I paused in front of Alma's door, listening. I said to myself, if I heard her crying again, perhaps I might beg to be let in; but there was not a sound. Not the faintest rustling. Not a crackle of paper, as if she were writing the letters she had told me she meant to write. Not a breath. Not the slight creak of a loose board under a footfall.

It seems to me that there are many different kinds of silence. The silence out of doors is full of a million little delicate sounds, which are like the breathing of flowers and grass and trees, and the talk of insects, or filmy, unseen creatures secretly visiting each other. Indoors, an ordinary silence is made up from a patchwork of tiny noises, too; a movement of curtains in some faint breeze, wheezings of wood, and I do not know what of homely stirrings. But, whether I was supersensitive, or whether there were really a tell-tale mystery in that silence which seemed to steal out like the fumes of incense from Alma's room, I cannot say. I can tell you only that it played on my nerves as a bow

plays on the strings of a violin. I *had* to knock and call to Alma, though I knew she might be lying down asleep, forgetting her troubles.

There was no answer.

It was cruel to wake her if she rested, but I knocked again, and then again, loudly.

The silence on the other side was thick and heavy, like a fall of feathers or snow. The thought came to me that it would be as still as that in the country of the moon.

I tried to get in, but the door was locked, as I was sure it would be. Suddenly, a rage of fear ran through me from head to foot, like fire bursting out from behind a barrier. I did not know what to do. But as I looked around, I saw a chair and a table in the corridor. I picked the table up, though it was heavy, and set it down before Alma's door. On it, I put the chair.

When I had climbed up, I could peer over the transom, which was still half open, as all our transoms were, because of the heat.

Alma's bed was opposite the transom. She was lying there, dressed in a white dress, which was the only gown, except the one she wore when I saw her last, which the landlord had left her in taking away her trunks.

It was a very pretty and delicate dress, and my first thought was to wonder why she had put it on just to lie down, instead of slipping on a wrapper. But instantly a dreadful idea sprang into my mind. I seemed to feel it flash in, as if my brain had suddenly been lit up with electricity.

She had pulled down the window blind, but it was pale grey, like the wall-paper, and thin. The light that came into the room was like moonlight, and Alma, in her white dress, on the white coverlet, might have been

a figure cut out in marble. Beside the bed was a small table, with two sealed letters on it; nothing else except her stylographic pen.

I cried out "Alma!" once more; yet she did not stir. Then I scrambled down, and the chair pitched off the table with a crash. I would not stop, but ran quickly to Cyril's door. In my excitement, I threw it open without knocking. Cyril was not reading any more. Herman was still with him, and they were playing some game of cards. It struck me as horrible that they should be amusing themselves.

"You have killed her," I said. "She is dead."

They both sprang up, and Cyril's cards fell on the floor. He stood staring at me, his face blanched and beautiful. But Herman's face grew red, and his eyes were hard and narrow. "It would be like her beastly selfishness if she's gone and committed suicide," he said in a voice like breaking ice.

I could have struck him. But there was no time to waste, and I ran ahead of them both, to Alma's door.

"You'll have to burst it open," I said. "The key's in the lock."

"If we do, there'll be a hell of a row," mumbled Herman. "Wait a minute. Let me think."

Cyril did not speak. A film of tears covered his eyes, like a crystal case. I think he was afraid to let the tears fall, because Herman would sneer at him.

We were all silent for a minute. Then Herman asked me if I thought I was small enough to crawl through the transom, if he put two chairs on the table, one on top of the other, and steadied them well. If I could do that, and drop down on the other side, it would be a good thing. I could unlock the door, and if Alma were not dead, after all, we might save a scandal.

"I'm Cyril's friend, and I don't want any scandal

for his sake," Herman said. "You're Miss Lester's friend, and you don't want one, for hers."

I thought for a few seconds, and then told him that I would try. I was cold and trembling, yet not with fear for myself. I felt sure that I could get through the transom; but I was afraid of finding Alma dead.

Herman and Cyril brought back the table and chair I had climbed on before, and found another chair, a very light one, from an empty room near by. They wanted to help me up, but I hated them so bitterly that I would not let them touch me. I shook off their hands, and they only steadied the chairs as I climbed.

It was not nearly as easy to get through the transom as I had thought it would be, because of the way the glass was swung. But the opening was quite large, and I was slim. I was determined not to fail, and I did what I had to do, somehow. When I hung on to the frame, and jumped down on the other side, I made so much noise that I thought people would come running from below stairs to see what had happened; but there was no one in the room underneath, and nobody came.

I knew that the men outside expected me to open the door at once, but I left it locked when I had picked myself up from the floor, and went softly over to the bed. I meant, if Alma were only asleep after all, not to open the door; but when I bent over her, and saw how white and strange her face was, I knew that she must be dead or dying. She looked calm and lovely, not as if she had suffered; but there was a peculiar expression which I cannot describe, except that it seemed to belong to another world.

I tiptoed back and unlocked the door. It would have seemed wrong to step heavily.

Herman and Cyril were there, waiting. They had

put away the table and chairs, and the instant the door was opened they came in and closed it behind them. It was Herman who pushed Cyril in and shut the door. Cyril looked ghastly, and would have hung back if Herman had not forced him in ahead of him. But he could not make Cyril go to the bed. If he had tried to do that, I think Cyril might have collapsed. Herman would have shaken Alma by the shoulder, to see whether she breathed, or opened her eyes, if I had not cried, "Don't be rough with her! If you are, I'll scream, and call the landlord."

I suppose he was afraid of being turned out of the hotel and made uncomfortable, in case of new trouble, and scandal about a suicide.

He put his head down to her breast and listened. "I think she's alive," he said. "She must have taken something, but there's no smell of laudanum or chloroform."

"Chloral, perhaps," Cyril whispered, in a stifled voice. "She had some, I know, to use when she couldn't sleep."

"It doesn't matter. We'll learn what it was, sooner or later," said Herman. "The first thing is to get a doctor. Go out, old man, and bring one. Don't ask in the hotel. Inquire outside. And hurry."

No doubt Cyril was glad to go. He rushed away without a look at the bed.

As soon as he was gone, Herman pushed the electric bell. I, standing by Alma's bedside, wondered what he meant to do.

Soon a maid came, and he asked for hot water and mustard. Miss Lester had been taken ill, he said, and we wanted to put her feet in a mustard bath.

Alma was always very pleasant to servants, and the girl made haste to bring the things. There was a great

tin can of water, and a heaped cup of mustard. But Herman had told the maid a falsehood. When she had left the room, he mixed cold water with the hot, making it tepid. Then he stirred in mustard, and said to me, in a low, hard voice, that I would have to help him give Miss Lester an emetic. If we waited, and did nothing, she would die before the doctor came.

He held her up, her head falling back, and made me pour the disgusting liquid slowly into her mouth; but it ran out, all over her pretty dress, and over the bed, staining the pure white muslin and the pillows and coverlet bright yellow. I felt very sick, as if I should faint.

While we were doing this dreadful thing, Cyril came back with a tall, cadaverous man. They walked in hastily, and softly, without knocking, and Cyril would have gone out again, if the doctor had not told him to stay; he might need help.

"Have you found out what she took?" the tall man asked. He carried a bag, like all the doctors I remembered.

"No," Herman answered. "I've looked, but there's nothing in the glass, and I don't see any bottle."

"Well, we must do the best we can," the doctor said. "It's certainly some sleeping stuff, very likely chloral or chlorodyne. That's one of the easiest drugs to get, in small quantities."

I told myself, in a dull way, that it would be just as well to remember this, in case I ever wanted to kill myself. One could get chlorodyne, little by little, and save it up, till one had enough.

The doctor injected something into one of Alma's arms. I am not sure what it was, but I think it must have been brandy. The room smelled of brandy. He poured something into her mouth—only a few drops;

but whatever it was, it did not dribble out as the mustard water had.

"She's coming to!" he said at last. "That's all right!"

He and Herman got Alma off the bed, and with their arms round her waist and shoulders, began dragging her up and down the room. They had to bear her whole weight. She hung in their clasp, her feet trailing, not walking at all. Her head fell on one side, and her hair slid down, in a long braid, which slowly unplaited itself as they walked her back and forth. By and by her eyes opened. She groaned faintly, and then was violently sick.

It was all like a hideous dream.

They would not let her stop walking, though she begged to rest, and moaned that it was cruel to bring her back to life. When she became fully conscious, after a long time, she saw Cyril, and called him, in a weak voice. But Herman said harshly, "Go, Cyril. You aren't needed here now." And very quietly Cyril slipped out.

If I had had a spark of admiration for him left, it would have died then. For all his beauty, he seemed to me a worm.

Alma was very ill that night, delirious sometimes. Herman and I took turns in sitting by her. I did not want him to come, but he insisted, coldly. He said that it was best for him to know what she was saying. "The woman is only pretending to be out of her head, so as to excite our sympathy," he stated in a loud voice, but, he added, no one could possibly have any sympathy for her now. As if she hadn't done enough harm before, she had finished the thing by selfishly trying to die and leave her company to shift for itself.

Once, when she seemed to understand what he was

saying, Alma faltered, in a queer little bleating voice, that she had written a letter to Harry. She had begged him to do for the company when she was dead, what he would not do for her when she was alive. "I was dying for you all," she quavered.

"Pooh! That's hysterical nonsense, and you know it," Herman answered harshly.

When I cried out, "You are a brute to speak to her so!" he said, "It's the only way to treat hysteria. I'm cruel to be kind."

Next day he telegraphed to Harry, but, as it had been when Johnson wired, no answer came.

Such jewellery as Alma owned, she had given Johnson to sell for her, thinking to use the money as far as it would go, for the company's hotel bills; but Johnson had taken it to pay his own fare back to Chicago. She had nothing left, except one ring, which had been her dead mother's. She had meant never to part with it, but when there was no reply from Harry, the landlord refused any further grace for us, unless she gave something on account. I was the one whom Alma selected as a messenger to try and pawn the ring, or sell, if a pawnbroker offered too little. Knowing how she valued her mother's gift, however, I would not give it up irrevocably. I had never been to a pawnbroker before; and if I had gone on my own business, I might have been easily browbeaten by the insolent young Jew who hectored me. As it was, I fought for Alma's rights, and came out of the sultry den at last, with fifty dollars. Forty I gave, at Alma's request, to the landlord. The remaining ten we kept to pay doctor's bills, Katherine having chosen this time to fall ill (I was hard-hearted enough to believe) in the hope of arousing Charlie's sympathy. If that were her idea, she seemed partially to succeed; for Charlie, as well as the

others, had gone over to the enemy. He, like Cyril, was completely dominated by Herman; and Herman's order was: alienation from the star, until she found some way of liberating the company. I alone was for Alma; and Charlie's calf-love for me died under the lash of my sharp tongue. He deserted me for Katherine, and spent most of his time reading Swinburne to her, when she decided to be convalescent.

I think poor Alma tried very hard to die, during the dreary days that followed her pitiful failure. No human soul could go deeper down into the valley of humiliation than she, and keep life and reason; for she saw herself as others saw her, not tragic, not even pathetic, but shamefully ridiculous. Nothing could have excused her attempt to die, except success.

I was seldom away from her, for I had left Katherine's room for hers; and Alma talked to me frankly, in moments when she must have felt that, if she did not open her heart, she would go mad.

"If they'd only let me die, everything would have been right for you all," she repeated, over and over. "Harry would have sent money, when he got the letter I wrote. He's superstitious. He would have been afraid my spirit might haunt him if he refused; for in the letter I told him I was dying just to get my people out of trouble. I said I wouldn't rest in my grave unless he helped them."

She was so weak from mental suffering and lack of food, that she dozed a good deal, and talked in her sleep. At such times she lived through the moments of her death agony—for such it would have been if we had not waked her in time. Often she would bid me good-bye, just as she had when she sent me away, meaning to take her own life when she was alone.

"Let me see—let me see; the letters, I must write,"

she would murmur. "To Harry first. I want Cyril's to be the last thing I touch in this world. I'll say that I'd like to be buried in the white dress. I'm all washed and ready for my coffin. Oh, God, forgive me. I don't mean to be wicked. I must save them, somehow. I can't think of any other way. Oh, horrible! I don't want to drink the stuff. I'm young. I might have been happy. But it's all over. It's the best thing. Will God hear me if I pray? Shall I die on my knees, or shall I lie down on the bed?"

If I live to be very old, I can never forget any of those ravings of hers. Each word stabbed my heart separately. It seemed as if I must bleed pity. And I hated everyone in the company, above all Herman and Cyril. My only comfort, as I sat by Alma's bed, I found in inventing dreadful punishments for them, some awful retribution which would ruin their future careers.

In two or three days Alma insisted on trying to get up. There were things that she must do, she said. When I had helped dress her, and pin up her long hair, she asked to see the landlord; and keeping me in the room, told him that she had a plan to pay everything. He was not a particularly good-natured person, but she was so pitiful to look at, such a wreck of the charming girl he had last seen, that the man's face and manner softened. He promised to trust her for a few days.

When he had gone out, she explained to me what the plan was. It seemed that there was an important magnate living in the town, on whom she meant to call. He was interested in mines and railroads, and was besides a successful politician. Some of his most intimate friends were theatrical stars. It was supposed that he had financed more than one company. Alma had never met, never even seen him, but she thought

that he had probably been in the audience, when we had presented Stephen's play, for he was known as a great "first nighter." Her attempt at suicide had been hushed up; nevertheless, the troubles of the company had given plenty of copy to the local newspapers during the week; and Alma hoped that, if she went to this man's office, curiosity, if nothing else, might induce him to receive her.

"What are you going to ask him to do?" I enquired.

"I'll trust to luck," she said wearily. "He might have a generous impulse, and lend me money enough to send everybody back to Chicago—or get them passes, or something. I could work it out in time, if he'd take me as secretary." (She had been a typist and stenographer after her father's death left her poor.) "Or, when I get another engagement on the stage, I'd pay him back."

There did not seem to be much room for hope. The man was known to be hard in business; and for the moment Alma had lost her good looks. She could not win him with the bribe of her beauty, unless he had seen her before, and knew what she could be. Still, the case was desperate.

Alma left the hotel for the first time in many days, wearing the white dress in which she had meant to die. It had been washed, and the horrid stains had all come out. But its daintiness, and the youthful style in which it was made, accentuated her sick paleness and the sharpened outline of her features. Her black hat was of a picturesque shape, with a long plume. It had framed her face deliciously when she was well; but with her sad, hollow eyes, shadowed underneath, and her limp hair, which had lost its life and lustre, she was like a ghastly caricature of her old self, done in chalks by some cruel French artist.

I walked with Alma to the building in which the politician had his offices, but she preferred not to have me with her when she pleaded with him. Now the hour had come, she was half fainting with suspense. I was afraid for her, as I stood watching the thin white figure carried up in the lift.

For a long time I wandered back and forth, on the opposite side of the street, staring at things in the shop windows, which I did not really see, because Alma's face floated before my eyes.

At last, after half an hour which seemed twice that time, she came out through the big open doorway where all the names of the office occupiers were printed in gold letters on each side. She looked rather better, for there were hot spots of colour on her cheek-bones, and her lips were red, as if she had bitten them.

"Well?" I asked.

"Oh," she sighed, heavily, "it was just as bad as I thought it would be, at first. Then it was a little easier, for he promised to think things over. He may advance the money and give me something to do, to work out the debt. But don't talk to me any more, just now. I've had all I can stand."

We walked back to the hotel without speaking, Alma leaning on my arm.

Next day the great man called on Alma. I was in her room when his card came up. He was waiting in the public parlour, and she went downstairs to see him, her head hanging. He must have stayed nearly an hour; and towards the end of the interview, the landlord was invited in for a consultation. Alma mentioned this afterwards, when she asked me to go and tell the company from her that she had been "able to make things right for them." She was going to stay in —, and do secretarial work, in payment of money advanced. To-morrow they would all be sent home, with

enough in their pockets to pay for food and sleeping berths. The salary owing she could not give them, but hoped she might be able to do so, some day.

"Do you think I'll go off like that and leave you?" I exclaimed, indignantly. But she stopped me with a tired gesture. "You must go," she said. "For my sake. I can't keep you here. Dear little friend, for heaven's sake don't argue, unless you want to kill me."

I said not another word, but went as she had bidden me, and told the company, assembled in Herman's room, what had been arranged for them.

They were all delighted. Only Cyril looked ashamed.

Saying good-bye to Alma was the greatest grief that had come to me then; even greater than Boy's death, because that had been so sudden, and I was too young to understand fully.

On the way back to Chicago, in the train, the people for whose sake she had stayed said to each other openly that she had stopped in — to be the politician's mistress. Herman knew a great deal about the man, and told his eager listeners that he was one who had "only one use for women." Instead of being grateful and pitying Alma as, at worst, a tragic martyr, they seemed to despise her for what she was doing. I heard the words "secretarial work" spoken scornfully by Herman, and the girls tittered.

I came out of this episode with a low opinion of men. Old or young, ugly or handsome, I thought them all the same at heart. I made up my mind that never would I love as Alma had loved Cyril, because no man was worth such love. I decided that I would use men, but would never let them use me.

XIV.

MRS. FERGUS advanced money to pay my way east, from Chicago to New York. She would deduct the amount, as well as her commission, from the next salary I earned.

The night I came back I was obliged to go to Mrs. Fergus's flat, because I had no money, and knew of no one who would take me in. After the freedom of the last few months, the shabby room shared with Fifi and two strange girls was disgusting to me. Fifi was more disagreeable than ever, and the new girls were not so pretty or pleasant as Julia and Kitty. I lay awake the first night, making up my mind that I would get away as soon as possible, whatever happened.

It was a bad moment for finding engagements, and six hateful weeks passed before Mrs. Fergus could get me anything to do. Even then, it was a part with only two lines to speak; but it was in a new play, by a popular author, and the theatre was a good one, if a little old-fashioned. The salary was very small, but I could live on it. The management promised Mrs. Fergus that my name should appear on the bill, and it was a great thing to be in New York. Fifi was engaged for the same production, but for a part in which she expected to make a "hit." She was pleased to be so far above me. I was to come on only in the third act, a ballroom scene, and while the people of the play were dancing a cotillon, a murder was being committed in another part of the house. The woman sup-

posed to be killed had never been seen by the audience, but had been constantly spoken of by the other characters. She was rich, old, very eccentric, rather mysterious, and had once been a beauty. Having lost her looks, but not her vanity, she had shut herself up for years, letting no one see her ravaged face, except her own maid, and a lawyer engaged in drafting her will. That document was of immense importance to the hero and heroine, and the mystery surrounding the life of the old woman was meant to focus upon her character the interest of the audience, though she was never seen.

I came early to the first rehearsal, and heard the actors run through the play with the author and stage-manager. Though the parts were only read, and no one attempted to act, I felt the thrill which the audience would feel in the dramatic situation unfolding around this hidden old woman.

In the third act, when the time was drawing near for the murder, the rehearsal was stopped by some misunderstanding about a scream, which was supposed to interrupt the cotillon. The author laid great stress upon this scream, and was vexed because neither the star nor the stage manager had remembered his advice to engage an actress especially for it.

"The whole end of the act depends on that scream," he insisted. "It will have to be a tremendous effect, or it will fall flat."

He was a very successful man, who had made money enough from his plays to build a beautiful house up town; but this was his most serious attempt at drama. His other works had been mostly comedies. Both the star (a *matinée* idol) and the stage manager were anxious to please the author. They assured him that it would be easy to find a woman who could scream well.

"Where is she?" he demanded, shortly. "It takes a real actress to scream, I tell you."

The stage manager, who was English, said that he would "sample" some of the "extra ladies," and if no one among them gave satisfaction, a special woman could be engaged later. He called one of the older and more intelligent girls who were "on" for the cotillon, and ordered her to try a scream.

She came forward conceitedly and obeyed, but the scream was a dismal failure. It sounded like a penny whistle in the big, empty theatre.

"Good heavens, girl, don't you know you're being murdered?" exclaimed the stage manager.

"Horribly murdered," added the author.

"You are frightened almost to death before you are touched," the stage-manager went on, graphically. "You realise you're going to be killed, unless you can yell loud enough to bring someone to your help. Everything depends upon that shriek. Put your heart into it. Put your soul into it."

The girl screamed again, and her voice cracked. The author shrugged his shoulders and threw up his hands. Another of the young women was summoned, then another, and another. Their efforts to scream like a person being murdered were ludicrous. The star and the leading lady laughed silently in the wings, their shoulders shaking. The latter was "dared" to show how the scream ought to be uttered, and took the dare with gay confidence in her own powers. But, clever actress as she was, her scream was not effective. It sounded young and thin, and had no real thrill of horror in it. I would not have believed that to scream could be so difficult.

Suddenly an old memory rushed back to me. For an instant I was a little child, sitting up half undressed,

in a tumbled bed, hearing the thud, thud of a falling body, and one nightmare shriek that broke off short on its highest note.

The impression was so strong that I was lost in it. Then, as suddenly as I had plunged into the past, I rose again to the surface of the present. The stage manager's eyes were on me. Mine were on him. Without knowing it, I had called to him with my eyes. They had something to tell him.

"Come here," he said. "You look as if you thought you could do the trick."

I obeyed, and came down centre to where he stood with the author of the play. I was not at all nervous. I knew I could scream exactly as Ma had screamed when she fell to her death.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the author, impatiently. "What's the good of bothering with a kid of that age? She'll pipe like a cricket. I want someone to scream like an old woman."

"I can scream like an old woman," I said, in a low voice.

"All right. Scream ahead, and let's hear what you can do," the stage manager commanded.

I shut my eyes, and saw the ugly room, with me huddled in bed, and Henry standing by the door. I screamed as Ma had screamed, just before she broke her neck.

When I stopped short, with a kind of gurgle, as she had stopped when her spine cracked, everyone was quite still. Then the author of the play said under his breath, "Good God!"

I could hear my heart beating, but not because I was nervous about what they would all think. It was only beating as it did when Ma's scream broke off, and I felt sick, as I had felt when I ran in my bare feet to

the head of the stairs, when the oilcloth was cold and torn.

When no one spoke to me, I looked around. The star had his eyes fixed on me. Other people were staring at me too. After a few seconds, the stage manager said, "Where did you learn to scream like that?"

"I heard someone do it once," I answered.

"When?" the author asked.

"When I was a little girl."

Then he wanted to know what was my age now. I said that I was "going on fifteen." "Going on fifteen" sounded to me much older than fourteen.

"Are you satisfied with her?" the stage manager inquired, in a dry tone.

"My God, yes," he answered.

The stage manager looked at me. "She's got two lines to speak," he said. "If she does the scream, she can't be on in this scene."

"Two lines. Great heavens!" grumbled the author. He was a curious, spasmodic man, boiling with emotions. Once he had been an actor, but had not succeeded. He had felt so much that he could not make other people feel.

"Which would you rather do?" asked the stage manager, "come on for the cotillon, in a smart dress and look pretty and speak the two lines you were engaged to speak, or scream 'off,' and never be seen at all?"

"I would rather scream," I said.

His face and the author's both brightened. They glanced at each other. I saw that they were interested in me. But it was true. I would not have given up the scream for anything.

"You understand, I suppose, that you can't have

your name on the programme if you do the scream?" the stage manager explained carefully. "That would spoil the effect for the audience. An old woman, a great character, though she's never seen, screams when she's being murdered."

"I know," I said. "I've been listening to the play."

"Oh, she's been listening to the play," echoed the author.

It was arranged that I was to scream, and one of the other girls who had only one line to speak got my two. I was to draw the same salary as before.

Every day after that they made me shriek when the cue came. They would never let me off the scream, even though the principals were simply walking through their parts. Perhaps the stage manager did not want me to get out of practice. But I did not tire of my scream. Always I shut my eyes and saw the little horrid room, with the flaring gaslight, and Henry at the door, clenching and unclenching his hands.

One day the author said, "That's the scream of an old woman with a short, fat neck." And he asked me curious questions about my "model"; but I would not tell him much. I hated to speak about Ma, and those old days; I hardly knew why, except that it made me feel sick, and that my hands grew cold.

Others asked me questions, too, and the star talked to me a little sometimes, when his great scene after the scream was over. He assured me that such a scream as mine would "work up the scene immensely." The men spoke to me oftener than the women did. The leading lady had not noticed me at all, and Fifi said it was because she thought me forward and common. It may be that I was both!

On the first night I came to the theatre before the curtain went up and asked permission of the stage

manager to stand in the wings, out of everyone's way.

"What do you want to do that for?" he asked. Ever since the first rehearsal he had treated me very kindly.

"I want to hear the whole piece, and what they are saying about me," I answered.

He was busy, but he stopped for an instant. "About you? What do you mean?" he inquired.

"Why, about Aunt Teresa," I explained. That was the name of the old woman who never appeared, yet dominated the play.

"All right, stand where you can hear all you want to," he said. "I shouldn't wonder if you'd do more than scream some day. You've got what they call 'temperament,' as well as intelligence and concentration." ✕

I knew he meant that I would be a good actress, and I was delighted. Not so much because I was ambitious, as because I liked to be praised. I felt that I could act, and I loved acting better than anything else in the world; but I was not like Joan of Arc among her sheep. I heard no voices calling me to glory. I loved acting because it was in my blood, inherited from my parents. And I suppose it was true that I had what is called "temperament."

I think I screamed better on the first night of the play than I had at rehearsals, just because of my "temperament," and the wonderful thrill that goes with a first night.

After my scream, there was a hush in the theatre; no applause; but it was the stillness that actors know means more than applause. I was glad, not for myself, because I was too excited to think of myself then, but for the act. It was a fine act, and I felt that I had helped it to make the right impression.

There was another afterwards, a fourth; and that was good, too, but less intense, and perhaps let the play down a little. Still, it played well; and in the dressing-room, which I shared with several other girls, I could hear a thunder of applause. The curtain went up and down, on five or six calls. Just before the leading people came off the stage, I left the theatre, and hurried back to my hated room at Mrs. Fergus's. Already a plan for getting away from her was growing in my head. Two of the girls who dressed with me at the theatre were pleasant and jolly. We were making friends, and I hoped that they would be willing to have me "chum" with them. They two shared a room in a building where artists lived, and by day they often acted as models. Their room had been a studio, and they said it was very big. I meant to ask, when I knew them a little better, if they would let me join them, paying a third of the expenses.

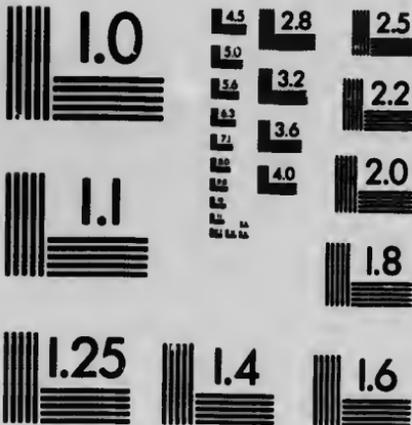
Fifi was already at home when I arrived. She was "on" only in the second act, and having one of the bilious headaches to which she was subject, she had made her latest "mash" bring her back quickly to her mother. Mrs. Fergus had been "in front" to see as much of the play as concerned her daughter. Then she too had come away, without waiting to hear my scream. Nothing that I did, or was, interested her particularly; but I think she was glad, for Fifi's sake, to dash any sense of triumph I might have had. The moment I opened the door, she said, without referring to the play, "I've got some news for you. Just read it in 'The Clipper.' Your mother's dead. Pneumonia and typhoid. Died in ——."

She named the town where Alma Lester had tried to kill herself.



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XV.

To my astonishment, all the newspapers mentioned the scream. They described it as thrilling, wonderful, blood-curdling. It was, one critic said, "as if that hidden Aunt Teresa had become incarnate before the eyes of the audience, at the moment of her death." Most of the papers attributed the "tremendous sensation" of the third act to the scream.

The second night of the play I did not go to the theatre till late, because I was thinking about my mother, and I wanted to be alone. I had seen Dearie's face before me all day, just as it used to be when we lived in the room of the skylight. I was not exactly sorrowful, for she had gone out of my life long ago, and had wished never to hear of me again; but I was very thoughtful; and the girls' congratulations on my scream seemed irrelevant, when I came into the dressing-room. I had nothing to do there, except to take off my hat, and put it on when I left; but I was to have dressed in that room, if I had played a part; and it was a place to wait in.

As I was leaving the wings on this second night, the stage manager told me that several newspaper men had asked about the woman who screamed. They wanted to know who I was, and what I was like; but it was proposed to make a mystery of me. The "management" thought that to do so would be a good

advertisement, and might "work up paragraphs"; still, the secret was bound to leak out sooner or later.

Even then I had no idea of what my little success would mean. I was too deeply absorbed in my plan for getting away with Mrs. Fergus, to care much about the newspapers. The girls at the theatre, Jen and Hatty, were willing to take me in with them, but I had trouble with Mrs. Fergus. She said that she had engaged to keep me till I was sixteen, and would not let me go until then. I insisted that Madame had meant me to stay only till I could earn enough to keep myself. I did not know the Baroness's latest address, and Mrs. Fergus refused to give it, but I found out from the new "Madame" at the old place, and cabled to Europe. The answer came that I must stop with Mrs. Fergus, otherwise the Baroness would not be responsible for my expenses at any time when I might happen to be out of an engagement. The businesslike wording of the telegram made me think that the Baron had written it. Nevertheless, I would have gone to Jen and Hatty, and risked everything; but the girls were afraid of Mrs. Fergus, who could hurt them in the profession; and they dared not take me against her will. All that Mrs. Fergus wanted, however, was Madame's money, which she still had an excuse to draw, on the ground that my salary was not large enough to support me. She was glad to have me spend as much time as I liked by day or night in someone else's house, in order to get me out of Fifi's way. I began to give Jen and Hatty half my salary each week, as soon as Mrs. Fergus had deducted what she had a right to take. For this consideration, the girls let me sleep on a sofa in their big, bare studio, as often as I wished, and help them cook and eat their picnic meals. They had a little stove in the room,

which was kitchen, dining-room, parlour, and bedroom in one, and on it we made all sorts of messes. I got to know the young artists who lived in the house; and through them, met some of the newspaper reporters who had inquired about me at the theatre. One of the artists, in love with Jen, sketched my head, and the drawing was published in the Sunday edition of a big newspaper. Underneath was printed, in large letters, "The Woman of the Scream."

The thing that delighted me most about this was being called a "woman," for I was only just fifteen. But the portrait stirred up the interest of the public in the "scream mystery." It had never entirely died out, for often there were paragraphs in the papers, referring to the "reticence of the management" in regard to it. A story was started that the woman who screamed was an old actress who had been a great favourite but for one reason or another had lost her vogue. Some said that she drank, others that her face was spoiled by smallpox, and that for the sake of her vanity and past reputation she did not wish her name to come out.

As everyone in the theatre knew who screamed, the newspaper men probably knew too, and were paid by the management to write up the mystery. But when my picture appeared, it may have been that they thought a new turn of affairs would keep up excitement. I was encouraged to be interviewed, and photographed. There were articles about me in the stage papers, and the big Sunday editions of the dailies, nearly every week. Eventually I was said to be younger than I was, which annoyed me extremely. There were references to my family, and to my past life, but they were always wrong, perhaps purposely wrong. I was said to be the daughter of a great actor,

who had died mad; and extraordinary stories were told about my childhood. I would have liked to contradict most of these, but my friend the stage manager strongly advised me not to do so. The made-up things, he argued, were all more interesting than the truth, and by attracting attention would help me on in my career. By and by, instead of denying the sensational tales, I mischievously added to them, and told people anecdotes about myself which I wished might have been true, just as, long ago, I had fibbed about Lenny and his presents of candy.

Fifi was so disagreeable and sarcastic, that I spent more time than ever with Jen and Hatty, practically living with them, in the big, untidy studio, until at last a dreadful tragedy happened there.

It did not concern me, except indirectly, and was so horrible that I need not tell you much about it. Jen was older than Hatty; a beautiful fair girl, with wistful eyes and little chiselled features, who had been painted by her artist lover as "Priscilla, the Puritan Maiden." We always called her "Priscilla" or "Puritan"; and, though she loved fun, she was prim in her manner, compared with Hatty and me. She used to reprove us sweetly for our wild pranks and weird slang, and though I pretended to laugh at her stiffness, I really looked up to and respected her.

If the tragedy had fallen upon Hatty, I should not have been so utterly taken by surprise.

Poor Jen, of the gentle voice and gold-haloed, saintly face, died in agony after a lingering illness, brought on by herself—though one who should have loved and protected her was more truly to blame than she. After the first awful night of her suffering, she was carried away from the studio to a hospital, where the end came after many days. The big, white-

washed room, with its Turkey red curtains and broken odds and ends of furniture, was haunted for us both by Jen, screaming on her sofa bed, praying to die, and end her anguish. We could not bear to stay there, and Hatty gave up the studio. She went to live with an old friend, in a boarding-house, and I had to go back to Mrs. Fergus. It was worse than ever before, in the dingy flat. Each night and morning I said to myself, "I'd do anything—*anything*—to get away!"

And now comes the part of my life-story where you would stop me, I think, if I were talking to you instead of writing. Yet I beg, if this reaches you, and you have read so far, that you will go on. It will hurt you to read, almost as much as it hurts me to write. But just because it is the hardest of all to tell, it is the most important for you to read.

One night news went round behind the scenes that a manager of another New York theatre was in the stage box. He was interested in several theatres, not only in New York, but in other big towns. This made him a man of importance to actors; and each of the principals in the play hoped, of course, that he was in front looking out for talent. A wave of excitement ran through the dressing-rooms, as it always does when such a person is in the theatre.

From the place where I stood in the wings to give my scream, I could peep out through a tiny hole in the canvas wall of the ball-room setting. I could not see much of the auditorium, except the front and second rows, but I could look into two of the boxes, of which the stage box was one.

In it sat a stout, red-faced man, with a short throat that seemed to run straight down in a line with the sides of his head. He had brown hair, turning grey;

a low, square forehead and prominent light eyes, which looked shrewd and very bold, perhaps because his eyelashes were singularly short and stiff, like tiny bristles, and when I peeped at him, just after my scream (conceitedly wishing to see the effect) he was bending forward, with his fat hands on his fat knees. On his fingers I caught the glitter of more than one handsome ring.

Immediately afterwards, I ran downstairs to the dressing-room which I shared still with Hatty and the new girl who had stepped into poor Jen's vacant place. I had nothing more to do, but I lingered, as usual, hating to go home. Before the curtain rang up on the last act, the call-boy brought word that the stage manager wished to speak with me. I was to go at once, and look for him near the star dressing-room.

A little anxious, lest I was to be scolded, I hurried to obey. When I arrived, he had not yet come. The star's door was open, and standing in it was the red-faced man who had been in the stage box. Evidently he was calling on the star; and he looked me over with his prominent eyes, as I waited. I looked at him, too, and then turned away, as if I did not know that he was staring at me still. But I did know. I saw by his expression that he thought me pretty, and that he wanted me to know what he thought.

Presently the stage manager came, and I was surprised as well as relieved to find that he only wished to speak about a change of position for me, when I screamed in the wings. It was a very slight change, and needed no rehearsing: he could as well have told me the next night. In three or four minutes he let me go, and as I walked slowly away, I gave a glance at the star dressing-room. But the door was shut.

Every morning about eleven, I came to the theatre to look at the letter-board. Most of us received a good many silly love-letters from boys and men who watched the stage entrance, and my average was one or two a day. The morning after the visit of the great man, I found a neat, square envelope, addressed to me in typewriting. The envelope was plain, but the paper inside had on it the name of a theatre. There were only a few lines in typing, but they made my heart jump. The manager who had been in the stage box directed the writer (his secretary) to say that he would be pleased to see me in his office at the Olympic Theatre, about three o'clock that afternoon.

Already I knew too much about theatrical people to be sure that the invitation would lead to anything important. But Mrs. Fergus, and my girl friends who were older than I, had taught me a kind of shrewdness which was not mine by nature. I was ready to dance with excitement, and I decided to look as pretty, and be as fascinating, as I could. I lunched alone at a cheap restaurant near the theatre, to compose my mind, and went back to the flat only in time to get ready for the interview.

Mrs. Fergus and Fifi were both there, but I said not a word to them about the letter. I knew that, if nothing good came of the visit, they would twit me, and laugh. I put on the dress and hat I liked best; the ones which made me look the most "grown up." With my hair in a great clump at the nape of my neck, parted a little on one side, and drooping in a wave over my forehead, I could easily be mistaken for seventeen.

Nowadays I cannot bear to see my hair fall over my forehead, even for an instant, in the thick wave I used to wear then. If, when it is being washed or brushed, it drops on one side in that way, and I happen to

catch sight of myself in the glass, a sick faintness creeps through me, and my heart is heavy and cold. It is as if something whispered in my ear, "You can never, never get rid of your old self, try as you may. There she is, staring at you now in the glass, just as she used to be; and she'll haunt you till you die."

I can't describe to you how I suffer when such moments come. I shut my eyes, so as not to see the face, and think with all my might of Lily Merritt, my dear little friend in the mirror, a gentle ghost, the only one who ever haunted me when my own soul was white and unstained.

You said once that my head and profile would look "purely Greek," if I wore my hair in a knot at the back of my neck; and you asked me to try it in that way, just once, as a favour to you. I pretended to forget, and you reminded me. Perhaps you may remember still, though we had not known each other long then. At last I told you that I had worn my hair in that fashion, and disliked it. I refused to do it so again, and I heard my voice growing sharp as I spoke. I saw that you were surprised and rather hurt, and I was unhappy all the rest of the day, partly because I couldn't bear to be disobliging, and partly because of that heavy, secret reason for refusing, which I thought then could never be told.

Perhaps if I had not done my best to look grown up that day, when I went to keep the appointment with Barron, everything might have been different for the rest of my life. Yet I don't know. Maybe it would have been the same, after all. Sometimes I believe that, in a former incarnation, according to your spiritual triumphs or failures, your fate for a future incarnation is decided. I am trying now to use my old self as a kind of mounting block.

I was shown at once to Barron's office, without

having to wait. That was a great compliment to an unknown actress.

A secretary was with him when I arrived, but he went out into another room. Barron sat behind a huge, flat-topped desk, made of rosewood. I did not know what the wood was, but I noticed that it had a faint, pleasant scent; and it associated itself curiously with the excited fluttering of my heart. Since, I have disliked that odour more than any other, and I have detested rosewood.

He was far more polite to me than any other theatrical manager had ever been. When I came in, he had on a hat, pushed to the back of his large head, but he took it off deliberately, and laid it upon a pile of papers on the desk. You would hardly understand how much this little thing inclined me to like him, unless you know something about the ordinary manners of self-made, important theatrical men with unimportant actresses.

Not only did Barron take off his hat to show me respect, but he walked round from behind the barrier of the big desk and shook hands heartily. He pressed my hand in his, and held it in a warm clasp for a few seconds. Then he placed a chair for me to sit down.

Having done this, instead of going back behind the desk, he pulled another, heavier chair near mine, so as to sit facing me, our knees all but touching. For a minute he looked me over smiling. My chair was turned towards the window, so that the light fell strongly on my face. He stared at it so hard, I was afraid that there might be a black on my nose, or something else which spoiled the good effect I was anxious to make.

"Well," he began, "have you been wondering why I sent for you?"

"Yes," I admitted.

He laughed good-naturedly, and showed large, yellowish teeth. "Honest Injun? Now, tell me, didn't you have a shrewd suspicion?"

I thought it would be sensible and pleasing to him if I did not try to beat about the bush.

"It seemed to me you might have some engagement to offer me," I confessed.

"Good girl! You've hit it first time," he said. He had a bluff, good-tempered, common way of speaking, and his whole personality and manner were vulgar. But I was used to that, in men. Most of those I knew were more or less common; and Barron's jolly nonchalant commonness suited his stout body, his bold eyes, and red face. I did not dislike him at all, though I thought him old, and somewhat unpleasant to look at. His office, with its expensive furniture and showy decorations, was a good frame for him. In a room of subdued colouring, and refined taste, he would have been like a big, mottled spider on a bunch of violets. The red walls, almost covered with gold-framed oil-paintings and photographs of lovely stage ladies in tights or low-necked dresses, paled the redness of his face. The large chair of sprawling outlines in which he sat seemed to reduce his size.

"Would you like to have an engagement with me, my dear?" he went on, his eyes always fixed on my face, without perceptibly winking.

An amateur would have been startled by his "my dear." But I knew that nearly all stage managers, and many managers of theatres, called every girl "dear." It was a mere habit or fashion, and meant nothing. It was only his tone which struck me. He spoke softly, as if to a child.

"Of course I would like it," I said.

He bent forward and looked at me closely.

"You're the genuine article," he remarked. "I was wondering if you were as young as you were painted."

"But I'm not painted!" I exclaimed, feeling myself grow red under his stare.

"That was my joke," he said. "When we get better acquainted, you'll find out that I must have my joke. I wasn't going to buy a pig in a poke, you know."

I considered myself a quick-witted girl, but I could not understand what he meant. I was afraid that he was making fun of me, and began to be uncomfortable, even rather angry. If he had not been very important, and I had not been in awe of him and anxious to please, I should have answered back pertly. As it was, I only threw up my head a little, and looked him in the face firmly.

"Don't bite me," he laughed. "I see you're a girl of spirit. I must teach you to take a joke. I invited you here for several reasons. One was to see if you were really a young girl or a grown-up woman. I've come to the conclusion that you're a baby. Now don't get mad! I'm paying you a big compliment. This light doesn't leave anything to the imagination. I should put you down as seventeen, a little more or a little less. Which is it?"

"A little less," I answered, pleased with him again, because, although he called me a baby, he thought me older than I was. Quickly I told myself that, if he knew I was not yet sixteen, he would hesitate to offer me the part he was thinking of. If I said "a little less" than seventeen, it would be true, and even if he found out my real age, he could not accuse me of fibbing.

"I believe you," he returned, "though I wouldn't believe most girls on their oath."

Then he went on to say that he had heard of me and my "great stunt," as he called the scream. A friend of his who was a critic had spoken of me, and he had seen my picture in the papers. "Last night I sat out the play," he explained, "as much to see you as anything else."

"But I'm only heard, and not seen," I said, when he paused.

"Well—I saw you all right, didn't I?" he grinned.

Then it occurred to me for the first time that my appointment near the star dressing-room had been arranged between him and our stage manager. I had supposed that Barron's being in the doorway at the time was a lucky accident, and that I owed this interview to a rare chance.

"I'm glad you saw me," I stammered, "if it makes you give me an engagement."

"Are you tired of screaming?" he wanted to know.

I answered that it was not so much the scream I was tired of, as living with Mrs. Fergus and Fifi. If I could get a better salary, I was old enough to live away from them, now.

"And pretty enough, too," he added.

Then, in a different tone, he said that just at present he could not offer me anything in New York, though later he might be able to do so. Had I seen Lily Stuart in the play running in his theatre?

The question made my heart beat, though what it suggested seemed too good to be true. I answered that I had seen her, just before I began my engagement.

"Like the part?" he inquired.

Of course I said yes. It was a splendid *soubrette* part, and Miss Stuart had made a great hit in it.

"Think you could play it better than she does, eh?"

I was afraid he was joking again, yet I replied boldly that I was sure I could play it very well.

"You're young enough to be Lily's daughter," he said. "But so much the better for you. What would you do for me if I let you have her part, in the company I'm sending on the road?"

Still I could hardly believe in my luck. My face must have been scarlet as I stammered out that I would do anything.

He caught me up quickly. "Do you mean that?" he asked.

There was no mistaking him, this time. I realised that he was in earnest. And I realised something more, with an electric shock, half of fear, and half of silly, childish vanity.

My youth had protected me in many ways so far, yet already I knew, from things I had heard and seen, more about the facts of life than many sheltered girls know when they are over twenty. There was no villainy I had not at least vaguely heard of, and I had had my eyes opened to the ways of certain theatrical managers. No manager had ever fixed his attention on me; but I knew only too well that few plums fell into the mouths of unknown young girls, unless they paid a price.

Still, a shiver ran through me now that the strange grown-up thing which happened to others was happening to me. My surprise was mixed with dread and trembling, physical terror; but with all my force of will, I tried to keep my face from showing any trace of what I felt.

I have told you that this which I write is only a statement of things as they happened, not an apology, not an appeal. I want to hide nothing, and soften nothing. I won't excuse myself by reminding you

what my bringing up had been, or the dreary lessons my experience had taught me. Perhaps if my nature had been nobler, in spite of my life's teachings I might have had a moral code. As it was, I had no such shield in battle. I had never even heard of a "moral code."

Alma Lester and a great many other sweet women, more fortunate than she, were the mistresses of men with money and power. Everyone knew what they were, and girls far below them on the theatrical ladder looked up, to envy them. Fifi, for instance, often said that she intended to "catch" somebody worth having. With all her conceit and ambition, she could hardly hope to marry one of the rich young men whose names were often on her tongue. It was something else to which she looked forward. Hatty had often said that, if she lived in Europe, rather than anything else she would like to be a king's mistress. The idea in the abstract did not horrify me at all. It was only now when it became concrete and personal, that I shrank. But my schoolgirlish love for Cyril Raven had turned into such supreme disgust, that I felt it would be impossible ever to love another man. I believed what older girls said, that men were all alike at heart. The only difference was, that some were richer, younger, and better-looking than others. As I told you before, I had made up my mind, because of Alma's tragedy, that I would "use men and not be used by them." Often, since leaving her to her fate, I had repeated those words to myself, and to my friend Hatty. I was proud of a resolve which made me feel cynical, and like a grown-up woman of the world. Now, after the first shock of reading Barron's full meaning, my chief regret was that my "chance" came from a fat, middle-aged man, with a red face and

a double chin. If he had been young and handsome, like some of the stars who made life easy for their leading ladies, it seemed to me that I would not so much have minded the rest.

Still, I took myself almost fiercely to task, and tried to be what Mrs. Fergus would call "sensible." This was an incredible piece of luck for me, I said to my trembling heart, and I should be worse than a fool to throw it away.

Only a few seconds did I hesitate. Then I answered firmly that I quite meant what I had said. I would do anything for him, if he would give me Miss Stuart's part.

As I spoke Barron kept his light eyes fixed on me. He was trying to be sure that I understood.

"Well," he said at last, "if you're a good girl to me, you shall have the part, and plenty of other nice things beside. All your friends will envy you."

I muttered that I was sure they would.

He got up heavily from his chair, and I rose from mine. When he put out his hand, I laid my fingers in his big palm, reluctantly. He pulled me nearer to him.

"Would you like to come and have a nice, quiet little dinner with me next Sunday evening at a place a friend of mine lends me when I want to entertain?" he asked.

It was already Friday. I was more frightened than I had ever been, and felt that I would not at all like to dine with him. But I knew, if I refused, it was the end of everything. He was watching me without winking, to see how I took the invitation. My mouth suddenly felt parched, but I answered steadily that I would go.

"That's right!" he exclaimed. "I'll give you a

jolly good dinner. A princess couldn't have a better one than you'll get with me, little girl. Come at a quarter to eight. I'll have a contract in my pocket for you to sign, if you're of the same mind you are now."

He mentioned a number in an old-fashioned square, rather far down town, where artists and literary people lived. He made me repeat the address, to be sure I understood and would not forget.

"I wouldn't speak about this dinner to any of your friends, if I were you, my dear," Barron said. "Most women are cats. They'd be jealous, and scratch."

"I won't say a word to anyone," I assured him. And I was only too glad to keep my promise.

"You're a wise child, that knows when it's in luck," he chuckled. Then he drew me to him, and taking my chin in one of his fat hands kissed me on the mouth.

I felt a wild impulse of anger, almost murderous. I longed to push him violently from me, and run away. But I said to myself, "No—no! Remember Mrs. Fergus and Fifi. Remember all your good resolutions."

"*Good resolutions!*" Those were the words I used, to steel myself against what seemed my weakness.

When he let me go, I hurried out of the room. Yet I went with my head up, smiling. I think, if I had had a mother who loved me, her heart would have ached at that smile.

XVI.

FRIDAY and Saturday nights I could not sleep at all; and by day I could not rest. I was burning with fever; but I should be deceiving you if I said that I was utterly miserable. I was more excited than I had ever been, so excited that I had attacks of giddiness, and went from hot to cold and back again, in a moment. It was the kind of excitement I think one might feel in a house on fire, if one were not sure whether one would be burnt alive, or find a chest full of pearls and diamonds. If I forgot for an instant the mysterious horror before me, I would remember again with a shock, as if cold, and boiling, water had been thrown over me by turns. I seemed to feel each separate nerve in my body being pulled by little strings. Then heavy moods, when nothing mattered, weighed me down; and I would break out of them like a butterfly out of the chrysalis, with a sensation of delirious triumph, longing to sing and dance, and tell Fifi things that would make her madly jealous.

Nobody at Mrs. Fergus's ever asked any embarrassing questions. One went and came at that house as one chose. I was not afraid of being found out.

The address which Barron had given me was the top flat of a beautiful old house, once a grand mansion, now converted into apartments.

I arrived promptly at a quarter to eight. A black

man, with one blind white eye, and thick grey hair, opened the door for me.

I entered a plain hall with only a few engravings in dark frames, on a green distempered wall; but I had never seen anything so wonderful as the room into which the negro showed me. I thought it was like a room in the palace of some sultan of the "Arabian Nights." It was lit by a soft pink light, and I had a dazzled impression of rose brocade glittering with gold threads, faintly tinted rugs which seemed to have on them the bloom of a peach or the delicate pale down of a "pussy willow." There were great divans, half covered with silk draperies, and piled with gold-embroidered crimson or purple cushions. All the doors were hung with curtains that sparkled with bright points like sequins. In front of one long divan was a low table, with a lace cover, laid with gold knives and forks and spoons. In the rosy light the sparkling glass and china were of fairy-like beauty in my eyes. And the lilies and roses, scattered among hothouse fruit on the table, sent out such an overpowering fragrance that I felt deliciously faint with their sweetness. There was a perfume, too, of pastilles burning, and a bluish haze of their smoke floated half-way between floor and ceiling, like torn rags of pale chiffon.

Barron came to meet me. He wore a Turkish smoking jacket of embroidered, gold-coloured silk, and with his big red face and fat body he looked grotesque in his beautiful surroundings. I could have laughed if I had not been cold to the heart with dread. But he was kind, and reassured me a little. He did not kiss me, as I had been afraid he would. He only lifted my hands to his lips, and seeing that I had on short gloves, pressed his mouth first to one

wrist, and then the other. He thanked me for coming, and was quite gallant and gay. I must go into the next room and take off my hat, he said, and went on to explain that these were bachelor's quarters; counting the kitchen, only three rooms and a bath, but good of their kind. He pushed aside a portière, and I saw a wonderful bedroom, far more beautiful than Madame's. It was not Oriental like the adjoining room, but French. The walls were of white satin, with panel paintings of nymphs bathing in the sea, and sleeping in flowery forests. Between the windows was an enormous looking-glass, and through an open door I could see a bathroom, whose walls seemed to be all mirror.

Barron said that he liked to dine in Eastern fashion, reclining on a divan. That was why he wore a Turkish jacket, in order to be more in keeping with the room. When he explained this, he laughed uneasily, and seemed half afraid that I might think it funny, for he was sensitive about his looks. He appeared relieved when I did not smile. Coming into the room with me, he opened one of the painted panels. There was a wardrobe or closet behind it, in which four or five lovely Oriental dressing-gowns were hanging up. On the floor I noticed several small pairs of silk or satin bedroom slippers, standing in a neat, straight row. They were of different colours, with very high heels, and I was curious about them. A strong, heavy perfume hung over everything, and came out in a cloud. It reminded me of the good smells in Madame's workroom, and made me feel homesick, and young.

Barron said that there were plenty more pretty things, but I would have no time to look at them now, as dinner would be ready at eight. He had

asked me to come a quarter of an hour earlier, so that I might put on one of the Oriental gowns, and be comfortable, reclining on a divan, to dine. "I've got that contract for you," he said, tapping his breast. "You'll see, I never forget anything."

I thought that he reminded me of the contract just then, to make me more willing to obey him about changing my frock. I put on a rose-coloured silk gown, which I admired so much that I almost forgot to be frightened, for a moment. But soon the cold, mysterious fear crawled back, like a wet snake.

There were splendid things to eat for dinner. Best of all I liked the salted almonds, for I had never tasted any before. I had no appetite at first, but the wine cheered and warmed me. Barron talked a good deal, and told me anecdotes about horses of his, which had won races, and successful people whom he had put on the stage. There was champagne, which tasted cold and delicious when it came out of its gilded ice-pail, yet drinking it sent a tingling heat through my veins. Barron kept filling up my glass, again and again, telling me that the "fizz" would do me good. I had never drunk any champagne before, nor have I since then. I can hardly bear to see it foaming in someone else's glass. When it was time for the fruit, Barron ordered his black servant not to come back unless he called. The man went out and shut the door softly. My blood had felt as if it were foaming like the champagne, but suddenly the exhilarating sparkle ceased, as if the tap of a syphon had been quickly turned off.

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XVII.

THREE times I have re-written this part which begins now. When I finished it first, and read it over, I thought I had been too kind to myself in what I said. Without meaning to do so, I had made excuses. I had explained what I did and what I felt; and trying to judge my statement fairly, as if I were an outsider, I realised, in reading it, that I had unconsciously made a bid for sympathy.

That is not what I wanted to do, or started out to do. I began again, and re-wrote a great many pages. Then, when I read them, they were too brutal. I was not the girl I saw there. In reading those new pages, I was looking at the picture of a repulsive stranger whom I had never known. I felt that, if it would be wrong to draw too favourable a portrait, it would be as wrong to libel the wretched child I was. From the beginning I have aimed at keeping all emotion out of what I wrote: to be my own judge, not my own advocate. But a just judge.

I did not know, when I began to write this long statement for you, how hard it would be to do the work fairly. I thought I knew, but I did not. All the first part was comparatively easy. The memories of my childhood rushed back to me. I wrote surrounded by a crowd of faces and old impressions, bright and lifelike against a dark background, as the

head-lights of a motor cut out the near trees and houses, clear against dead darkness, like black velvet. It was a relief, almost a pleasure, to write down everything as it flashed back into my brain. I felt as if I were busy building a bridge across the gulf of distance and separation. I seemed to be talking to you. I saw your eyes looking at me, full of kindness. The work renewed my interest in life, and gave me peace after the restless agony of letting you go.

I was very nearly happy in my writing, until I had got as far as leaving Madame. Until then, I had seen myself like a little boat drifting on a stormy sea, and it was not the boat's fault if it gathered barnacles, and tangles of seaweed, or grazed its bow against sharp rocks. When I began to write about my life at Mrs. Fergus's, and about going on my first tour, I found my work suddenly more difficult. Some impish intelligence had come to guide the little drifting boat, and was guiding it all wrong. Because I had to write the story of a girl, no longer a child, beginning to grow up, the task grew more complicated. I found myself stopping to think, and asking anxiously, "How shall I say this? Am I laying too much stress on that? Am I describing this coarsely? Am I putting in too much, or leaving too much out?"

Besides, I was surprised to find a great many later impressions not so clear as the childish ones. Though they are nearer in time, truly they do not seem as much a part of me as the memories of older days, when I was a very little girl. The child I was before leaving Madame, I understand, and remember with a kind of dreamy tenderness. The girl I became at Mrs. Fergus's is almost a stranger to me now. And in writing about her, I have found that it is as if the girl knew this, and would not come near me to explain

herself, thus forcing me to write down, as my own, second-hand impressions.

It is not like that with the great things, good or bad, which moulded me. They stand out with a frightening vividness. And in reading over what I have written, it seems to me that this peculiar state of mind betrays itself in the descriptions.

It is strange that it should be so difficult, so all but impossible, to write the truth about oneself. If anyone had told me it would be so, even after I had begun, I would not have believed. I should have said, "It is only too easy." I remembered all I felt and did in the old boarding-houses, at Tovey's, and at Madame's; all my surroundings just as they were, and as they affected me. But on going to Mrs. Fergus's it was as though a curtain had gone down on the first act of a play, and for some reason there was a long, irritating wait before the next act—a wait that depressed the spirits of the actors.

I thought, as I went on with my writing, that I was telling the whole truth about myself, just as I had at the beginning, and perhaps I succeeded more or less, after many efforts, up to the asterisks which I have only now put at the end of what I may call an episode.

At first, I did not let it end there. I went on, as best I could. But, as I have just told you, I could not let what I wrote stand. Even now, in beginning again, I may do no better than before; yet, if not, this explanation in the midst may show you why I stumble and make mistakes. I try to tell the truth. But—what is the truth about oneself? Can one know—even in the depths of one's own heart, where nobody else ever sees—can one know exactly why certain things were done in the past—the past of years ago,

or yesterday—or what one's real feelings were? Is a woman able to judge her own soul, or can God alone do that?

Forgive all this. It is the only part I shall ask you to forgive. As I have gone on, unrolling the past before my own eyes, I have seemed to see your eyes looking at me more and more coldly. I see that, if I were a man, I could not forgive a woman such mistakes as mine; that if I were a man, in my eyes nothing could wash her clean. I have not the same faint hope now, in writing on, that I had when I began.

In the part I have destroyed, I told you things that I think were unnecessary to tell. But I am still all at sea. Whether it is better just to be laconic, and mention events, or try to make you see how I felt about them? Already I have tried both ways, and neither seems right.

Perhaps one great difficulty I have is that, in justice to you, I cannot tell my story as romances can be told. In fiction, years can be left out, or slurred over in a few words. Above all others, I must not leave the bad things out; and if I were to be "artistic," I should have to lie. Until I went to Italy, there was nothing artistic in my life. Almost every note in it was wrong, except the part which concerned the actress side of me, and that is the side of which there is least need for me to tell you.



When I went back to Mrs. Fergus's, I had the signed contract which had been promised, but I said not a word of it to anyone that day.

I told Mrs. Fergus and Fifi a falsehood: that I had

spent Sunday night with Hatty, at her boarding-house. But they hardly listened. I might as well not have troubled to make up the story. If I had blurted out the truth, they would have been, not disgusted, but jealous. Or else they would have believed that I was "boasting."

I wish I could tell you that I was 'desperately miserable and remorseful; but I was neither. I was not quite happy—that was all. There was a black spot of decay on the fruit which I had hoped would be golden, but the spot did not spoil the fruit. I wished that life were different, not that I were different.

On Tuesday, I showed my contract to Mrs. Fergus, and told her, vaguely, how I had received a note from Barron at the theatre, asking me to call on him. I gave her the impression that everything had happened in one day, even the signing of the contract; and she and Fifi were so angry because such a wonderful plum had fallen into my hand, that they did not stop to think of discrepancies. They could scarcely believe that I was to have Lily Smart's part; and, at first, Mrs. Fergus was inclined to the opinion that I was hoaxing them.

I am afraid that I was mean enough to take the most intense delight in Fifi's jealousy. I felt that at last I was able to punish her with one blow for a thousand slights.

Some clauses in the contract made Mrs. Fergus guess I had not told her everything, and she spared me none of her suspicions. But I had learned too many lessons from her and Fifi not to know how to answer.

I had meant to leave the flat immediately, for I was to be paid for rehearsals, and even if I had no other expectations, I could have afforded to make my own life. But I punished Mrs. Fergus still further by pre-

ending to go because of her insinuations. "I will tell Mr. Barron the horrid things you've said to me," I threatened; and she tried to take back her words, for she was afraid of Barron for Fifi's sake and her own. She even begged me to stay, knowing, now that I was nearly sixteen, it would be useless to wire an appeal to the Baroness; but I was not to be persuaded. I packed my few belongings, and left within the hour, in a whirlwind of virtuous indignation, which may not have impressed her as much as it pleased me.

I went to a small private hotel, the address of which Barron gave me. Coming from Mrs. Fergus's, the place seemed luxurious. I was enraptured at being installed in a little suite of my own, with a tiny sitting-room as well as bedroom, and, best of all, a bath. I had never admired anything as much since I was torn away from Madame's dainty house; and this was all my own. If I had anything to regret, I forgot it in gazing at that little white bathroom, which I loved as I would have loved the doll's house I had always wanted, but never had, as a child. I walked back and forth, from room to room, revelling in all three; but I would have sacrificed both the others, if necessary, to keep the bath.

I did not think of myself as a bad girl, because I was to live in that suite, though I had no money of my own to pay for it and other luxuries I expected to have. I thought: "Now, at last, I am going to have lovely things, and be dainty and sweet. I can take two baths a day if I like, or even three; and there will be nobody to nag and be hateful." It seemed almost a virtue, to be so glad of the sweetness and cleanliness and beauty that would be mine. It is dreadful to tell you that I was really happy, at

least by day. Sometimes there were awful hours at night when I could not sleep, when I hated myself, and cried hysterically, not daring to think of the future. Then it was as if I saw the face of a hideous, giant negro, growing out of a small floating black spot on the wall, and coming slowly nearer and nearer to me, like a dream that had been my greatest horror in childhood. I used often to dream it, always the same; and now the dream seemed to have come true. But I shut up my fear in the locked cupboard of the night, and scarcely thought of it in the daytime.

The rehearsals took hold of me, and I gave my whole self to the new part. I don't know whether it was good or bad for me to have that great interest just then, for, by day, it made everything else seem small, just as you can shut out the sight of mountains with the palm of your hand, if you hold it close before your eyes. If a dark thought did loom over my horizon, I shut it out like that, with my hand, saying to myself, "You're going to be an actress, a great actress, and nothing else matters. You had to grow up and be a woman, somehow, before you could hope to act."

So I forced myself to be happy, in spite of some things, and because of others; but my happiness was very different from the happiness of last year. Then when I travelled in the road company, with Julia and Kitty, I was gay and sunny all through, like a fountain with the sun shining down to its depths, leaving no dark corners. Now the sun shone only on the surface; but it shone brightly there, bright as the new diamond ring which Barron gave me one day.

When I was small, I used to think I should be perfectly happy if I had a diamond ring of my own like Dearie's and Madame's, but it did not seem

possible that I should ever have one. I would say to myself, "Perhaps by the time I am twenty I shall have saved up enough money to buy a diamond ring," for twenty seemed a great age, when one ought to have money and rings, if ever. Yet here I was at sixteen with a far more splendid diamond than Dearie had ever owned, or anyone else I had ever seen.

It was given to me for a surprise. I opened a white leather case, lined with velvet, and the ring sent a blue lightning streak up to my eyes. It was a wonderful moment, and for months afterwards I never tired of watching the lights come and go in that stone, and other stones which came to keep it company. I, who had never had a ring or any jewellery, was intoxicated with the beauty of my diamonds and rubies and emeralds. Whenever I knew that I was to receive a present, I wanted it to be a ring. I could not have too many, for it gave me the most intense pleasure to turn my hands back and forth, or twist my rings to watch the colours come and go. At last, I wore several rings on each finger; and I spent an hour each day manicuring my nails, making them glitter like wet coral, and staining my finger tips rose-pink, so as to set off the rings with an effective background.

I was exactly like a child let loose in a toyshop and told that it may take whatever it chooses. I could have everything I wanted, but I did not know what to want, for I was a poor child who had never possessed anything, and suddenly it seemed to me to be always Christmas.

When I was a very little girl, before Boy and Dearie came back, a kind young actress, who played with me sometimes, took me to a big shop to see a Christmas "bazaar," as she called it. There was a fat, red-faced man dressed up as Santa Claus, with a pack

on his back, and out of this pack he gave each child whose mother had spent a certain amount of money, some little toy. A few children, whose mothers or companions could prove by coupons that they had spent twice or thrice the stipulated amount, got two or three presents. I had only one, a tiny gilt watch, but it was an event in my life. I was afraid at first to go up to Santa Claus and take the watch from his hand when he dangled it, because he was so fat and red, but my actress friend who had the coupon laughed, and made me go. The great bearded Santa Claus laughed too, with large yellow teeth, and just as he put the watch into my hand, bent down suddenly and kissed me.

No what Barron had begun to give me presents, I could not push the thought of the fat Santa Claus in the Christmas bazaar out of my head. Sometimes it almost seemed that Barron and he must be one and the same person. Barron was the master of the toyshop in which I was playing, and I could run about and take what I liked in it; but he was always there, with his large yellow teeth, and his fat red neck that had wrinkles in the back of it, above the low collar.

It was so new to me to have money, that a rage of spending came upon me. I bought things just for the wild joy of buying. I ordered lovely underlinen, all lace and delicate embroidery, more things than I could wear. I had quantities of different perfumes sent home, and emptied a bottleful at a time into my bath. I bought a great many hats, in which I admired myself passionately at the milliner's, but often found unbecoming when I tried them on again, at home.

Barron was giving me all my costumes for the new part. My extravagances seemed to amuse him, and

I amused him, too, as if I were a new type of girlhood. But most of my time was taken up with rehearsals, and he, too, was very busy, arranging business which concerned different productions. I was secretly thankful that he was not able to see me often.

Over the mantelpiece in my bedroom was an engraving of an old picture, called "The Maiden's Prayer." How it came to be in a room of that hotel I never knew, and I wished it away, but I had not the courage to ask that it might be taken down and something modern and more lively hung up in its place.

It was in an elaborate gold frame, which matched those on other pictures of a very different kind, and the face of the praying girl and the title printed underneath haunted me curiously. When I went to bed without saying my prayer, (as I always did nowadays) I would see the upturned eyes and clasped hands, as if they were photographed on the inner side of my tightly closed lids. I would see the name of the picture, too, in large, staring letters, larger than they really were: "The Maiden's Prayer."

I did not feel wicked, except, as I told you, sometimes in black night-moments, when I was a lost soul, drowning in dark waters, or the giant head was growing out of the floating spot on the wall; but I realised doggedly that I could not pray, and ought not to pray, because it would be sacrilege. It was not that word which was in my mind, for probably I had never heard it; but the idea was there. I said to myself that it did not matter, for probably there was no God to pray to, and there was nothing at all after this life. I knew that Barron also had this theory. One night he became confidential. In telling me anecdotes of his past, his business struggles and successes, he mentioned inci-

dentally, that he did not believe in God, or any heaven or hell. Sometimes I preferred to think that he was right. At other times not to believe in God or anything good after this world was like being alone in a universe where every other living thing except myself had been destroyed.

Once in a while, I thought of Alma, with grief and pity, and longing; but I compared myself with her, and it seemed to me that I was far, far wiser than she had been. Two or three of the young men who were going out with the company were very attractive and pleasant. They would have liked to flirt, partly because I was the girl of most importance in the cast, and partly, perhaps, because of the danger they must have guessed they ran in paying marked attention to me. The star, too, though not young, was handsome, and considered fascinating; but I cared nothing for any of them. I felt that I was being worldly wise, and that I was keeping the vow I had made after the sad ending of Alma's tour: the vow to use men, and never let myself be used by them. I saw myself as a woman of the world, a woman grown up. Yet all the more, for that reason, I was in reality a child. A woman does not waste any thoughts upon the wonder she has achieved in becoming a woman. But I was a child, playing a game of being grown-up—a horrible game.

I saw Barron only once a week, except occasionally at the theatre, while the rehearsals went on in New York. For some reason, which I did not understand then, he was very anxious to be prudent, very much afraid of any talk about us. He impressed it upon me that all his precautions were for my sake. But I grew to hate, with a deadly hatred, the beautiful flat with Oriental decorations, which I had thought of at first as a palace of the "Arabian Nights." It belonged to

Barron, not to a friend, as he had told me in the beginning, and it was a secret haunt of his, where he never brought even his most intimate men friends. I have never been able to admire Eastern draperies or embroideries since then.

I used to indulge myself ungratefully at moments when I most disliked Barron, by calling him "Santa Claus" to myself. I would count the days before leaving New York, and say, thankfully, "After that, no more Santa Claus!"

But soon I found out that my hopes were mistaken. He was interested in several theatres along our route, and my heart sank at the news that he intended to run out and see me there.

It was after we had started on the road that the mystery of his prudence "for my sake," in New York, was explained, for the people in the company began to discuss the "Boss," as they called him, as they had not dared to do during the rehearsals, when he might appear at any instant.

There was an old lady, Mrs. Mead, who played the part of my mother. She had seemed to be a great friend of Barron, and I had often heard her flattering him in the cosy, purring way that suited her gentle blue eyes and dimpled, peachy cheeks. Once in a while the idea flitted through my head that she had promised Barron to watch me, and let him know how I behaved myself in his absence. Very likely I did her an injustice, and although I never trusted her quite, I was fond of her in spite of myself. She pretended to love me as much as if I were really her own daughter, and I could not help enjoying her petting. It was pleasant to feel like a child with a kind mother, and she made me call her "Mamma."

Once, a long time ago, Mrs. Mead had been a

favourite light comedy actress. She had gone on the stage when a child, and had fascinating stories to tell about every theatrical celebrity of the past or present. Most of her anecdotes were scandalous, but she told them so purringly, over her knitting, that she contrived to give them quite a homely flavour. She would swing comfortably to and fro in a rocking-chair, the light from a window or lamp turning her wavy grey hair to silver, the bright knitting needles moving swiftly in her plump fingers as she shaped a stocking. With a soft motherliness she would coo monotonously on, stopping to count the stitches in the midst of a tale which would not be passed in print by any censor. She had a way of moistening her lips often as she spoke, the little pink point of her tongue darting back and forth delicately, like a lizard's.

Among her pet stories were a few about the "Boss"; but these she related carefully, and under solemn pledge of secrecy. She must have known that there was a chance of my repeating them, but the habit of talking was irresistible to her, and I have noticed that most great gossips are singularly confiding.

I learned from Mrs. Mead that Barron had "launched" dozens of young actresses; that he was always interested in some girl or woman, but never in one for long, until the reign of Lily Stuart. She had kept him faithful, outwardly at least, for three or four years; but "they" were saying now that he was tired of Lily, and would have thrown her over if he were not too much in awe of her furious temper. She was famous for "the worst temper and the best pearls" of any actress on the stage.

When Mrs. Mead mentioned Barron's fear of Lily, I began to understand why he had been so careful while I was in New York lest his interest in me should be talked about. The old lady explained volubly that

though Barron was said "never to do anything for nothing," I need not be afraid of slander. I was "so young, only a child," and the "hit" I had made with my scream had aroused his curiosity and interest in me, that was all.

I doubted her protestations, but did not much care whether she believed in this theory or not, or even whether the rest of the company believed it, as Mrs. Mead assured me they did. I knew very well I was envied by the other girls, each one of whom would be in my place if she could; and there was not one of my fourteen companions of the tour, from the star down to the property-man, who did not spoil and flatter me. I basked in the sunshine of kindness, and hardly ever stopped to think that it was not for me, myself, but for the "Boss's" protégée. Even now I believe that most of the people really liked me, for actors and actresses are warm-hearted folk, in spite of their jealousies; and I was grateful to them, so were they grateful to me for the many favours I was able to wheedle out of the "management" for them.

Barron often came to see how the company was getting on, in big cities where he was interested in the theatres, and at those towns I had the best suite in the most luxurious hotel. My sitting-room would be full of flowers every day; not the flowers I loved best, but those which were most expensive and showy—orchids and gardenias, and stiff, long-stemmed roses, which I might have used for walking-sticks.

Although I was only "leading lady," not the star of the company, my part was as good as the star part, and the "advance man" was instructed to have me "written up" and advertised everywhere, before our arrival. My photographs were shown in lobbies of theatres with those of the star, and, being made to appear as important, it was not strange that my news-

paper notices were often as long or longer than his. I realised that my success was not entirely due to my talent; still, I revelled in it, and thought it worth any price, no matter how high.

When summer came, and the tour ended, Barron would not let me stop in New York, and remembering Mrs. Mead's stories, I guessed that Lily Stuart's power over him was not yet at an end. I was not jealous of her, in the ordinary sense of the word, because the less I saw of Barron, the happier I was. But it vexed me that, because of Lily, I could not live in New York. It was very little consolation to be reminded that there was no need for me to spend long, hot days in the city, as other actresses had to do, my next season's engagement being safe. I might have loved the country, which was new to me, if Barron had not frequently broken the peace of the quiet seaside village by coming there to spend week-ends at an hotel near the cottage I shared with Mrs. Mead. If it had not been for the great interest of a new play, which was being written expressly for me, I think the summer would have been unbearable, and that, in desperation, I should have made my escape from Barron at any cost to my future.

He let me hope that the play would be produced at one of his New York theatres, but when rehearsals began, and I had to run up to town every day for them, he could no longer hide his real plans from me. He told me, then, that, after all, he had decided to send me on tour once more. When I came back, rich in experience and success, I should be a "real star," worthy to shine in the most important city of America, and be taken seriously by the critics. Of course, I knew that he had never meant to let me open in New York, and that he was still "afraid" of Lily. But I liked my new part too well to be very angry. Nothing outside it mattered just then.

The part I had played the season before was that of a young girl, a spoilt child, half ingénue, half soubrette. There was no real feeling in the acting. The new part was emotional, and though the character was unlike my own, putting myself in it, and learning to live it and be it, seemed to wake a side of my nature that had been asleep. I longed for a different kind of happiness from any I had ever known. Music stirred me as it never had before. It was as if my nerves were the strings of some instrument, answering to every touch. I trembled all over with physical dread when a telegram arrived telling me that Barron was to be expected. I loved no one, but I dreamed of the ideal lover, and he was in all ways the opposite of Barron.

We had good bookings, and very few one-night stands, so that we led a lazy life, in spite of our evening's work; yet, though I did very little by day, except read novels and eat chocolates, my spirit was restless, though my body was idle. It was as if a prisoner in a tomb were trying to cry out and force someone to hear. Because I was not as nearly contented as I had been the year before, and because my luxury was no longer a new and satisfying toy, my acting was better than it had been. I think I was like someone in a dark room, fumbling blindly to find a thing which had been seen there in a dream.

The winter after that—the third which had passed since my acquaintance with Barron, almost to my surprise, he kept his promise. Either he had tired at last of Lily, and ceased even to be afraid of her, or she had thrown him over, for she had gone to another management. He put me into the theatre where she had been leading lady, and I need not tell you much about it, but I made a success in New York.

I HAD no flirtations during those years when I owed everything to Barron. If there were any virtues in me at that time, they were gratitude and loyalty. But perhaps, if I had been strongly tempted, I might have been both ungrateful and disloyal. I am not sure. All that I know is, no man came into my life who made me wish to deceive Barron. The more I studied him (as unconsciously I studied all people) and saw him cruel, cynical, tyrannical, yet sensitively vain, ferociously jealous and coarse-minded, his faults veiled to strangers under a thin surface of bluff good nature, the less I inclined to trust other men. If I showed disgust for him (as I did sometimes in brave moments when I would have died for the pleasure of speaking my mind) he would say, "I'm no worse than anyone else—better than most. Every mother's son of us is a beast at heart if it comes to that; and women wouldn't like us if we weren't." All my experience went to make me believe that he spoke the truth about men.

It is hard not to pity myself when I think what I was at that time—though maybe I deserved no pity. I was like a lost child trying to find light, but not knowing the difference between limelight and sunlight. I knew no better than to believe that limelight was the only light in the world. I tried hard to think myself happy, for to give up, and admit to being unhappy was like lying down to die. One of the things that still had

power to amuse me, and keep me from black moods, was gazing at my jewellery. I can hardly realise it now, in looking back, but my jewels were to me what morphia is to some women. When I felt dissatisfied with life, and wished I had died when I was a child, rather than ever have met Barron, I would get out all my diamonds and pearls, and my black opals, the stones I loved better than any others, because they seemed to me like stormy souls of dead geniuses. I would look at them all, and say to myself, "What is there in the world that is better to possess?" But sometimes the medicine would have no effect, or would make me even worse than before. I would feel as if I were drowning in a terrible, cold sea, which engulfed me with wave after wave. Then, in frantic desperation, which seized me I did not know why, I would pull off all my rings and bangles, and fling them about the floor. I would empty my jewel-cases, and throw everything in them across the room. For a few wild minutes I could find a savage relief in that confusion, of which the confusion of my mind was part. I would think of running away, or collecting little doses of chloral and killing myself; but it all ended in nothing. By and by my elderly maid, Jane, who was used to what she called my "tantrums," would pick up the scattered rings and pendants, and dog-collars, and bracelets. She would put the jewels away in their places; and before long, the day always came when I was quite pleased to put my discarded treasures on again. I was not ashamed of these exhibitions, but at heart rather proud of them. With a kind of morbid childishness, I vaguely thought it interesting, and a sign that I was a genius, to indulge in "tantrums." They proved that, indeed, I had temperament. I believed that all people who controlled their emotions were cold and uninteresting. I en-

couraged myself to give way to storms of anger. I boasted of being fantastic and whimsical, and hard to please. The novels I had read, and the theories I had formed from life, made me think that, to be charming, a woman ought to develop a new mood each new hour. She ought never to be in the same mind twice, or let a man know what to expect from her the next moment. The region of intellect was as utterly beyond my comprehension as the words "up" or "down" to the inhabitants of Flatland.

When fits of depression seized me, in the last of the four bad years, I tried going to church as a solace. Organ music, in the twilight, brought tears streaming from my eyes. I longed to become a Catholic, feeling vaguely that the incense and the singing would raise me out of myself, near to heaven. But I could not bear the thought of confessing to a priest. At vespers, I often yearned to throw myself at the feet of some man of God, and beg for absolution for my sins. Yet I held back; and next day, perhaps, I would insist defiantly that I had no serious sins to confess. I was, as Barron said of himself, "no worse than anyone else—better than most." And then maybe I would go out and give away money indiscriminately, in what I supposed to be "charity." That act would make me feel very good, and in harmony with all the world for a little while; but perhaps when night came, the doubt and despair would press down on me again, like the lid of a coffin. I remembered Alma on such nights, and told myself out aloud, with my face hot, and my hair tangled over my pillow, that it was the fate of all true artists to be miserable. But even that did not soothe me long, since I was never sure for twelve hours together that I was a true artist. There was perhaps more comfort in thinking it useless to struggle against destiny, for

that saved trouble. I bought myself a diamond brooch, formed of the word "Kismet," and looked at it often when I was alone. But I never wore it when it could be seen by Barron. I could not bear to have him ask questions.

After a violently religious phase, when I prayed and sobbed all night, there came a phase of cold atheism. I said sullenly that there was no God, no after-life, nothing to do in this world but enjoy oneself and help other to enjoy themselves. I grew very hard and bitter, and perhaps found some childish satisfaction in becoming a cynic, since other satisfaction there was none. But I was no longer as amusing a companion as I had been. I was twenty, and I felt very old. Nothing interested me except my acting, and I cared for nobody except Jane, my maid, who lectured me and was fond of me—the only creature in the world who loved me unselfishly.

Of four years, I spent half the time in travelling, half in New York, where I lived far up town, in a pretty flat which I never liked, and would rather not describe to you. I went to the theatre in a motor-car of my own every night. Jane knew all about Barron, and disapproved of him and everything connected with him, with her whole soul. Yet she would not desert me, though she was religious—an ardent Methodist. She was a different woman when we went on tour, and I knew why, though she never hinted at the reason. Stern as she was, she was the soul of discretion. I, too, was happier away from New York, because the third and fourth year, Barron followed me less often, when on the road. I think Jane hoped, perhaps prayed, that he would at last ask me to marry him.

If he had asked, almost certainly I should have refused. Marriage seemed to my mind a stupid state

to enter into, a kind of stepping-stone to divorce, and extremely dull while it lasted. But it was a severe shock, nevertheless, when one day Barron told me abruptly that he was married.

I had just finished a long, successful tour, and had arrived at my flat, with Jane, both of us tired out after a hot, dusty journey. A servant, re-engaged from the season before, had returned, and opened the rooms for us. There were flowers everywhere, and it did not matter much who had sent them. The place looked sweet and fresh, and for the first time seemed like home. I had been depressed by the thought of coming back to New York for the summer, but for the moment the depression was gone. I was singing as I rearranged some strong-stemmed American Beauty roses in glass vases. I am glad one doesn't often see American Beauty roses in England. I have never cared for them since that day.

Barron was announced. I had not seen him for a long time—only once since I started out West in the autumn. He had written seldom, but had sent many telegrams, which I liked better than his letters. They were less troublesome to read or answer. Always he had excused himself for his negligence, saying that he had a great deal of business to attend to; and I was thankful for the business.

When he came in and found me among the roses, he seemed delighted to see me, and paid me a great many compliments. "I'd almost forgotten how pretty you were," he said. And there was a curious, anxious look in his eyes, as if he were afraid of me. Perhaps he had once looked at Lily Stuart in that way. I wondered if he had been losing money on some of his theatrical companies.

At last he blurted out, "I've got a thing to say to

you that you won't like. But I want to tell you first that it isn't going to hurt you, or make any difference between us."

He floundered on for a minute or two, and then grew brusque again, in self-defence. The long and short of it was that he had been married the day before. Without giving me time to speak, after that bare statement, he hurried to explain some of his reasons for marrying. It was a marriage of expedience, he said; benefits to gain on both sides. But when he told me the name of the woman, I was sure that he must have tired of me, and at least have fancied himself in love with her.

Then, though I had a feeling for him which had come very near to loathing, if I analysed it, I was suddenly furious. I had kept him faithful longer than anyone else had been able to do. But now this woman had put me in the place where I had put Lily Stuart. All that was bad in my nature rose boiling to the surface. I think I had never been really wicked at heart before, in spite of all the wrong things I had done; but I was very wicked then. I made up my mind deliberately to win him back, and take him away from his wife. I saw that he admired me still, more than he had realised while I was away. I felt that he was sincere in saying that he had "forgotten how pretty I was"; and the look in his eyes told me that I had power over him.

No doubt he had been afraid that I would make a scene; but a bad sort of cleverness kept me from speaking out the thoughts in my mind. I was gentle and friendly, and a little sad, outside. Inside, I was like a wicked cat, planning where to scratch. And all the time I knew that I was wicked; but I did not care.

I assured Barron that he had had a perfect right to marry, and I was not angry. But the only right thing

for me to do was to give him up at once. I had saved enough money to live on for awhile; and next season, if he would like to give someone else the part which he was having written for me, I could easily get another engagement—thanks to his past kindness. All the managers knew now what I could do, and there were several who would be glad to have me in one of their companies.

The lady he had just married was an actress, and a strikingly handsome, talented woman; but I was sure that she could not and would not play the part I spoke of. I could see, without waiting to hear it from him, that he meant to send me on tour next winter, in the new part, while she was starred in the New York theatre. As I thought of this, it made my heart feel more and more wicked. I was glad that I was ten years younger than Barron's new wife; and I felt very certain that I could make him regret marrying her—maybe make her regret marrying him.

I would not listen to any more explanations, but said firmly that I would give up the flat, and go away to the country. It would be easy to sublet the flat, I went on gently. He would have no trouble about it; and even if it were to stand empty, I could not live there any longer. I insisted, too, upon returning to him all his presents of jewellery. He could give them to his wife, if he liked, I said quietly. She would never know from me that they had belonged to anybody else before coming to her.

I talked so sweetly that he was almost reduced to tears, and his sentimental regrets seemed so maudlin to me, that I could hardly look at him. But I was beginning to be pleased with myself, because I was acting as well as I had ever acted on the stage.

You may not understand quite what I mean, when I

say that I had never been so wicked as I was in leaving Barron. But I am sure a woman would understand. I was unscrupulous and cruel; and I had never been either of those things before.

Nothing that he could say or do would make me change my mind. He refused to go away unless I would promise to stay in the flat, and keep all his presents; but he was obliged to yield in the end. No doubt he had some engagement with his wife, and was anxious lest she should find out that he had been to my flat. I could imagine how she must have made him swear that he would never see or speak to me again, and I had a cold pleasure in the breaking of his vow.

I wished that I had flirted desperately and secretly ever since the day when I knew him first; and I said to myself that it was not too late to begin. I wanted to make him suffer, now that he had no longer any right to complain of my ingratitude.

When he had gone, I told Jane to pack again the things that she had just unpacked, except the jewelry. All Barron's presents to me I sent in a sealed package, by district messenger, to his office, with "To Mr. Barron's arrival," written on it in large black letters.

Then I decided to go to a place so well known and conspicuous that, if Barron followed me there, his wife would be sure to hear of it. Summer had begun, and in thinking over different seaside towns which might suit me, I chose N—tt. A great many rich patricial people and their friends went to N—tt, even out of season.

I had plenty of money, because my salary for the last two years had been very good. As I had told Barron, I knew that I could find plenty of engagements. There

was no need for me to save; but even if there had been I would not have wished to save. I took a furnished cottage at N—tt, let by a family who had gone to Europe; and next day the news was in the papers. The same morning I had a telegram from Barron, in the cipher code he always used in wiring to me. He had been distracted at my disappearance, and begged me to come back to New York. I had expected this, and did not answer. I knew that he was afraid to come to N—tt, but I was certain that if I remained firm he would come, sooner or later.

Every day I received telegrams and letters, but I took no notice of them. Once a messenger brought me all the jewellery which I had returned, but I sent it back by the same boy, under another cover addressed to Barron.

This went on for several weeks, but at last he could bear it no longer. He arrived one evening, after dark, and bribed a new servant of mine who answered the door to let him in and surprise me. I was just finishing dinner when he walked in.

His face showed that he dreaded a bad reception, and I saw, as I had seen before, that I had him at my mercy. Instead of telling him to go, I was kind, though sad, as I had been when I sent him away from my flat in New York. I sat down again, and gave him dinner, as he said that he had had nothing to eat. Then, when he had drunk some wine, he began to pour out all his troubles.

The marriage was not a success. His wife was cold as ice, yet very jealous. According to his story, she had a nagging temper, and was recklessly extravagant. She spent his money like water, and gave him nothing in return. Already he was wondering "what the devil he had seen in her." He wished to heaven that they were not married, and that he could go back to old

times. But on the mother's side she was related to some important people in society. If they could "worry along without a bust up," he said, they might be received together into a very different set in New York from any that had ever opened its doors to him. He confessed that, now he had plenty of money and was tired of hard work, he had begun to be ambitious socially. With his wealth and his wife's connections and good reputation, he believed that by and by he could "get to the top of the society tree," and he wanted to do it, because he had succeeded in everything else he had undertaken. He was trying for this now, with all his might, and would hate to fail. Failure would mean that he had married "a beast of a woman" in vain.

Then he went on to repeat what he had told me in New York; that he did not love his wife, and that I was the only girl for whom he had ever cared. He begged that I would take him back, and yet help him not to get found out.

I longed to let the man see my full contempt for him; but that was not in the game I was playing. It was a game—a wicked game; and if I was not punished enough long ago, I am punished now, in having to write of this to you, without making excuses for myself. Rather than smooth things over, and try to appear better than I was, I will risk your thinking me callous, just as I have risked your thinking me coarse. And the most horrible thing is that perhaps you will be right. I may be too ready to forgive myself. But you will not make that mistake. If I could be sure, at least, that you understand why I have let myself seem brutal! But it is part of my punishment that I cannot be sure; that I feel it will be impossible for you to understand at all.

I was unfailingly gentle in my manner to Barron,

and said at last that I would think things over, if he cared to stop till Monday in the hotel. I told him that he might come and see me sometimes, as a friend, while he was there. I took advantage of such fondness as he had for me, to hurt him; and it did hurt him to feel that he had lost me. He stayed; and though he was careful not to be seen, and even took his meals in a private sitting-room, the day after he went back to New York one or two papers stated that Barron had spent the week-end at N——tt.

He had mentioned that his wife had just been operated on for appendicitis, or else he would not have been able to slip quietly away for three whole days. It seemed that he had told the truth; but though Mrs. Barron was shut up for weeks in hospital, somehow she contrived to find out where her husband had been for those few days. After a terrible scene with her, he wrote to me, throwing himself on my mercy. And that letter unexpectedly began a new phase of my life.

XIX.

ONE afternoon I was lying in a hammock, on a narrow back verandah of the cottage I had taken at N—tt. It was thickly screened with grape vines, through which a green light sifted, almost as deep a colour as if the little verandah had been walled in with green glass. On hot days, a pleasant, bitter-sweet smell of the young grapes and curly tendrils was drawn out by the sun; and when it mingled with a salt breeze from the sea it was a heady fragrance that excited me oddly. But then, everything that was keenly pleasant excited me. Nothing could give me peace.

I was studying my part that afternoon, for Barron had begged me to go on under his management the next season, and I had consented, chiefly because I liked the new part so much I could not easily give it up. I wanted to play it better than I had ever played a part before, so that Barron might fully realise what he had lost in losing me. It is strange that I still resented so passionately his secretly marrying another actress while pretending to care only for me; because, since I had broken away from him, my life was a thousand times pleasanter than it had been for years. And yet I did resent his marriage, I do not know why, unless some curious twist in human nature makes us want to be first always, even with those whom we wish never to see again.

One side of me was absorbed in my study, the other side—the child-side, which I think never dies in a

woman—was pretending to be a mermaid, floating with the tide, far down under the green roof of the sea. Probably I should have dropped off to sleep soon, if I had not heard the door-bell ring.

That sharp sound usually meant a telegram or a letter, for very few people I knew were at √—tt just then. A minute more, and a servant (the only one I had, besides the indispensable Jane) brought me a visiting-card.

It was a very small one, so I knew, even before reading the name, that my caller was a man. I was just inventing an excuse, for I could think of nobody for whose sake I would care to break off my studying and dreaming, when I read the name: "Mr. William Vibert," with a very magnificent address underneath, and that of an exclusive club for the richest young men of New York. Instantly I changed my mind and decided to see him.

Not because he belonged to a grand family, whom it was supposed to be an honour to know, but because I was curious as to why he had come to call; and still more, because of another reason which I shall have to explain, to make you understand—even a little—the things I did afterwards. And to explain, I must go back to the winter before, and tell you about an incident which was of importance in my life only because of Willy Vibert.

I played in Washington, at one of the best theatres; and because I was rather the fashion, as the youngest of the successful actresses on the stage just then, the gayest set of young people "took me up" socially. Several girls were very nice and kind, in a cordial way which belongs only to the South and the far, far West, and I was flattered and pleased. They told me that I was pretty, and a splendid actress, and that they envied me for being on the stage. They asked me all

sorts of questions, which it amused me to answer, and made me feel of great importance as a beauty and a genius. They sent me my own photographs to sign, and made me presents of flowers and chocolates. Also they invited me to luncheon-parties, which was a greater compliment than the rest, for it showed that they had never heard, or at all events never believed, scandal about me, and perhaps that they accepted as truth the newspaper stories of my good birth and early surroundings.

While I was there, in Washington, Margaret Vibert, who had come out in New York that autumn, arrived to visit a school-friend whose father was a senator from the South. This friend sent out invitations for a luncheon-party in honour of Miss Vibert, and I was asked. All the other girls invited were in their own set. I accepted, and was looking forward to it, because it seemed likely to be more interesting than most luncheons; but the day after writing my acceptance the invitation was cancelled. My young hostess's mother wrote a civil note, saying that her daughter was ill, and would not be able to give the entertainment after all.

I would have thought no more about it, if I had not received an anonymous letter at the theatre, telling me that the luncheon had only been abandoned in order to get rid of me; that Miss Vibert had refused to make my acquaintance, because she had heard that I was "not respectable"; and that as soon as I left Washington, the invitations would be sent out again.

If I had been very sensible, perhaps I would not have cared; but I did care, immensely. I tried not to believe what the anonymous letter said, but I felt that it had told me the truth; and it was just as if I had been publicly struck in the face. The last few days of my stay in Washington were spoiled. My vitality was

lowered. Even my acting was affected; and when I tried to eat, there was always a lump in my throat. I imagined that everyone knew, and whether it were fact or fancy, it appeared to me that the new friends I had made were not as cordial as they had been. My foolish sensitiveness, which was probably more than half vanity (though I didn't realise it then), felt the bruise for a long time. I brooded over the slight just as indignantly as if I had not deserved it; and when I had good notices for my acting, in other cities, the remembrance came between my eyes and the paragraphs which would otherwise have made my heart beat with joy. The kindness of many other people did not console me for the scorn of that one New York girl of my own age, who had refused to know me because I was "not respectable." Those two words, which had put me beyond the pale, rankled in my mind at all sorts of unlikely times and places. I would hear them in the night, when I ought to have been dropping off to sleep; or the whirring wheels of a flying train would say them over and over.

You will think this strange, because what I have told you of my life has shown how little regard I paid to conventionalities, and how little I knew about them; but I suppose there are characteristics in one's blood, which have come from unknown ancestors, different in most ways from one's self, and one does not even know that the traits are there until something happens to bring them up suddenly to the surface. I had never realised before how it could hurt to have a well brought up girl shrink from me because I was not as she was, until Margaret Vibert refused to meet me at luncheon. That was the entering wedge which pierced my sensibility, if not my conscience, and began to show me sharply what a price I had undertaken to pay for my advancement on the stage, and the sweet cleanliness

and all the luxuries I had gloried in after escaping from Mrs. Fergus's.

Now you can see a little of what I felt when I took Willy Vibert's card in my hand that afternoon in the hammock; but only a little, because you are a man, high-minded and nobly ready to forgive things that ought to be forgiven.

Willy Vibert was Margaret Vibert's brother. I knew this, because, after reading in the paper about the luncheon-party, which was promptly given after I left Washington, it had seemed that I was continually coming upon the name of that family. They were not among the great, sensational millionaires, and they were not people who advertised themselves and their doings, as some of the mushroom millionaires do; but the Viberts were too important in society to keep out of the papers, and their names had sprung at my eyes nearly every day since Washington. I knew that Willy Vibert had spent a good deal of time travelling in Europe since leaving college, and I had read only a week or two before that Margaret was in England, staying with an aunt who had married a man of title. There was a rumour, the paper said, that the American heiress was engaged to a relation of her aunt's husband, and the name was mentioned—a very ancient one, which can be seen in a play of Shakespeare's.

For a second or two an angry impulse made me want to shut my door on Willy Vibert with a rude message; but quickly I remembered how I had lain awake at night, weaving all sorts of revenges, more or less fantastic and childish, to punish Margaret for what I had suffered. I saw, after an instant's reflection, that I had a far better chance of punishing her by keeping her brother, than in sending him away. I did not stop to arrange any definite plan, but I told the servant that she might bring Mr. Vibert out to the verandah.

I knew that I looked well in the hammock, which was of canvas, dyed scarlet, and I was propped up on a pile of red silk cushions, which made as good a background as I could have chosen for my hair, and my thin white dress. Probably a girl in society would have risen to receive a caller whom she had never met, but I did not know or care whether that would be the right thing to do. I lay still, in the green light, feeling somehow as if I were on the stage, playing a new part on a first night—a part I had not quite learned.

I had seen Margaret Vibert in a box at the theatre in Washington, and she was pretty, with red hair, which was her principal beauty. As her brother came through one of the two long windows on to the verandah, I saw that there was a family resemblance, though he was not handsome. He, too, had red hair, but redder than Margaret's, and instead of a very white skin, as she had, his was brown (not a soldier-brown, like yours, but a brown-red brick colour) with quantities of big yellow freckles spattered over his face. He was very tall and slim, with a long neck in an extremely high collar, and he was so well dressed, and had such straight slender legs, that he gave the effect of having a perfect figure. He had curled-up red eyelashes, almost invisible brows, and, being clean-shaven, with a nice smile, he looked boyish in spite of a big nose. I leaned on one elbow to greet him, and, as we shook hands, I saw that his hand and all of his wrist which showed under his shirt-cuff, was covered with fine red hair, like a delicate film of copper lace. He smelt good, of some perfumed hair-wash, and Turkish cigarette smoke. His teeth were slightly prominent, and one of the two front ones, very white and strong, lapped somewhat over the other. This gave his long chin a look as if it receded a little.

I had thought that, though I had never met him,

probably he had seen me act, since he came back from Europe; but by the way his eyes lit up as he took my hand, I guessed that, after all, he was seeing me for the first time. This idea made me even more curious than before; but immediately he began to explain, stammering and halting, as if he were very shy, that he had brought a letter of introduction.

"I didn't like to send it in ahead of me," he said, "because—er—you see—it's rather a queer thing altogether—and I wanted to explain first, or—or anyhow get to you. Because you might have cut me off, you know, without giving me a chance. And I've come on an errand. It's partly for someone else, though I—I wanted to meet you awfully, of course."

I lay there and looked at him quietly, without taking my eyes off him, or interrupting, which I think confused him more than if I had broken in before he got out his apology. But at last, when he stopped for breath, or to find something else to say, I asked him, smiling, if he would give me the letter he had brought.

He looked actually frightened. Like most red-haired people, his skin was very thin, and little beads of perspiration came out on his forehead, in a diamond powder. He pulled at his collar, and settled his necktie. "First I'd better tell you who the letter's from, and explain a little more," he said.

I asked if the letter would not explain itself; but he begged me not to begin it yet. He tried to say something mechanical, which evidently he had planned to say, in a programme he had made out before coming. His eyes grew large and strained, as they fixed themselves on me, and seemed to be fastened to mine, as if by hypnotism. Then he looked down at his manicured nails and turned a green seal ring, with a crest on it, round and round on the little finger of his left hand. As he lowered his eyes, I saw that his long thick eye-

lashes were powdered with dust, which had sifted on to them in a train or motor-car. I cannot tell why, but this effect was engaging. I suddenly liked him. But I did not like him nearly enough to forgive his sister for his sake.

I thought of her, and was glad to believe that she would be sorry if she could see him sitting by the side of my hammock, in the green light of my vine-screened verandah, that was like a little room for intimate friends to talk in. She would believe that I had "got hold of him."

I had not "got hold" of him yet; but already I was making up my mind that I would do so, and somehow shame Margaret as she had shamed me. I wondered if she were with the titled Englishman to whom she was said to be engaged, and I sent hard, cold thoughts to her across the sea.

I was not surprised that Willy Vibert had hesitated and found it almost impossible to explain his errand, when he had managed to stammer out enough to make it clear. I suppose it must have been one of the queerest errands that ever took a man to a woman. It was so queer that for a few minutes I could hardly believe I understood; but when I began the letter, I saw that there was no mistake.

Of all the things that have ever happened to me, this is the only one which I think is more like an incident of a story than real life. My meeting with you was pure romance, romance which makes me believe in a heaven where all is good; but it was real, and to other women, perhaps, their own love stories seem as beautiful, whether just begun and broken short, like mine, or melodies that go on without a jarring note. Only this one chapter of my life, which has to do with meeting Willy Vibert might be used in a novel or a play. The others would not lend themselves to either.

"I'm not sure whether you know I'm acquainted with Barron," he said, after his preamble.

I shook my head without speaking, because it was a disappointment to know that he came from Barron. I wanted the visit to be made for a more interesting and, perhaps, romantic reason, for almost unconsciously I was starving for a little romance just then.

Willy Vibert went on to say that he was a "forty-second cousin of Mrs. Barron, and that it was through his distant relationship with her that he had met her husband. "I used to go to Barron's theatre, and hear about him and all that," he explained hastily, "but we never ran across each other."

I said nothing, and Willy went on. "You see, we got acquainted in a different way from what we could otherwise, I being a sort of cousin of his wife's, and the only one of my people that cares much about the theatre; the others go in for opera more. And we got kind of intimate. He found out I was in a d—d—I mean an awful—mess, and he helped me out of it. I'd never have thought what a devilish good fellow he is. Nothing to get out of me in return, don't you know; at least, he didn't see that he had then."

I was not so sure of this, because Barron had told me about his social ambitions, and I knew that Willy Vibert could help him immensely in society. My experience of Barron exactly carried out what Mrs. Mead had said of him, that "he never did anything for nothing."

Having got so far, Willy had landed himself in difficulties again. He floundered, inquiring if I had ever heard that by a coincidence Barron's surname and his middle name were the same. I replied that I had learned it for the first time in looking at his card.

"Seemed to sort of draw us together," he laughed uneasily. "Anyhow, he was so good to me, keeping

me out of my governor's bad books, that I told him he'd only to ask, and I'd do anything he wanted. He said he didn't want anything, but maybe he would some day; you never could tell, and that kind of talk. It was only yesterday he reminded me of my offer, and begged me to run out here."

"As a favour to him?" I suggested. I smiled as I put the question, but my heart began to beat thickly and sickeningly, as it always did when I was reminded of Barron.

The poor young man was afraid he had been tactless, and mumbled that, of course, it was the greatest pleasure to come, and he had been dying to know me, but had not known how to bring about a meeting. He wouldn't have dared to call on me, "off his own bat," and now that he'd seen exactly the kind of girl I was, he would almost rather go back, and disoblige Barron, than let me read that letter under his nose.

It was then I began vaguely to suspect something of what had brought Willy Vibert to N——tt. I insisted on seeing the letter, and read it through slowly, without once raising my eyes from its pages. Even when I had finished, I could not look up at once. I felt cold and sick at heart, because men could believe me capable of consenting to such a bargain. Yet I did not know what answer to give Willy Vibert. I wanted to find some way of keeping him near me, in order to frighten and hurt Margaret, and at the same time I longed savagely to send him back to Barron with some terrible message, which neither of the two could ever forget.

As I lay there, with wild ideas racing through my head like the little horses of a merry-go-round, Willy Vibert sat leaning anxiously towards me, one arm, in grey flannel, resting on the verandah rail, the fingers of his right hand nervously drumming a tune on the

wood. The tap, tap made my nerves twang, and prevented me from concentrating my mind on the subject of the letter. I could not help wondering what tune he was playing, and mechanically I tried to fit the tapping to several airs it might suit.

At last I said, "Please don't do that!"

He stopped so suddenly that I glanced quickly up at him. Our eyes met. His were suffused with some emotion, perhaps embarrassment. I did not know why I was impelled to ask, "What tune was that you were playing?" But I had to do it.

He blushed painfully, as if he had been detected in a shameful act. I was sorrier for him than ever; but not sorry enough yet to let him alone.

"I—I think—I'm afraid it was Yankee Doodle," he stammered.

"Oh!" I said, reproachfully.

He was almost ready to cry. "It's the only one I know," he pleaded.

This made me laugh, and he was only too thankful to take up the cue. We both laughed hysterically, and could hardly stop. But when at last we controlled ourselves, suddenly becoming preternaturally solemn, there were tears in his eyes. Seeing his wet, tears sprang to mine, and poured over my cheeks. He was deeply distressed, and stammered broken apologies and consolations. I had cried before other men—stage-managers who had scolded me in old days, or who would not understand what I wanted at rehearsals, in later years; once or twice I had cried before Herman Caine and Barron; but no man who saw me weep had ever taken my tears so seriously as Willy Vibert did.

"Oh, don't, don't!" he implored. "I'll go on my knees to you, if you'll stop. I deserve to be killed. I'd do anything to comfort you!" His voice sounded

very boyish, and there was more diamond powder than ever on his forehead, which looked like a bright embroidery on a red background, as I saw it through a thick blur of my own tears.

"Do you know what is in the letter?" I asked, when I had dried my eyes.

"Not exactly," he answered. "Perhaps there are things kept back from me."

Cruelly, to punish him for coming, though I was not sorry that he had come, I forced him to tell me what he did know. I tore out of him the fact that Barron had said he was "in for an almighty row with his wife," and that there might be a divorce, in which my name would be mixed up, unless Willy would "help him out of the mud." Ashamed as the wretched boy already was of the part he had agreed to play, I could read between the lines of his admission that he had been flattered by the request, which had made him feel a man of the world, launched upon a great adventure with an actress.

What Barron had asked of him, was to call on me at N—tt, to present the letter in person, and to be extremely polite. The coincidence of middle name and surname being the same, had put an idea into the latter's ingenious head. He thought that, if Willy and I would consent it might be made to appear that it was Willy who had spent the fatal week-end at the N—tt hotel, signing his middle name in the register, instead of his last, as a precaution against publicity. If Mrs. Barron could be made to believe that the adventure had been Willy's, she would have nothing against her husband; and apparently the desired story had already been told to her. She was still in hospital, but insisted on questioning Willy, as soon as she could be allowed to see a visitor. It was for this reason that Willy had been hurriedly sent to me. Barron dared

not trust the fluffy-headed young man to describe me, or the hotel at N——tt, or my cottage, or answer any other embarrassing questions that might be asked, unless he had really met and talked to me at my cottage. Besides, it was necessary for success that Willy and I should talk matters over, and arrange a plan of campaign together.

Willy had been induced, through gratitude and flattered vanity, to consent to the scheme. I was to be terrified by the threat that I might be dragged into a disgraceful divorce case, and bribed in addition by the offer of twenty thousand dollars in cash. These two last inducements had not been mentioned to Willy; and when I prevailed over his reluctance, and made him read the letter, his tanned, red face grew so pale that the freckles stood out on it like blotches of yellow ochre. He was furious with Barron for making a catspaw of him, for asking him to carry such a letter, not knowing the contents, and piteously anxious that I should believe in his innocence.

"Of course, you wouldn't take money," he repeated over and over, as if he were afraid that I had not heard him. "I only thought, that to get Barron out of a scrape with his wife, you might go into the thing. And it was mighty nice for me, having such a chance given me to meet you. I see now, you can't possibly do what he wants."

"Wait. Let me think," I said. I shut my eyes to ponder the matter over, and Willy sat motionless, painfully rigid, without even letting his chair creak, as if I had been ill, and he were watching over me while I slept through a crisis.

In my life I had done a great deal that was wrong, and foolish, and bold, and perhaps even selfish and greedy; but I felt sure that never had I given Barron cause to believe I was a girl to accept his twenty thou-

sand dollar bribe. A little while ago, if he had ventured such a suggestion, I should have been blind and deaf to everything except my rage against him. But now I was only coldly disgusted. His secret marriage, and his wish to have me stay on at the flat as if nothing had happened, had shown me exactly what he was. There were no surprises left as to his lack of scruples. I loathed him a good deal more than before, that was all. But after the first impulse of anger, when I longed to punish him in some way, I was not sure that I would refuse to enter the plot. I was sure only that I would not take money. I think I would not have had a dollar on such terms if I had been starving; but I was very far from starving. I had enough to go on with for a long time, if I used what I had saved out of my salary without thinking of the future; and I was too true a daughter of Boy and Dearie to waste any anxious thoughts on years to come.

I had two motives for thinking over that part of the proposal which did not concern money. They were not high motives, but at least they were not mercenary. One was, that to be brought into a divorce suit would do me great harm, not so much in New York as in quiet towns of the West, where respectable, church-going people went to the theatre only if they approved the morals of the actors. I was very popular in such towns, since I had become a "star," and girls turned out in crowds for my matinées. In spite of the rumour that had set Margaret Vibert against making my acquaintance, there had never been any wide-spread scandal about me in connection with Barron. In his selfish wish to protect himself, he had incidentally protected me as well, and I did not want newspapers, which had been kind so far, to print my name in large letters as the respondent in a divorce case. Besides,

for the sake of punishing Margaret Vibert, far more than because I liked Willy, I was willing to be gossiped about a little with her brother. Being very observant, and flattering myself that I could read a man's character at sight, I was sure already that I would be safe with him. I saw that, though not highly intelligent, he was chivalrous, and singularly unspoiled for a young man in his position; and I thought that by and by I should be able to do almost anything with him. I was quite undecided yet what I would choose to do; and the uncertainty interested me.

When I opened my eyes, at last, I found Willy's fixed on me. He apologised for staring, and said something foolish about my eyelashes. I had half expected this; for I am not sure that I had not shut my eyes, and kept them shut for so long, on purpose to let him notice my eyelashes.

The only fault you ever accused me of was being vain of their length, and liking to have them admired. But you laughed when you took me to task. I think my childish vanity, which I could not deny, softened your heart to me a little, and made you feel that I was very human; for you had such an exalted opinion of my qualities! I thought that day, with a stab of pain, if you could guess my real faults, how your indulgent smile would change—the dear, kind smile a man gives the woman he is beginning to care for, when she seems particularly feminine.

I said abruptly to Willy that, of course, Barron must have told him everything about our past, or he would not have come to me on such an errand. Painfully red, the boy tried to say no; that he did not understand what I meant about the past; but his face betrayed him.

"Please don't lie to me," I said in a low voice, sitting up in the hammock. Then I looked him

straight in the face, with my head high, and laid my hand, which had grown very cold, though the day was hot, on the back of his hand, that still rested on the railing. Impulsively he grasped mine with both his. I liked the way he did this, and did not try to draw away, but sat still, looking at him steadily.

"I *can't* lie to you!" he exclaimed. "That beast did say things, and I was ass enough to believe some of them. But of course, I don't now. I've a mind to kill him."

"He told you the truth," I said. And then more tears came. They were not false tears, neither were they true in the best sense. It was not from sorrow for my past that I cried, but in sheer emotion, and the growing thrill of a situation which always brought tears to my eyes, even if I were reading a book or watching a play on the stage.

I could see that Willy Vibert was falling under a spell. Never before had I tried so deliberately to exert power over any man except on the day when I heard that Barron was married, and again when he followed me to N—tt; but I felt that there was a fascination in it, and in succeeding I had almost a contempt for Willy, because it was so easy to win him.

I thought his eyes, which could not break loose from mine, no longer looked nice and boyish, but silly; yet I was glad, for I knew that men's eyes always had that look when they were falling in love. I had not yet wanted other men to be in love with me, except on principle, thinking of them not as individuals, but as Man. Yet now I wanted to have Margaret Vibert's brother for my slave.

"Are you sorry for me?" I asked gently.

"God knows I am. I want to murder that beast," the boy stammered. I saw that he could hardly speak.

In all his life, he had perhaps never found himself in so serious a situation as this.

"But you knew before. And you were grateful to him!"

"I didn't know *you*. That makes all the difference."

No woman, still more no girl, could have helped softening towards him at that.

I felt that I could like Willy quite warmly, and that whatever I might have to do to win him thoroughly, would not be a disagreeable task. But suddenly I made up my mind firmly that the game I was beginning to play should be for high stakes. I seemed always to be playing games with Fate, at this time; but I had grown so hard since Barron had deceived me about his marriage that I thought of them as if I were merely acting some new part, more or less distasteful, yet necessary.

Tactfully, I recited a few chapters of my life, since Barron gave me my first contract, not as I have recited them to you, but painting myself as much an innocent angel as possible, Barron as an unscrupulous villain. I told no actual falsehoods; but I knew how different my story must sound from the version Willy had heard from Barron. As I went on, I worked myself up to a high pitch of emotion over my own sufferings and wrongs; and before I finished Willy was listening with his face hidden. At last, when I ceased speaking, he bent forward, seized both my hands and kissed them. He, poor boy, magnetised by my misleading eloquence, said that I was pure as snow, purer than girls who had never been tempted.

For a few minutes I actually believed him. I forgot the game I had begun to play. I throbbed with the remembered agony of my spoiled and broken youth. I clung to him, repaid for all I had suffered through Margaret. I thought of myself as a fallen angel,

dragged down from some shining height where I might have stood. But suddenly I saw, with the clearness of a cinematograph picture, myself in Mrs. Fergus's flat, dancing wildly round with Julia and Kitty, all three of us undressed, our hair flying around bare shoulders, as we sang with joy over our road engagement together. This reminded me forcibly that I had never stood upon a height. Yet the remembrance did not prevent me from trying to fascinate Margaret Vibert's brother.

Willy asked if I would accept him for my knight, and I said yes, gratefully. I told him that I needed a friend, and let my voice tremble as I spoke. In the end we shook hands upon our friendship.

He did not go back to New York that night. He stayed on for days at the hotel near my cottage, where Barron had stopped. But I was horribly clever in those days, swept onward by some hitherto unknown tide of worldly wisdom, whose first ripple had crawled to my feet when Barron confessed to his marriage. I would not consent to see Willy often; but when I did allow him to come to me, I was kind with a gentle aloofness that helped me with the new part I was learning for next season. And the part helped me to succeed with Willy.

For three days he was very good. He kept bravely to our compact of friendship, and was my knight, but nothing more. On the fourth day he told me that he loved me, and seemed to think that I would be surprised. That belief was a tribute to my acting.

I did not say that I could never love him, but I told him that he had better go, because I was sure he did not really care for me. When he asked, as I knew he would, why I said that, I answered that his love was selfish. I did not want to hurt him, I went on (which was true enough, though I thought of myself

first); but if he wished to keep me in his life, there was only one way. I had made a terrible mistake, when I was too young to realise what it meant, and if he loved me, he would not wish me to make another. He must go abroad and forget all about me as soon as he could, or else—he must ask me to be his wife.

I never knew, and never will know, whether he spoke the truth, or only wished to save my pride; but he vowed that he had never thought of anything else but marriage. He pretended to be, or was, indignant because I had believed him capable of any other intention. There was but one obstacle, he hurried to explain. He had no money to live on, except what his father allowed him. The family did not like the stage, and had always been afraid that he might marry an actress. They would not welcome me as his wife, and he was not "smart enough to earn his own living." We must wait two years, till he was twenty-five, before having our marriage announced publicly, for then he would come into several hundred thousand dollars which his grandmother had left to him without any conditions. But he begged me to marry him secretly at once. He pleaded that he loved me too much to wait, and he could not bear to think of my "travelling about the country with a lot of good-looking actors making love to me," unless he were sure that I belonged to him.

I ought to have been passionately grateful to any man, perhaps more especially to one in Willy Vibert's world, for shutting his eyes to my past, and wanting to have me for his wife. But I hardly thought of gratitude, and the idea of marrying Willy unless his sister and Barron could both know that I was his wife did not please me at all. My one great reason for wanting to marry him was to "pay" Margaret for her insult. And, incidentally, it would have soothed my

hurt vanity to have Barron see that his aristocratic messenger had, without a struggle, become my humble slave.

I refused to marry Willy until his people could be told. I said that if we were talked about together nobody would ever believe that I was his wife, and that I should be very unhappy. All I would consent to was an engagement, and even that only provided he wrote to his sister, if no one else in the family; also that he told Barron everything.

It was an infatuation, and Willy did exactly as I wished without any sign of the reluctance which I suspected him of feeling. I made him show me an answer that came to him from Margaret, in England, wherein she said that if he married such a girl it would ruin her prospects. Lord Heriot would probably object to having me for his future sister-in-law. Willy assured me eagerly that this was "all d—d nonsense." Most English lords married chorus girls! And he implored me "not to mind." He did not guess that I was glad, and that I had got exactly what I wanted.

But with this mean gratification of my spite against Margaret Vibert, all the pleasure went out of my engagement. I was not sorry that, when Barron's wife started a scandal about us, Willy was strong enough and chivalrous enough to tell his friends the truth. His father was deeply offended, and sent telegrams from Europe, where he had gone to fetch Margaret; but the boy stood by me loyally. He was "interviewed" and I was "interviewed." A romance was made of the affair by the newspapers, for it was still the dead season, and journalists had not much to talk about. On the strength of my engagement to the son of a rich man, well known in society, several managers made me offers; and that, at least, was a

good thing for my career, as I had sent back my new part to Barron when I wrote to refuse his money, and I enclosed my contract torn in two pieces. It was childish and sentimental to do that, but I was both at twenty, in spite of the experience which had made me very old in some ways.

Still, in spite of his goodness—almost touching nobility—and the advantages it gave me, I was so unbearably bored by Willy that when we had been engaged for three weeks, I knew I could never marry him. It seemed to me that almost any other life would be more endurable than an existence in which I should have to be with him every day, perhaps all day.

Although, when we came to know each other, we had no tastes in common, and I found him irritatingly dull, I might have gone on contentedly enough for awhile, if it had not been for my work. A splendid piece of luck came my way, the best that had ever happened to me, up to that time. I received an offer of a part from one of the best managers, not only in New York, but in America, a man who was as upright as he was intelligent. His faith in my talent was an inspiration to me. I could think of nothing but my new work. Willy ceased to exist, except as an annoying spoke in the wheel of my progress. I forgot all he had tried to do for me, and wished that I had never met him. I did not break the engagement, because I was thinking too intensely of my part on the stage to give thought to my part in real life. It was too much trouble to have "scenes" outside the theatre, and so I let things drift on as they were. But I made a dozen new excuses each week not to spend any time with Willy. I was too busy, or I was not well, or something unexpected had happened which called for another rehearsal.

The part I had been given to act that winter was an experiment for the manager, and critics said he had been plucky to try it; but it was a success. He believed in me as an emotional actress, and trusted me with work not unworthy of real greatness. The woman I had to portray was a good woman, sorely tempted. Looking on life from her point of view (as an actress must if the heart of the audience is to beat with her heart), seemed to open my eyes to things all around me which had been invisible. Since then I have learned a small something of the thousand sights and sounds which our eyes and ears are not fitted to record. That part was for me like a magic touch on closed lids and deaf ears. Just a slight touch, not potent to make me actually see or hear; but strong enough to fill me with a faint premonition of ethereal wonders behind a veil. I cannot describe the stirring of my spirit in any other way. But at first, the vague, sweet pangs I suffered, without knowing what they meant, gave me a restless desire for relief of some sort, it hardly mattered what. I thought that I wanted a new sensation, and began to search for it, though idly and without definite purpose. It was a dangerous state of mind for a girl of my temperament and experience.

New York society was being rather foolish about a Russian notability that season. One night he came to our theatre with some American friends, and sat in the stage box. In my best moods, I forgot the audience; but I could not help seeing the Russian. He forced himself on my attention by leaning conspicuously forward in one of my "big" scenes, and clapping his hands enthusiastically at a moment when applause could be meant only for me. I pretended not to notice; but everyone who was on the stage at the time quizzed me about it when the scene was over. I was teased

about my "conquest," and bets were made that the Russian would ask to be introduced.

I laughed, but I was a little excited; and I should have been disappointed if those bets had been lost. For an instant I had met the man's eyes, passionate and magnetic, yet at the same time insolent and proud. I realised that there was power in him, and I was haunted by the wish to measure mine against his. Something said in me, "Here is the new sensation you wanted!"

Let me tell you quickly that concerning the Russian there is nothing I need be ashamed to confess; nothing worse than vanity and silliness. I could not go on without saying this to you, though perhaps, again, it is only vanity of another kind, which makes me impatient to put myself right with you in the few places where it can fairly be done.

The Russian did ask to meet me that same night.

I knew slightly his principal hostess, who went condescendingly sometimes to a rather Bohemian house where I often spent my Sunday evenings. The lady was one of those New York women who made the acquaintance of actresses as she would have gone to the Zoo to feed some amusing little animals, and no doubt she thought that she was paying me an astounding compliment in sending round a scribbled line to invite me to supper at Sherry's after the theatre. She added that her Russian guest had expressed the wish to know me.

An invitation from her was, in New York, almost like a Royal command in Europe, especially when put as she put it. I was childishly pleased, for no such great personage had ever so flattered me before; but I saw how confident the lady was that I would accept with humble joy, and I determined to surprise her. I wrote back a hurried note on my own paper, which I

kept in my dressing-room, saying that though I appreciated the compliment, my part was too trying for me to accept any invitations after the theatre. I greatly regretted that I could not make an exception to my rule, even in her favour.

That night I could hardly sleep for wondering whether the Russian would be too angry to try again, or whether my refusal to make myself cheap would raise my value in his eyes. As for the lady, I did not much care what she felt, for at the moment no one was of importance to me except the Russian, whose insolent, passionate eyes coloured my thoughts.

Luckily, or unluckily, he was still determined to meet me, and three days later we were introduced to each other at an "At Home," which the same lady gave. He did all he could to interest me in himself, and there was a strain of wildness in his nature which appealed to the same strain in mine, or I thought so. His moodiness and savage sadness alternating with fits of reckless fun, rough as an untrained boy's, had a kind of fascination for me as I learned to know him, especially as he did not show the hidden tiger in him to every one. I was tremendously flattered by his admiration, and though his curious magnetism never touched the higher part of me, I was tempted by him almost to the breaking-point. The two selves in me fought for and against him, and the fight was the harder because I was without moral scruples, except an instinct, which was like a voice whispering in an unknown language. If I had been at heart immoral, the rest of my life would have been different, and you and I might never have met. But I was only *unmoral*. I was pagan.

I knew precisely what it was that held me back, when one side of me was crying out to know the "new

sensation " to the full. It was not gratitude or loyalty to Willy Vibert, for the dull monotony of him (the all there was of him) had tired me out. Mentally, I had already swept him aside, and could no longer even find a mischievous spice in making him jealous. The power of resistance in me came from my certainty that the Russian wanted me precisely as an Indian wants a scalp. Even in his most passionate moments, I felt that behind the hot beating of his heart, a cold intelligence, like a spider's, was awaiting the moment when I would be caught. I felt that, though perhaps he was not fully aware of it himself, he had no doubt of conquering me in the end, as he had conquered others. And with all the strength I had I determined to disappoint him. That was my secret weapon: a woman's pride of self against a man's. And the woman won.

The Russian left me at last in a rage, and left New York the next day. He went to the West, and enjoyed great success there among women; but I did not regret him when he was gone. More and more I congratulated myself on having beaten him. I thought of his ancestors, who had tortured and murdered their serfs; and I thought of mine, who had, perhaps, been no higher than those serfs, and my victory over the strong man was very sweet. Apart from the pleasure I had in my acting, I had never known anything quite like that sensation in my life. And the affair had consequences outside the inward struggle and triumph. The gossip of people and of one or two newspapers brought Willy's father to visit me for the first time.

I had seen his photograph in magazines, and at Willy's rooms, where I had gone occasionally, chaperoned discreetly by Jane; but I had never seen him before.

He called at the apartment-house where I had a flat,

without sending word in advance, but timing his arrival at an hour when I was almost certain to be at home. His card was brought to me, and I thought that it would interest me to meet him. Instinct told me what he had come to say, and it was not deceiving. It seldom is.

He took the line that for Willy's sake he had tolerated our engagement, though from the first he had strongly disapproved; that he had always hoped, if he did not oppose his son, Willy might tire of me eventually. But now I was bringing disgrace on the family name. He had come to threaten, and that gave me a chance for a situation. I have told you that I had still a childish pleasure in being the centre of a picture, on the stage or off. I informed Mr. Vibert that nothing would induce me to marry his son, that I had kept the engagement dragging on only because I was sorry to hurt Willy's feelings; but now I had the excuse to break it, and he might consider it broken from that moment. The man seemed much surprised.

Although his daughter was handsome, and Willy was considered a great match, the father was a common-looking person, and had a common manner. As I talked, I felt myself immensely superior to him, though he was a power in the financial world, and I was nobody. To feel this gave me a queer sense of intoxication, as if I had drunk wine, and it had gone to my head.

Not many days after, I saw him again, at a restaurant, lunching with a financial magnate. Their table was not far from mine. Willy's father was eating an egg. His lower jaw was somewhat prominent and his upper lip was short. As he ate the egg, hurriedly, the inside of his large mouth was like a yellow cavern. Suddenly he caught my eye, as it was fixed on him in fascinated disgust. He flushed a dark red, and

suddenly looked very humble in his absurd embarrassment. He was a man hard as iron in business, and had no mercy on those whose interests were against his own. I have always been glad that I looked at him, and made him flush when he ate the egg.

You may remember my telling you that "in prehistoric days I was engaged to Willy Vibert for a few months." It was when you and A—— and I were motoring to Farnham, and broke down. We stopped at an inn, while the chauffeur did things to the car, and you and I spent the time until tea was ready in turning over the pages of an illustrated paper. In the paper there was a snapshot of Willy at his sister's wedding. You looked a question when I spoke, but asked none, and I said no more. I was even sorry I had said as much. There was no reason why I should tell you anything at all about myself then, and I spoke on impulse. Afterwards I felt guilty, because Willy and his people were so much above me socially, in America, that having been engaged to him might have made you believe me in a better position than I really was. But it was a matter that could not be explained. Now you know the whole history of the engagement, and it is all to Willy's credit, not to mine.

In remembering, I am more grateful to him than I was then. I owed Willy many things, and, indirectly, my chance with a manager who made me a real actress. Still more indirectly, I owe him a new soul.

That puzzles you, perhaps; but I will tell you what I mean. Being engaged to Willy Vibert lent me a borrowed halo, and brought me good offers from important managers, which otherwise I might never have had. The offer I accepted led me eventually from the new world to the old. There I found myself. And, having found myself, I found you. I have lost you

now, but I have not lost the memory of you, and never can while I live. I think I cannot lose it after death. And it is worth all the other memories I shall carry away out of this life.

Mentally, I was left rather at what they call "loose ends" when the Russian had gone West, and Willy had been packed off to Monte Carlo to forget me.

Joseph Surface argues with Lady Teazle that in the "consciousness of innocence" lies the sting of scandal. One is whipped for stealing fruit, and has not had the fruit! It was so with me, after the Russian episode.

For the first time I suffered from injustice, and smarted irritably under it. The bad side of me wanted to do something to hurt somebody, as I had been hurt. I am ashamed to tell you what I did. It was more like the trick of a mischievous cat than a woman.

After this preface, you may expect a dreadful revelation. And when I have told you the thing, perhaps you will think it nothing. I despise myself for it more than for bigger sins; yet to you that confession may mean that I have no sense of proportion. I doubt if women have any such sense. But it may be that we have some other, finer sense to atone for the lack.

In the spring, after Willy and the Russian had gone, a week before the theatre should have closed, I was attacked with influenza (which we call "grippe") followed by pneumonia. It was my first serious illness, and Jane sat up with me for ten nights. No one who had not loved me could have done half what she did, and probably I should have died if it had not been for her care. When I was coming out of the depths, Jane's familiar face, with its pale skin covered with a network of tiny wrinkles, seemed to keep death back from me. I lay and stared at her, feeling that I could not die while my eyes were still able to follow the lines

of her homely profile. She had on the lower lid of one eye a curious mole, or wart, which was semi-transparent, like a tear mixed with milk. Vaguely, when half delirious, I used to feel that it was a drop of medicine, distilled to save my life. It was the craziest idea, but it pleased her immensely when I told her afterwards. She saw nothing funny in it, nor, indeed, in anything, for she took life with deadly seriousness, and thought it frivolous to do otherwise.

An understudy played my part, and when I was out of danger and able to be moved, the doctor ordered me to the country. It must not be "some little New York by the sea, or in the mountains," he said, but real country, where nothing happened and nobody came—that is, nobody from my world.

I was too weak to care what was done with me, and I let him choose. He was the first doctor I had ever known since the three with their black bags, always recalled to my memory by the very word "doctor." This man and his wife were both very good to me while I lay ill; and it was his wife who found my resting-place in the "real country." She had stayed there herself, among the mountains of New Hampshire, or within sight of them, and within smell of their air. I agreed to go, with Jane. Nobody was to know anything about me. I was to be Miss Brown, or Miss White—it does not matter which name I took.

The hotel had grown and grown by its own success, out of a farmhouse, and it was still kept by the farmer's wife, who had started her business by taking a few summer boarders. Besides this hotel—more like a big family boarding-house than an hotel—there was no other building within a five-mile walk, except the church, the minister's house, and the post-office, which was also a general "store." Even they were out of sight, and from the house there was nothing to see except a

flowery lawn, an apple orchard, some billowing fields, and a blue horizon of mountains. But the place was famous for its bracing air, and Mrs. Goatley, the landlady, was famous for her management and cooking.

The doctor's wife engaged for me and Jane two bedrooms and a makeshift sitting-room. It was she who had suggested my change of name, saying that if I were known, I should be stared at unpleasantly. But when I arrived I guessed that she had planned to save my feelings. I saw that an actress would be like a black sheep among a flock of white lambs at the Watford Farm.

It was the old point of view of Miss Plum, who had thought herself disgraced by my kiss. Willy's father had it, too, in a more worldly way. But there was no worldliness at the farm.

It was early in July when I arrived, for I had been ill a long time. The rambling house, white among green orchard trees, looked a hidden abode of peace. There was a verandah, wide as a large room, which ran the whole length of the front, and as I drove up with Jane, dozens of ladies, middle-aged and old, sat on it in rocking-chairs. There were no young girls and no men visible. The ladies had a kind of family resemblance of goodness and innocence; narrow-mindedness I thought it, impatiently, as I saw them all sitting there in rows, rocking back and forth in different directions, like ships on a Dutch clock. It was before "tea," as they called it, a kind of supper, and the boarders in their afternoon dresses were chatting and crocheting as they waited for their meal. Some of the wide planks creaked under their rockers, and their voices were thin and devitalising. Afterward I learned that there was no man at all in the house except old Mr. Goatley, and a half-blind clergyman staying at the farm for his health.

I was tired out and ready to cry after my long journey, and my heart sank at the sight of so many elderly women. I did not know what would become of me in their midst. Even Mrs. Goatley, kind, and bustling, and motherly, seemed to me like an alien creature from another world. I felt as different from her and her boarders as if I were an inhabitant of the moon.

I had to rest before walking, as I would not consent to be carried by Mr. Goatley, a weedy old man in an alpaca coat. His wife, the landlady, put me into somebody's rocking-chair, by the front door, and I had only a confused vision of a little white-haired woman jumping up to give me her seat, when I sank into it and nearly fainted.

My weakness, and perhaps Jane's respectable appearance, won the hearts of the ladies. They buzzed round me like bees, making suggestions in stage whispers suited to an invalid. Home-manufactured smelling-salts were brought, and footstools, and pillows in worked covers. I did not want any of these things, but I smiled feebly. It was like a dream of old ladies. I had never seen so many together before. It seemed to me that they were of the same type as Jane. "Poor child; poor little thing!" they murmured over me, and asked Jane in low-voiced asides if I had been very ill, and what was the matter. I saw by her face, and the way her nose came down over her mouth, that she meant to be careful about answering questions. Yet she was pleased at the attention I excited. These were her sort of people, and I knew that she would be at home in this place. With me in New York, or on tour, she was like a hen-mother, who runs wretchedly after her duckling into the water.

I heard her say to someone, "Only twenty-one," and a mild voice cooing, "Oh, I'd have thought seventeen." It occurred to me that I must be looking very

young, with my hair down in two long plaits, tied with ribbon, and my face so white and thin. I had not thought about my looks before, since I was taken ill, except that I remembered Jane muttering to the doctor, "It's like dressing a lath to put on her clothes. There's nothing left of her but her eyes."

I almost laughed now, thinking that I must be like a country clergyman's daughter dying of consumption. And it amused me faintly to be taken for a person so different from what I was.

I stayed in bed next day, but the boarders all inquired for me, and sent me kind messages. Jane was sentinel, and told me what they said. She seemed pleased and proud. Though she hated the least prevarication, I knew she was glad the doctor's wife had taken the responsibility of changing my name. She would have endured silent agonies if she had had to see me looked at askance by this band of good women.

When I could go downstairs, my place was in a steamer-chair, on the shadiest part of the verandah, which was called a piazza. Nobody who had ever seen me on the stage could have recognised me with my hair smoothed primly back, wearing a plain, loose gown, without corsets, and a little white Shetland shawl, light as a cloud, thrown round my shoulders. I sat with my eyes half shut at first; but I saw the ladies coming and going around me, and noticed all their peculiarities. I thought if I were a "character actress," I would like to try making up my face to copy two or three of the quaintest ones, and that it would be fun to imitate their ways and voices. It was a distraction to imagine myself doing this; so when I felt strong enough to talk, I smiled at the ladies when they hovered near me. That encouraged them to speak, and they began an acquaintance by criticising the weather, or telling me that I would soon be well. They all had friends or

relatives who had nearly died while very young, but had recovered miraculously. I compared the ladies in my mind to birds, timid, yet eager, who hop near to scattered bits of bread, then flutter away, and at last grow bold enough to peck at the crumbs.

Everyone wanted to know who I was, where I came from, and what I did for a living. All the boarders at the farm did something for a living. Most of them were teachers. One was a missionary. There were two Christian Science healers; and all were very religious. They did not dare ask questions of me, for I was an invalid; but they hinted to Jane. Duty and inclination made her discreet. She was in her element; and I was silly enough to be jealous because she was so beamingly happy among these good women. The kind little attentions that had pleased, even while they bored me, got upon my nerves at last. I wanted to go away with Jane, and win her back again.

But I was not well enough to go just then. I had to assume patience, if I had it not.

As I grew stronger, the ladies vied with each other in doing new kindnesses for me. Because I had happened to mention knowing a newspaper man, they rushed to the conclusion that I was a writer. They assumed that I was "literary" and fond of reading, therefore they took turns in reading aloud. They skimmed what they considered the cream of the news for me, and were careful to leave out all the theatrical paragraphs. Jane unconsciously added to my growing irritation by dropping a hint that I must be careful not to speak of the stage. "Show people" were disapproved of at the farm.

I had easily guessed this from the beginning; but it vexed me to hear it from Jane. Vaguely I began to plot mischief.

The books my self-appointed nurses chose to read

aloud were all more or less religious, and novels were laid aside on Sunday. Sunday papers were not taken by the Goatleys, and some of the ladies were not quite sure that they ought to write letters on that day. On Sunday evenings they all united in singing hymns, and I would have been made to join if I had not pleaded that my voice wasn't strong enough yet. Jane sang lustily, and seemed ardently making up for the time she had lost in my pagan service. I felt sulkily injured because she revered these plain, elderly women, all over forty, who could never have had any temptations, and that she mingled no respect with her love for me. I thought that she was ashamed of me in her heart, now that she had come to live in this rarefied atmosphere, and that she was afraid of my being "found out."

That idea made me wickedly wish to be found out. I dwelt a good deal on the thought of a catastrophe, and wondered what, if anything, would happen. Almost morbidly I imagined the homely faces that beamed on me now, freezing into masks of horror.

At last, I could get up from my steamer chair without help from Jane or anyone, and walk slowly up and down the verandah. Then I could try my strength on the grass path under the great old apple trees. But I was not allowed to go alone. I had become the spoiled darling of the house, the one young person, the one creature who could be petted. Always I had a bodyguard of two or more elderly ladies. They told me anecdotes about their lives at home, and expected confidences in return, but I contrived to seem frank, yet to tell nothing. Quietly I let my new friends keep the theory that I was a journalist who had broken down from over-work. They built it up themselves, without much help from me. I had only to be evasive, and I never had to lie.

Once or twice I turned the talk to theatres. The ladies did not wish to think harshly of anyone, yet they could not help fearing that actresses must be "not quite nice," even the best. They had never met any. But on principle they were sorry for the poor things. No doubt actresses had a great many temptations, and ought not to be severely judged. The ladies were sorry, too, for millionaires. The responsibilities of wealth were too great. Most of all, they pitied foreigners. They were unable to imagine a Russian aristocrat being a good man; and one day, when I came across a photograph of my Russian in a newspaper, I could not resist asking a group of my kind nurses what they thought of him.

They had all heard of his visit to America, and his adventures. Their homes were in small towns, but they read New York society news every day except Sundays, if only to shake their neat heads over the extravagances of the Four Hundred. Everyone agreed that the Russian was a dangerous man, and had a horrid face. All were at a loss to understand how American parents could let their pure daughters dance with such a notorious person. They had heard distressing stories about him and an American actress, which they hoped were untrue, for the honour of America. But they did not know what the details were, as they thought it best to skip improper things in newspapers.

This talk stirred up all that was rebellious in me. The vague longing I had to startle these good people took a definite form.

The paragraph with the Russian's photograph said that he had returned from the West, and that he would be paying visits to Boston and Bar Harbour before sailing for Russia.

By this time I had been at the farm for more than

three weeks. I was well again, and almost as strong as ever, though I still looked thin and pale. I felt younger, too, and more like a child than I had felt in the past four years. Already I had written to my doctor, telling him I should do something desperate unless he let me cut short the rest cure, which was to have lasted six weeks. On the day of the discussion started by the Russian's portrait, I waited till the hour when most of the ladies took their naps, and then, full of my new idea, started out along a shady "short cut" to the post-office.

I had corresponded with no one except the doctor since I came to the farm, and the few letters I received had been forwarded from my flat under cover to Jane. Now I telegraphed to the servant I had left at home to send me a certain costume which I described. The parcel was to be addressed, of course, to the new name I bore at the farm. Next, I wrote out a long message to the Russian, saying that I should be glad to see him again, in a friendly way, if he cared to motor from Boston to Watford, and "take me for a long drive." I mentioned a day just after the date of his expected arrival at Boston, asking him to call at two o'clock in the afternoon. I gave him the address, and told him to wire whether he would come or not.

The answer was: "Yes, with great pleasure." And I let the spirit of mischief take hold of me. When the parcel with the costume from New York arrived, I hid it in my room, without letting Jane know that it had come. I told her only that the doctor might let me go away sooner than we had expected; that by any post I might have news, and she had better begin to pack, for when permission came, I should want to start at once. Jane was grieved, but submissive. With me she had learned to expect the unexpected, and few things that I could do would have surprised her.

It was the habit of the boarders at Mrs. Goatley's farm to sit chatting on the verandah for an hour after finishing their noon dinner. Then, one by one, they would excuse themselves on different pretexts. Naps were mentioned only by the most original and independent natures, for there existed a Puritan prejudice against laziness as a vice; but when the ladies returned to their rocking chairs before tea-time, they all looked suspiciously fresh and bright.

Dinner was at one o'clock. We invariably finished before two. I was sure, therefore, that if the Russian came at two, he would find the whole company of my friends grouped on the verandah, on the shady side of the house—the east side which commanded the drive up from the front gate.

Though I was well again, I kept the privileges of an invalid. Nobody thought it strange that I excused myself from dinner before the apple pie and cheese. I ran upstairs, and locked my door, although I knew it was unlikely that Jane would follow me. She was fond of helping in the kitchen, where Mrs. Goatley and an elderly cousin of the family did all the cooking. As soon as the boarders' dinner was over, Jane and the cousin had their meal cosily together.

For the first time since coming to the farm I dressed my hair as I wore it in New York. This alone, after wearing it in two long tails, made a great difference in my appearance. But when I had put on corsets, fitted by a famous corsetière from Paris, high-heeled shoes to match the costume sent on from New York, and the costume itself, I was hardly to be recognised as the meek little invalid.

I changed quickly, as if I were dressing for a call at the beginning of a new act. When I was ready, and had packed a small handbag, I scribbled off a note in pencil to Jane. This I fastened to the crocheted

cover of the pin-cushion, on the old-fashioned chest of drawers. Jane could not help seeing it there the moment she opened the door. In the letter I explained that I had gone off with a friend, in his automobile. I told Jane to pay our bill at the farm, and follow me with our luggage to an hotel in Boston where I had once or twice stopped when on tour; and into the envelope I put enough money for everything.

By the time I had finished all my preparations it was close upon two o'clock, and I sat down behind bowed window-shutters to wait. I had felt sure of the Russian, but when ten minutes, twenty minutes went by, I began to wonder if he had changed his mind, or perhaps had never meant to come. I knew that he could be cruel to those he thought had injured him; and he had been angry with me before he left New York in the winter. It occurred to me now that this might be his Russian way of revenging himself. But while I thought over many things that could have happened, I caught the sound of a motor. It was a sound not often heard at the farm, for the place was not near the high road. I jumped up and peered through the half-closed shutters. A big red automobile had whirled through the open gateway and was tearing at a great pace up the long straight drive, under maple trees.

There was not an instant to lose if I wanted to seize the dramatic moment. I snatched up my handbag, and, flying downstairs, flashed out on to the verandah like a rocket, just as the motor slowed down at the steps.

When I excused myself from dinner, I was wearing a plain white linen shirt and short skirt, with canvas tennis shoes, a black bow at my neck, and black bows on my plaits of hair. Now my hair was "Marcelled," and puffed out to fill up the brim of a red motor-bonnet, with a long red veil. I had put a little rose-coloured

nail-salve on my cheeks, for I had no rouge with me, as I have never used it off the stage. My dress was of poppy-red cloth to match the bonnet, and even my high-heeled shoes were red. It was a costume I had worn on the stage in last season's play, and I had sent for it now because I knew that the car which the Russian used in New York was red.

The ladies in their rocking-chairs, already startled, even terrified by the sudden dashing up of the scarlet automobile, were thrown almost into a state of collapse at sight of me in my bright red dress and bonnet, with its floating veil.

I ran out of the house to the steps of the verandah without turning to glance at them; yet I was conscious of their shocked amazement—I saw with my mind's eyes. I shook hands with the Russian, who called me by my real name, as I pronounced his title. We took no notice of anyone but each other, and behaved as if we two were alone in the world. His chauffeur was driving, and the Russian put me on his right, in the back of the car. Then, as he was giving directions to his man, I leaned out and kissed my hand to the band of ladies on the verandah.

"Good-bye, everybody!" I said. "A thousand thanks to you all for being so kind to me. Perhaps I shan't come back. Jane will attend to everything. I wish you'd come and see me at the theatre some day."

With that the car was off. As we whizzed down the drive and along the road, I told the Russian about my rest cure, and my kind nurses at the farm. We both laughed a great deal and loudly; but even as the story unfolded, and I hit off the peculiarities of my friends for the Russian's amusement, I found myself already trying to apologise for what I had done, to excuse my hard-heartedness on the ground of the old ladies' narrow-mindedness. But it was a feeble

defence. I felt that keenly, though the Russian, far from being disgusted, roared with laughter as he listened. By the time I had finished I was miserably ashamed of myself, and would have given anything to go back and beg everyone's forgiveness. My own story, in the telling, showed me how hateful I had been, and the Russian soon made me see that I had also been imprudent. My invitation had led him to expect more than I meant to give, and if I had not threatened to call out to passers-by, he would not have put me down at the hotel where I wished to stay in Boston.

There is very little chance that any of the kind souls whom I disappointed and shocked so cruelly at Mrs. Goatley's farm will ever read what I am writing. If by some queer chance this story of my life should fall into the hands of one among them, I should at once be recognised. Nevertheless, I wish that they could all see it. I should like to have them know, even after these years, that I hurt myself more than I hurt them by the ungrateful trick I played.

Sometimes in dreams I go back to the farm, and see faces whose features I can hardly recall nowadays when I am awake. Then the dreams bring back the remembrance of my going away, so vividly that I see myself in my red dress turning to wave good-bye from the Russian's red car. And I feel again the sharp sting of remorse, like a whiplash across my breast.

As for you to whom I write, I want you also to know that I was sorry, as soon as it was too late. It seemed, and it seems still, even a more shameful thing to have done than other things which a man would think far worse. I have never forgiven myself, and it is partly as a penance that I tell you; partly because you could not know me precisely as I was unless you knew the story of the Watford Farm.

XX.

IF Jane had not loved me with real devotion, she would never have come back to me again after what I did at the farm. I was afraid, while I waited for her alone, in Boston, that she would not come. But she forgave me, because she knew that I needed her. I cried when I saw how withered the poor face looked, and I never had the courage to ask what was said after I went away with the Russian. I knew that I had made her ashamed for herself and for me, and that she really suffered; yet she never spoke a word of reproach or referred to the incident after that day.

When we got back to New York, the theatre was closed for the summer; but Mr. Otis, my new manager, had made a plan for me. He called at my flat the day I telephoned news of my arrival in town, and asked me, without any preamble, how I would like to run over to Paris.

The idea almost took my breath away with joy. It had never seemed possible to me that I should be able to go to Europe. When I heard or read of other people's sailings, I felt dimly that they were floating away into blue regions of space. Europe had no reality for me. It existed only in books, like beautiful fancies of which poets had written. I listened without speaking, while Mr. Otis talked on, explaining his plan.

He thought that the sea trip would do me good, and that Paris would "brighten me up" after the dullness of my rest cure in the country; but those were not the only reasons for his suggestion. A new play had

just been produced in Paris, which had made a sensation. From all accounts, it was a strange play, but Mr. Otis had been interested in what he read of it. He had made inquiries by cable of a man in Paris, whose judgment he trusted, and he thought that I could play the part which a favourite French actress had created.

"Go and see for yourself," he said to me, in his grave, quiet voice, which always inspired me to do my best. "You have learned enough French to understand what they are talking about on the stage. If you *feel* yourself in the part, I'll have the play translated at once by X—, and we'll open the theatre with it in the fall. I've got the refusal of the rights already, by cable."

This was like Mr. Otis. He always secured the rights to any foreign plays which might possibly succeed in America, though often he did not produce them, but sold to other managers, or let the rights drop.

The idea of going to Europe seemed almost too good to be true. Even after my cabin and Jane's berth had been engaged on a big ship, and instructions about meeting me sent to X— in Paris, I could hardly believe that such a wonderful thing could really happen. I felt as I used to imagine I would feel if a big mirror suddenly opened like a mysterious door, and I could walk down a glass corridor into another world—the looking-glass world, where Lily Merritt lived.

Even while I was on board ship with Jane, it was still a dream. The ship was as unreal as Europe, whither it was supposed to be taking me, across the unknown sea. I had never been on a ship before, and had not even visited the docks to see one move out or come in; but while I was walking up and down the deck with Mr. Otis (who had volunteered to see me off), to my great surprise the Russian appeared, with

a group of American millionaires and millionairesses whom he had been visiting. I had had no idea that he meant to sail in this ship. I had not seen him since we parted after the quarrel in his motor-car, in front of my hotel in Boston; but I had read in the papers that he was sailing in one of the big new Cunarders. My ship was of another line, and would take a week between New York and Cherbourg.

When the Russian came in sight with his rich American friends, Mr. Otis glanced at me with a whimsical look, and raised his eyebrows. I understood, as well as if he had spoken, that he meant, "Well, my dear girl, this is really going rather too far."

"Please don't hold me responsible," I hurried to say. "I assure you I didn't even know the man was coming."

"I have no right to criticise you off the stage," he answered, with a pleasant smile. But I felt that he was good-naturedly forgiving me, rather than believing that what I said was true.

Instantly I had a change of mood. The beautiful, mysterious sense of unreality was gone. I, and everything round me, seemed painfully real again. I could have cried with rage because Mr. Otis thought I had secretly encouraged the Russian to engage his passage on my ship. To have done this, I felt (and was sure he felt) would have been taking unfair advantage of the mission on which I was sent. I wanted to protest, to argue my case, to assure myself before parting with Mr. Otis that he accepted my word. But a stubborn pride darkened the sunshine in my heart. I would say no more. Mr. Otis was very kind, and bade me good-bye pleasantly, evidently anxious that I should see no change in his manner; yet a shadow had come between us, and my pleasure in anticipating the trip was spoiled. I

respected Mr. Otis more than any man I had known since I grew up, and I wanted him to respect me as a woman, as well as an actress. I saw that I had forfeited his esteem, and because this time I was innocent, a sense of the world's injustice weighed heavily on my mind. I thought that I should not have disliked half as much being found out by him if I had really been guilty; and I had a strange wish to revenge myself on God, for letting the one man whose good opinion I valued most go away thinking badly of me.

I remembered how people had gossiped about me and the Russian in the winter, when my only sin was a little flirtation. The injustice from which I had suffered then seemed worse now than it really was. I reviewed my whole life soberly, and it seemed to me very tragic. I told myself that I had never had a chance; and even though I knew in my heart that this was untrue, I found a grim pleasure in thinking it. Against the black background of my reflections, I saw myself stand, a white figure, like a martyr; and I determined that I would be a martyr no longer. I vowed to enjoy life as I never had enjoyed it yet. I made up my mind that I would do all the things which the world and Mr. Otis believed that I had done. And it seemed that Paris, of all places in the world, would be the place to begin to live a life of pleasure.

The Russian came to me when his friends had gone, and the ship had started. He told me that he had changed his passage at the last moment, because he had heard I would be on this ship. He said that he regretted the cause he had given me for quarrelling with him, and seemed so sincere that I liked him better than before. Besides, I was flattered that a man in his position should care so much for me. My vanity was stirred. The Russian was a conspicuous

figure on the ship. Everybody knew him, and I guessed how those who did not know me were inquiring of each other who I was, as we walked the deck together the first day out. A good many people of importance in society were on board, among others several hostesses who had entertained the Russian, and I could not help being pleased because apparently he preferred my society to theirs.

I found that he was not my only acquaintance on board. There were two or three Harvard boys I had met when I played in Boston one year. On the second day out, they introduced a man who was, in his way, as interesting as the Russian, and far better looking. He was from Texas, a tanned giant, taller than the Russian, with a soft, lazy voice, eyes of yellow-brown like the water of a brook in sunshine, and the nicest smile I had ever seen, then. At first, I wanted him to like me, in order to make the Russian jealous; but soon I wanted it because I liked him. There were other men, too, who were willing to waste their time on me; and I saw that there were women who envied me, pretty women in society who would not have cared to know me off the stage. I felt a sense of power, and was intoxicated by it. I longed to make others feel it too; and I told myself that there would be joy in using it recklessly. As an actress I had lived, but never yet as a woman, and something urged me on to begin, in the old world, which poor Jane believed to be so wicked.

The Russian was to spend some days in Paris: how many, depended upon me, he said. I promised that he might call at my hotel, and that I would dine with him somewhere. I imagined that with him, in Paris, I should see new phases of life, and my pulses beat fast as if I were knocking at a closed door that would soon open. I promised the Texan that he,

too, should see me; but the first night was for the play which I had been sent to judge. I was looking forward to that with keen interest, but for the first time since going on the stage the actress in me was pushed into the background. This was a bad sign, and I knew it; but the danger signal fascinated rather than frightened me, because of that tumultuous need or desire I had to live.

Deliberately, I wanted to fall in love. I thought that a real passion would put into my acting something that it lacked. I tried to make believe that I was learning to love the Russian, and I said to myself that if the lesson were to be learned, I would learn it in Paris. He talked of carrying me off to St. Petersburg. I laughed, and pretended to take the threat as a joke, yet in some moods I could imagine going voluntarily.

At Cherbourg, he ceased to be my slave, and became once more a high personage. This made me value him the more, for it showed me the distance between us, which he was eager to bridge. Grave-looking, distinguished men met him, and bowed a great deal, with their hats in their hands. He had a private car, and walked off to it with his escort, but his eyes followed me and the Texan, as we mounted into the same carriage.

At Paris, I was met by X—, introduced by Mr. Otis. X— recognised me from photographs he had seen, and I recognised him from Mr. Otis's description: "Look for a young man about thirty, with a long nose, and a pair of black eyes so bright that they seem to have a separate, individual life of their own. You would feel, if he died, that death could not kill them, but that his eyes would go on living, and glow like coals in his coffin, when he was a skeleton."

That was a description not to forget, and I thought, when the brilliant eyes called mine, from a distance, and across a crowd, that no words could have given me a more vivid idea of their compelling, fiery intelligence.

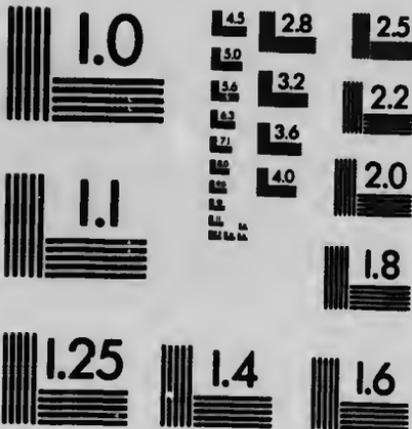
The man's whole personality sparkled with magnetism. I felt a shock run up my wrist when he took my hand in his nervous grasp, and our eyes meeting as our fingers touched, another electric flash darted through me.

X— had been born in America, of French parents, but there was Jewish blood in his veins. He had the shrewdness of the West, the artistic sense of the Latins, and the dreamy passion of the Oriental. I seemed to learn all this in a glance. His accent was slightly American, and made me feel at home in a strange land. But, as we drove together to an hotel, where he, by Mr. Otis's request, had engaged rooms for me, I happened to mention that I had learned French, for the sake of a part I had to play a year before. Then he broke into the language which seemed more his own, more expressive of himself, than English. At once, he became a Frenchman. His gestures were French. He said things which neither Americans nor Englishmen say to women. I found that I could understand all he said, though he spoke very fast, and this pleased me; but his compliments upon my French pleased me still more. I told him how I had learned the language by the Berlitz method, and had hired a Frenchwoman from Tours to come to my flat every morning for months for conversation and criticism. In order to speak broken French intelligently, in the part I was studying then, I had wanted to understand the language well. "Brava!" X— said, fixing his burning eyes upon my face. "Brava! That is the true spirit of the



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actress. I believe all that Otis writes me of you. Now you are going to have a reward for your hard work. I can hardly wait to know what you will think of this wonderful play, and I cannot tell you how glad I am that we shall see it together."

He had engaged rooms for me at an old-fashioned but charming hotel, of which few Americans of the tourist type had ever heard. "I thought," he said, "after seeing your photograph, that you would be kind to like it better than the big, obvious places where everybody goes."

This was a compliment, and I appreciated it.

X—— took me to the hotel, and with the fat, polite manager went up to show me the rooms. They were full of flowers, deep velvety red roses, with purple shadows lying between their petals.

"Again I judged from your photograph," X—— said in English. The manager of the hotel had never troubled to learn English.

Then I knew what I already suspected; that X—— was responsible for the flowers.

There was something extraordinary about the man, which I felt intensely, but could not have described. He seemed a born lover, as well as a poet, and at the same time a man of the world. I could not imagine meeting him anywhere except in Paris. For me, he was Paris.

I was too much excited to be tired when evening came. I had not even lain down to rest after the long journey from Cherbourg. I forgot that I had been an invalid only a few weeks ago, and that Mr. Otis had advised the sea voyage as a tonic. Never had I felt more alive, more vital. I knew that I was in the right mood to squeeze the last drop of meaning from the play.

X—— called for me early. I was to dine with him before the theatre. He had chosen the Ritz, as a

contrast to the quiet hotel where he had put me among my roses. On the table were more roses. The sweet heady perfume of them was the perfume of Paris. X— looked well in evening dress. His smooth black hair, parted in the middle, seemed to be carved on his head, like a block of varnished wood.

He said, "I will not give you champagne. That is for butterflies and millionaires who want the best but don't know how to get it. You are a rare woman, and I have chosen a rare wine for you, a libation for a goddess. It is the colour of your roses. It would be the colour of your jewels if you wore them; for your jewels should be rubies."

My heart was full, as I told him that I hated champagne of all things, and loved rubies, but had no jewels.

"You ought to have them," he said. "You are worthy of rubies."

His brilliant eyes lit a fire in my blood. I felt his power, and felt, too, that I had power over him. We talked of impersonal things, and his intellect seemed to display itself for me, as a jeweller shows his diamonds and pearls, on a gorgeous background of rich coloured velvet, to dazzle a customer. His wit and knowledge of great authors and great events made me long to match him with mine, but my treasure-chest was empty. I had never filled it. Yet though I knew little, and had read little that was worth reading, I had thought some strange thoughts about life, which I had never put into words for anyone. There had been nobody who would have cared to hear my thoughts spoken. This man made me feel that here was a master of music who would listen to my little improvisations, and understand them. Still, underneath that feeling was another; an instinct, rather, which wished to tell me that in the nature of X— was a pavement of stone, under a bank of hot red roses. A

woman might break herself on that stone, yet she would first have had the sweetness of the roses. Something in me recognised that he was more dangerous than the Russian, therefore more attractive, and that he was putting forth all his powers to awake my interest. I knew that he meant to make me love him, if he could; and—he was Paris!

He told me about the woman who had created the part I was to judge. He sketched her in a few words, as a painter dashes off the first rough outlines for a portrait. I saw her through his eyes: strange, vivid as a passion-flower, wicked as night-shade, intoxicating as old Spanish wine. But as he talked of the French actress he looked at me, and his eyes said he thought only of me, seeing me in the part which was the sensation of Paris.

"You could see all that that other woman is," he said at last.

"Wicked, too?" I laughed as I asked the question.

"Why not?" he answered. "A knowledge of what stupid people call vice educates heart and soul, as cold virtue never can. To be a great actress, a woman must know all, feel all, of which human nature has been, or can be, capable."

I had this theory to brood on, as we drove quickly, and without speaking much, to the theatre.

X—— had taken a box; and we were early, because he wished to tell me about interesting people in the audience before the curtain should go up. Those whom he thought most worthy of mention among the men were poets and artists, and among the women, celebrated *demi-mondaines*. "They are all coming to see this play," he said. "It draws them, as a light draws moths. They can't keep away."

The women of whom he spoke, of whom he told me strange anecdotes, in quick whispers, leaning close to

my ear, were all women of a singular attraction. Even I, a woman, could feel it; only a few were actually beautiful; some were even plain, yet I felt that they might reign as queens over men. I believed that X—— thought I had in me something of their power, still undeveloped, and that he was willing me with all his force to develop it.

"Is the woman who plays my part like these?" I asked.

"Wait and see," he said, mysteriously.

He had not told me much of the play; and from Mr. Otis, a man of few words, I had heard only the bare plot. As the curtain went up, I was conscious of keen curiosity, yet I was thinking more about myself than of the stage. I was ready to throw my soul into the part, if it appealed to me, yet I wished to make it mine, not to give myself to it.

Unlike most plays, which lead up to the entrance of the principal people, the hero and heroine were discovered on the stage. And now, though I have not told you about other plays which were of importance to me, I want to tell you something of this one. Soon you will see why.

The girl, and the boy—for he looked only a few years older than she—were in the garden of a café. There were others there, but these two were so young and vital and happy, that they stood out among all the rest, like wood-doves among cockatoos. Behind them, a big windmill was slowly turning its great arms, dreamily and impersonally; yet the lazy arms as they went up seemed to be raised in a gesture of genial blessing on the lovers. In the garden were a great many little tables, and most of the people were drinking; but the two wood-pigeons were cooing to each other. They had glasses on their table, as the rest had, but they had forgotten everything except one

another, and the glasses were full. X—— explained in a whisper that the scene was a realistic picture of the Moulin Rouge, and said that he would take me there after the play, or on any other night, if it would amuse me to go. I murmured, "Yes, oh yes!" but I scarcely heard; for I saw myself there in the garden, with an ideal lover, such as I had never known, and perhaps would never know.

The girl and boy had met for the first time a few nights before, at this very place. She was a little dressmaker of Paris, young, with a pulsing vitality, and still innocent in act. But her heart was a strange, tropical garden, ready for the sowing of any seed. He begged her to give herself to him. They would be everything to each other, for ever and ever. He was an artist, and made not too much money yet, but some day he would be rich, and all good things that came to him would be for her. She said that she loved him, and did not care for money. If they had each other always, it would be enough. It was spring in Paris, and in the garden, and spring in their lives. One hardly knew that one heard music, but it played softly and continuously as a trickling fountain, and there was the throb of spring in its wistful notes. I put myself in the girl's place, seeing not the French actress with her Egyptian features and long eyes, but myself. The boy was not for me merely a handsome actor playing the part of a young man in his first passion: he became the Spirit of Youth and Love.

The girl, in realising that she loved the boy, carried out of herself, had forgotten the motive which brought her to the garden that night; but suddenly she remembered, for a man strolled on to the stage: a man, middle-aged, blasé, carefully dressed, clinging desperately to the ragged edges of his youth. He had come to find the girl. Day after day he had

followed her in the street. He had spoken to her, promising to give her all that she had ever wanted in life, or envied others. At last, she had agreed to meet him in the garden.

It was as if the snake crawled out from among flowers while the young Adam and Eve spoke their first words of love. The sweet spring music fell from its youthful treble to a lower key.

The girl had told the boy nothing about this man, not because she deliberately planned to deceive him, but because he and love had made her forget. The man saw her, and, coming up, claimed her acquaintance, as if she belonged to him. The boy believed that he had been betrayed. And so the Spirit of Love and Youth vanished out of the girl's life. She felt that nothing could be as it had been. A stubborn streak of fatalism in her nature would not let her call love back, and there was no returning to the old, childish days, after such feverish, crowded hours of woman's life. She consented to go with the man.

That was the end of the act; her decision.

The next scene was at the Ritz Hotel, where X—and I had dined. I could see the very table where we had sat. A year had passed since the night in the garden, when the arms of the windmill rose in blessing, and fell in cursing, the lovers. The girl was no longer the same merry little milliner. The strange garden of her heart, ready for blossoming a year ago, had flowered with tropical blooms. All the fantastic possibilities of her untried nature had developed, as if in a hothouse. She had become a brilliant courtesan, and in the summer of her success the buds of spring seemed pale and cold. Dazzled with her own splendour, she was so gay that she did not miss happiness. Already she had left the first man who had launched her on the tide of success. She was

with a Russian prince, who valued her, not for herself (he did not understand, or trouble to understand, her nature), but because she was *la femme la plus chère, la plus difficile*. She was the Koh-i-noor of the half world, where women can be bought like diamonds. There were other men around her, who envied the Prince, and women who envied her the prize she had taken from them. ✓

The sweet minor music of spring had changed to voluptuous notes; but suddenly the old delicate *motif* began again, in the midst of the deeper chords. It sounded like the spraying of a fountain on apple blossoms, among a tangle of passion flowers. The boy who had loved the girl in the garden came upon the scene with a friend whose wife's portrait he was painting. He had been away from Paris, in the north for many months, and knew nothing of what had happened, but he had never forgotten the garden, and the love he had found and lost. Now, when he heard men talking of the Prince's mistress, he turned to look, and recognised in the woman the girl he had adored. She recognised him also, while the audience felt the thrill of the spring music; but she had no regrets. The Spirit of Youth and Love passed by, and she was glad that she had turned away from him in the garden, to stray into the path paved with gold.

In the third act, one year later, the Russian prince had tired of his mistress, and left her for another woman, *encore plus chère, encore plus difficile*. Still a great courtesan, she had taken a step down. The world knew why the Prince had deserted her for a rival, and eyes that had looked only at her turned to the other woman, who was more dear and more difficult. The star had fallen into the hands of a rich merchant—the one comic character in the play, accentuating its tragedy. Even he did not love the

splendid creature he had bought. To him, she was worth her price because she had been the Prince's mistress. He boasted proudly of what she cost him, and of his predecessor, "a serene highness." In public he made much of her. In private, he taunted her because the Prince had cast her off for a jewel more rare than she.

The voluptuous music had strident notes in it, as the Prince appeared with his new acquisition. The merchant coveted the reigning beauty, because what was "good enough for royalty was not too good for him." The scene was Monte Carlo, and the Prince had just refused his new mistress a rope of pearls which had belonged to an Empress. The merchant bought and offered it to her, in the hearing of the dethroned queen.

They were at a ball, given by the Casino. Many artists were there, and among them the boy of the garden, now a man, his heart saddened, but not wholly changed. So again the Spirit of Youth and Love drew near the woman for a moment, and, by beckoning him, she might even then have brought him back into her life. But, broken and disappointed as she was, Love and Youth had lost all charm for her. Their sweetness would have been like water after champagne.

In the last act, fifteen years had passed, since the first scene in springtime, in the garden. But again the scene was laid in the same garden. Outwardly, all was as it had been. It was spring, as before, and delicate early flowers were in bloom, as in that dead year, long ago. There were the same little tables in the same places; and in the background the great arms of the windmill went up and down impersonally and dreamily. Only the people were changed. New waiters hurried about, serving new people : pretty girls

and young men who would have been little children at the time of the first act. At the table where the girl and her lover had sat, other lovers sat now. Two or three of the old set returned as the act went on, and the artist, successful and rich, appeared with a young wife whom he loved. As he told her of the past, and the old passion, found and lost in this garden, no longer regretted now, the music changed. All the old notes blended, as if with surging memories, became strident, then monotonous, as the moving of the windmill's arms, and eventually muffled, coarsened, the first elusive *motif* swallowed up in jarring sounds. The woman he had loved was coming into the garden, walking mechanically, as if her feet brought her along the well-known way almost without her volition. The man had just told his bride that he saw the garden again now for the first time in fifteen years; but the woman's step and unseeing eyes told the audience that she had wandered in every night at the same hour, year after year.

Somehow, without painting lines or hollows on her face, the actress with the strange Egyptian features had made herself appear, not fifteen, but twenty years older. It was a wonderful transformation, which could be felt by those who saw it, rather than defined. And the change was not the ordinary gentle change from vivid youth to placid middle age. There were no wrinkles to be seen. The woman's hair showed no grey. She had neither grown fat, nor wasted visibly in figure; yet she looked as old as the world, as old as sin. In her gaudy dress and fashionable hat, expensive but slightly *passée*, she was a galvanised corpse, not a living woman with warm blood in her veins, and a beating heart. Her great burnt-out eyes were dead fires, not to be rekindled ever, by any light of joy or hope. All the elasticity of youth had gone from her

muscles, though in years she was not an old woman, scarcely even of middle age. She dragged herself along as if dazed as well as weary. She did not lift her feet from the ground. Her shoulders drooped. Her arms hung straight down at her sides, as if she carried weights in her hands. Her head bent forward, and yet her lips wore a faint smile, sad as the faded perfume of *pot-pourri*. People spoke to her, not unkindly, yet as if she were a thing of no importance, a withered leaf out of place among spring flowers. She answered without change of expression. She was perfectly conscious of what she was doing, but it was the consciousness of a body without a soul.

I had never seen an absinthe drinker on the stage or in real life; yet I knew that this woman had killed her youth with wormwood, had blotted out ambition and hope. There was nothing left for her in this world but more absinthe, and then more.

The man who had loved her once saw and shrank from her with horror. I could see him wondering why he had ever worshipped or regretted this galvanised dead thing. Quickly he moved away with his young girl, as if to save her from pollution. The woman's eyes turned towards him as he went, moved after him with a faint gleam of interest which died as it was born. The lovers at the table where she had once sat listening to the boy's prayers got up, and strolled happily off, their arms linked, their heads close together. The woman, seeing the table free, moved heavily to it, and let herself drop into the chair the young girl had left. There was no tragedy of despairing memory in her eyes, only the tragedy of a dead soul. She did not care that the spirit of Love and Youth had passed away from her for ever. She had forgotten what its charm had been. She ordered absinthe, and sipped it, as the curtain slowly fell.

"That girl gives the finest portrayal of *une buveuse d'absinthe* I have ever seen," X— said. "I have been watching you as you studied her."

"I was not studying her," I answered, hardly knowing that I spoke aloud.

"Not studying her?" he repeated. "I see! You were thinking how you would play the part yourself."

"I was—thinking," I echoed. It was with difficulty that I spoke. My throat felt dry and contracted, as if a fierce hand had pressed it, choking my breath away. I got up, and X— put my cloak around my shoulders, touching my bare neck with his warm, vital hand. His magnetism did not thrill me as it had before.

"The play has taken hold of you," he said. "I understand."

But he did not understand.

He asked, as we went out, if I would like to have supper at the Moulin Rouge, and see the real arms of the windmill moving behind the garden. I said "No," quickly, then thanked him, and explained that I would rather go there another night. I was, I explained, just beginning to realise that I was tired after my journey. I added that I had been ill before sailing, and was obliged to be a little careful still. The truth was that I could hardly wait to get home and to be alone. I felt broken. All the life had gone out of my body. X— had lost his attraction for me, and I think he knew this. It would have been the same to me if he had been a tiresome old woman.

Now you know why I have told you at such length about the play. And yet—*do you know?*

Perhaps you think—if you have come as far as this in the statement I am writing to you, and if you have read a little between the lines here and there—that a sudden tide of sentimental repentance had swept over me. But if you think that, you are wrong. It was not

with me as with some sinners who go to a revival meeting, or read a tract. I did not repent my past, or agonise over it, or even feel that I had been wicked or vile. Something very different had happened to me. I was seeing myself in past and future, in a bright, merciless light, as clearly as I used to see my mysterious little friend, Lily Merritt, in the looking-glass.

I saw myself with Barron, climbing to success on the ladder of his money and influence, then being discarded by him for another woman. I saw myself accepting Willy Vibert to revenge myself on Margaret, and then reaping advantage from his position in society. I saw myself playing my dangerous game with the Russian.

All that in the past. And in the future, I saw myself living the life I had half resolved to lead when I came to Paris. I saw myself with the Russian, with X——, with the Texan, with others, testing my power over men, holding it for awhile, then slowly losing it with my youth and beauty and joy of life. I saw all my lovers, all my friends leaving me, and I saw how I would be driven to console myself in the end, when I was no longer wanted by anyone. No detail of the picture was spared me.

I was not repentant. I was only afraid. I could have died with the coldness of my fear.

I had promised to cable Mr. Otis what I thought of the play and of the woman's part. By the time I remembered him and the promise it was too late to send a message that night; but I scribbled it out on paper ready for the morning. "The part is great, but I cannot do it. Writing."

Next day I wrote a short letter, because I did not feel equal to explaining my state of mind in a long one. I said: "If I acted that part badly, the play would be dead. If I acted it well, I should go mad."

XXI.

EVEN now, I could not make clear to anyone, even to you, either by writing or speaking, the immeasurable effect of that play upon my whole nature.

It was not a great play. It appealed to the emotions rather than to the intellect. With a different ending, one could have gone away and forgotten it. Perhaps, if I had not been ready to absorb its meaning and message as a sponge absorbs water, I should merely have been vaguely depressed; and regaining my spirits I should have become my old self again. But preparing to act the part, I had so entered into it, that for the time being I and the woman of the play were one. Besides, the accident of the second lover being a Russian of high title, was to me, in my highly-strung mood, more than a coincidence. I saw myself on the same path the woman had trodden, going down, down from the garden of tropical flowers to a place of darkness, among bestial shapes that writhed and wallowed.

I saw that, for a woman who chooses the life this woman chose, the life I had thought of choosing, there must inevitably be the Place of Darkness, when youth is gone and love has tired. No religious scruples held me back from such life. I had none. I was not sure that any God existed, or that, if there were a God, he would care what I did with myself. I clung to homely, domestic things in the cold horror of my great fear; and I clung to Jane.

I lay in bed, and let her take care of me. Jane was happiest and at her best as a nurse. She thought that I had done too much on my first day in Paris, and wanted to call in a doctor, but I begged her to let me rest, seeing no one. The Russian called and sent flowers, the Texan also. X— wrote me a letter in verse. All three of those men, and all other men, seemed far away and shadowy. I did not care if I never heard again from anyone I knew. The touch of the cool linen pillows and sheets was very good. I was not ill, in mind or body; but my bed was like a safe, pleasant island in the midst of a wild sea. I could not bear the thought of going out of my room; yet, while I was there, with Jane to take care of me, I was not unhappy.

I am not sure what would have befallen me in those days if Jane had not been there. But Jane was always there, always, then and afterwards; until the year before you and I met. Then she died. I have never ceased to miss her; but never have I missed her so much as since the day when I let you go. It would be a great comfort to me to have Jane now. Since you went I have been oftener to Kensal Green, where I had a plain marble cross made to mark her grave, just the kind she would have admired, and called "plain but rich"—a favourite expression of hers. I take with me her favourite flowers, too, when I can find them in shops or gardens. Such a quaint, old-fashioned sort of flower! I wonder if you know it? I have never heard the scientific name; but I saw it first at Mrs. Goatley's farm in New Hampshire. It is called "bleeding heart," a sad, pensive bloom, but not hopeless.

I lay quietly in bed for three days, after the night of the play in Paris. I dozed a good deal, for sleep

seemed to give me more counsel than strenuous thinking. I had a curious feeling that I was making myself over again. Several people I knew at home had read in the papers that I had arrived in Paris, and they called at my hotel; but I would not see them. I was afraid that if anyone I had known came near me now, some emanation from their thoughts of me, as I had been, would pull me back. Sometimes when I shut my eyes, and let myself drift, I seemed to be on a mountain side, climbing all alone, slowly and with difficulty, not daring to turn and look over my shoulder, lest my feet should slip. I knew that this was only a half-dream between sleeping and waking, yet it was impressed upon me at the moment with a sharp semblance of reality. I could see my own figure, on the dark rocks, in a kind of luminous twilight, wearing a grey travelling dress which I had brought with me, but had never put on yet.

One day I asked Jane what she thought God was like. She threw me a shocked glance, to see if I were "making fun"; but was reassured when I looked her straight in the eyes, gravely and almost anxiously. She was pleased with me that day, because of a message I had sent the Russian, which would prevent him from coming again, ever; so she answered my question in good faith. God had made us in His image, therefore He must be like a man, she thought, only much larger than even the tallest giants ever born. He would always be sitting on a throne, of course, with His Son beside Him, still in the form of man, therefore not so grand and gigantic as God the Father, who would, Jane thought, have a long grey beard.

I suggested that grey hairs were a sign of decaying vitality, but Jane could not change her picture. To

her, a grey beard meant supreme dignity, and she felt it would be irreverent to imagine God the Father without it. She was not clear in her idea of the Holy Ghost. Vaguely she felt that it would be wrong to form any conception of the mystic Spirit. She saw the Holy Ghost behind a bright veil; but all Three would be on the throne together, a golden throne, with a golden background of radiance too dazzling for human eyes. The goats, on the left, would certainly be blinded by it; and when they were judged, they would plunge down into outer darkness, where there was no more light except the red glare of hell fires.

"Jane, do you think I will be a goat, and go to hell?" I asked.

Jane burst into tears, the first time I had ever seen her cry. It was extraordinary how quickly her nose grew red, and how large it swelled in a moment. There were queer workings in her throat, like a chicken's claws, but she made no sound, except afterwards when she blew her nose. She admitted having feared that I might go to hell; but she believed now that her prayers for me were answered, and that I would be saved.

"What is heaven like?" I asked then, and Jane was very happy to answer. She knew all about heaven, as well as if she had been there, and was eloquent on the subject. The sheep, on the right hand, would be given white robes and crowns. They would stand before the throne, playing golden harps and singing psalms of praise without ceasing. Eternity would be one long, glorious Sabbath. It did not seem in the least funny to her, to talk of sheep in white robes and golden crowns.

I was horribly depressed, for it seemed as if Jane ought to know what heaven was like, if there were

any; and I almost hoped there was not. Then I closed my eyes; and it came to me that Jane saw only those things for which her comprehension was fitted. Poor Jane! The most bloodthirsty psalms were those she liked best, though she would not kill a fly, and always saved one that fell into the water, while detesting it for being a fly.

"According to you, God isn't as good to goats as you are to flies," I said to her on one of those days in Paris, while I still kept my bed, building up a new self. But Jane replied without hesitation that that was different, because she was not a Judge. And she believed implicitly in Adam and Eve, and the Snake, and the apple, and the world having been created in six days of ordinary length.

The first time that I felt like sitting up, I made a mental effort and wrote a long letter to Mr. Otis. I began by trying to explain why I could not play the part he had sent me to see; but I found a logical explanation impossible. I tore up several sheets of paper, and even the version I let stand was a strange jumble. I might just as well have said, "I can't do it, just *because*," as have tried to string together a bundle of reasons why. In a postscript I mentioned the names of two actresses who might, I thought, do the part successfully if he decided to have the play translated.

I did not leave my room until I knew, from reading the newspapers, that the Russian had gone home, and that the Texan, whose name was almost as well known as the Russian's in America and Paris, had started for Switzerland. X—— I had offended by not answering his rhymed letter. He had neither written nor called since sending it, and I did not think that he would come near me again. When I began to go about, the things in which I had expected to be most inter-

ested in Paris did not appeal to me. I did not want to go to any more theatres. I did not care to wander among the shops. There seemed no motive to buy dresses or hats. I did not know what I was going to do in future, and so I could not tell what I should need to wear. I knew only one thing: that I had an overwhelming repugnance to returning to America in the autumn, as I had of course expected to do; and that I could not face the idea of taking up my life where I had left it off with my attack of *grippe*.

I drove every morning alone in the Bois, not trying to make up my mind, but living in the hour. In the afternoons I sat with Jane, in a chair under the trees in the Champs Elysées, and lazily, yet not languidly, watched little French children playing with red balloons and tops.

One evening, when we had walked back to my hotel, I found Otis reading a newspaper in the hall, and quietly waiting for me.

"What have you come over for?" I exclaimed, when we had shaken hands.

"To talk to you about your letter," he answered, in his calm voice.

"I don't think I can explain," I said.

He looked at me, as I sat down in a chair opposite him.

"I won't ask you to explain," he said. "We will just talk."

We talked; and I think that he began to understand, in spite of, rather than because of, anything I could say. He must have known the history of my life since I was sixteen; and it had often seemed to me that in some ways he was clairvoyant. He knew why people did mysterious things, when they did not know themselves. He knew what people were thinking about;

and which men and women, whom others did not value, would succeed on the stage.

If he should ever read what I am writing to you, he would know at once who was the writer. But he would not tell.

Without waiting for me to say that I did not feel strong enough to act again in the autumn, or to make any other excuse for not going home, he said, "If I were you, I wouldn't do anything for the next few months, except find myself."

"That's just what I want to do!" I answered.

"I know," said he, gently. "Well, stay over on this side, till you are dying to act again. Then you can cable me. That maid of yours will look after you well. And I'll keep your name before the public, so you needn't be afraid you'll be forgotten."

Curiously, for the first time since I went on the stage, I wanted to be forgotten by the public. I thought that I would like great waves of forgetfulness to roll over me; and I believe that Mr. Otis saw what was in my mind, though he said nothing. No doubt he supposed that the mood was part of the illness I had not yet thrown off, and that it would pass. But I was not sure. There were people in New York whom I could not bear to remember. I detested the idea of living in the same city with them, or of having them come to see me act, even though I never saw them. The very thought of those people made my body ache all over, as if I had been beaten with a hammer.

I see now that I must have been in a strange transition state; yet it did not seem at all strange to me then. Every other state of mind I could recall or imagine seemed strange, but not this.

Mr. Otis dined with me that evening, and told me about picture galleries I would enjoy, and

museums that I ought to see. He did not mention the name of X—, and I was sure that they must have met, and talked of me. But I did not care what X— had said.

After all, Mr. Otis did not have the play translated, and take it to New York for one of the actresses I had recommended. He said, before bidding me good-bye, that, having seen it himself, he found it so "distinctly Parisian" that he doubted its success in New York. And since I would not create the woman's part there, no one else should. I liked his putting it in this way better than if he had said that I was the only actress who could play it. To be told that I was of that type would have broken me just then.

He must have seen very deep into my mind, far deeper than I saw myself; for without my suggesting or even thinking of it, he wrote two letters of introduction for me, to London managers. "You might take a fancy to play a part in London for a change," he said. "If not, tear up the letters."

When he shook hands in saying good-bye, he looked at me a little sadly, as if he guessed that our parting would be for a long time.

XXII.

It was very good for me that by the time I began to feel like sight-seeing in Paris, the season was well over, and everyone I could possibly have known had gone to Trouville or Aix, or out of France altogether. When my vitality and love of life came flowing back after the curious shock I had had, it was exactly like beginning a new life. All my surroundings were new, the faces I saw were new. Suddenly I wanted to give away my clothes that I had worn in America, and buy new ones. It was an interest. And the museums and picture galleries Mr. Otis had told me to visit gave me a new set of thoughts. They reawakened my childish love of history, on which Miss Minnie had complimented me when I was a child. I was filled with an immense craving to know all about the jewels, and armour, and instruments of torture, the statues, and paintings of historical events. It seemed almost too good to be true that I could read of the different things and periods in French; but I found it easy; no harder than to skim through some flimsily written French novel, which used to be my way of practising in New York.

Jane went with me everywhere: to the Louvre and the Cluny Museum, and made me laugh at her shocked airs. It did not count with me, Jane's being a link with America, for she had always been alien to the life I was trying to forget.

Precisely what convinced me that I must go to Italy at once, in the heat of September, I am not quite sure; but I think that I must have dreamed some wonderful dream of Italy, and forgotten it in the moment of waking. The desire might have lingered when the memory had vanished, as the perfume of lavender will haunt a broken bowl in which it has been kept. All I know is, that I opened my eyes one night, after being fast asleep, and found myself lying in a pool of moonlight. I heard myself murmur lazily, "I must go to Italy." And though I was still half asleep, the idea roused me to such exquisite excitement that I heard little pulses beating in my ears and all over my body, as one hears little unseen brooklets rippling in the dark.

I thought about a picture I had seen in a shop in a queer old street that day, a copy of Carpaccio's St. Ursula, asleep in her bed, with the tiny dog near her feet, and the angel coming in at the door. I saw the beautiful Italian room, with the mist of moonlight veiling the corners, and instantly I felt that I should not be happy until I could go and sleep in Italian moonlight.

I could hardly wait for morning. When it came, I got up early and went out to buy travel books about Italy. I bought them in French, because—more than anything—it gave me a new made-all-over-again feeling, to read books in a language that was not my own. I forgot to tell you that my Berlitz teacher in New York had said that I picked up French more quickly than anyone else he ever saw, and that I must have Latin blood in my veins. You have said the same thing. But there is one of the reasons why a man like you should never have thought of me! I do not know who I am, except that I had a father and mother whom

I used to call Dearie and Boy, and who were nicknamed the "Love Birds" in the profession.

One of my books said that Venice was delightful in September. There were others which warned travellers not to venture there at that season, because of mosquitos and other annoyances, but I wanted to go, so I believed in the first book.

You, who know so much, and have been to so many countries, almost all over the world, can hardly imagine my ignorance. Most children of twelve know as much as I knew about the geography of Europe; but I had an appetite for knowledge, and for sight-seeing. I thought that, above all things, I should enjoy seeing Venice and Rome. But I did not guess all they were to be to me.

I have come to the end of the bad part of my life now. I have nothing more to say that will hurt you. I think that, at last, what I tell will make you glad. Yet suddenly, even as I write these words, I wonder whether you will really be interested where you are, so far from me that I and my doings may have grown to seem remote? How do I know that you have not lost interest in me? All these months that lie between us may have been built up into a high wall, so high that you no longer even wish to see over it. Perhaps when a man is told to go, by a woman he has loved, and he believes that she does not care, he begins at once to learn not to care. And perhaps with you, the lesson has been easy. Why should it not be?

You know how, in conversation, you sometimes see the person to whom you are talking suddenly unhitch his attention from what you are saying, and become remote from you, though he has been near. You can see the strange thing happening behind the windows of his eyes. It is just as if his soul had been looking

out at you ; then, it turns and walks away, leaving the windows blank, and the room where his soul was, empty. The soul has gone off on an errand of supreme interest, and you and your concerns, of which you are prating, are forgotten. He thinks, because he keeps on smiling politely, that you don't know he has sent his soul somewhere else.

What if your soul has gone away from me? If I only knew!

It is humiliating to write on and on, opening my heart to you, knowing that you may skip the pages of its book. I would not so much mind your not reading at all, because the reading would give you pain. But that you should skip what I write for you! I cannot bear to think that this might be.

How like a woman's vanity is to a growth of weeds in a garden. It seems possible to uproot it. Yet it will spring up again.

When I am afraid that you have changed to me, I cling in thought to the days when you used always to hear what I said, and know what I was doing, even if we were separated by a roomful of people. No matter who the other actors were, for you the curtain rang up only with my entrance, and the stage was empty after I left it. How well I knew it was so with you, and how the secret joy of my knowledge was sweet as stolen honey.

So easily it may be that you have changed! Yet there is a consolation which I whisper to my soul in dark hours, as a priest gives extreme unction to the dying. It is this:

You, as I knew you, You who loved me once, will live in my heart while I live. That You can never change.

Do you remember the st . . . of a young bride and

bridegroom who went for their honeymoon to the mountains, and the bridegroom fell into a crevasse, where a glacier was slowly, slowly moving downward? In the story, it was known that the body must be borne by the glacier to a certain place at the end of half a century, and the girl lived on in the hope of seeing her dead love again. Fifty years later she arrived at the appointed place. An old woman, withered and grey, she saw sheathed in ice the form of her bridegroom, young and handsome as on the day he was lost to her, half a century ago. I am sure you must have heard that story. And so it will be with me. I shall grow old, and as the years go on you may forget me. You, too, will be old, and have a thousand interests in which there will be no place for memories. But that other You, which is mine irrevocably, will be young always, and loving. This You will be my companion through the years, and nothing can take him from me. So I will not be shamed by the thought that I may be writing for one who does not care any longer. The part of You which is mine will care.

XXIII.

I FIRST saw Venice on fire with sunset, and the new moon was like a little silver lamp, hanging half-way down the west.

An English schoolmaster and his wife in the train—the sort of people who love to advise strangers—told me that Venice in the hot weather would be impossible, and that I must go to the Lido, where they were going. They described the Lido, and though they had a dry, short way of talking, it sounded lovely. I made up my mind to do what they said; but when I saw what Venice was like in the sunset, I could not go away. I had to live there. And afterwards I was very glad that I had not taken the schoolmaster's advice. Usually one is glad when one does not take advice. It seldom fits; and though it may be right for the person who gives, if one takes it, often it is like putting on that other person's clothes.

That very night, sitting at my window, looking out over the Grand Canal, I knew that Italy was the medicine I had needed. I said to myself that it was like having died and come to heaven. I felt that I could not go back for a long, long time, to acting in my own country. I must stop in Italy, and sip my medicine slowly, like some rare golden wine that would renew vitality.

Venice was to me far more than just a miraculously beautiful city. It was an epoch, like the play in Paris,

only a very different one. And I would have had to go through the Paris experience first. Without that, the new Me, which needed Italy, could not have been born.

I stayed on and on, in a hotel at first, afterwards in a little apartment found for me by a gondolier whom I hired by the month. He was a delightful man, quite old, with a face that might have been cast of bronze. He could speak a little French, and taught me a few words of very bad Italian—Venetian Italian, all consonants, with the vowels left out. He and Jane were my best friends. And Jane loved me in those days with the devoted, silent love that a watch-dog has for a child. She did not know in the least what was passing through my mind, but she saw a change in me, and dumbly rejoiced in it. No doubt she believed always that her prayers had been answered; and perhaps they had.

There were no men in my world, then. They looked at me across an immeasurable distance sometimes, and their eyes lighted with interest if I had put on a pretty dress to grace Pietro's beautifully carved gondola. But, in their gondolas, they were for me only floating shadows. I seemed to gaze through them and beyond them as if they were transparent; and faces of people were not as interesting to me as the marred faces of old palaces.

I spent almost all of every day in the gondola, and saw the great sights of Venice from outside many times before I saw them from within. In the evenings, Jane and I often had dinner on the lagoon. We took food with us, in the gondola, and made coffee over a spirit lamp.

I want to tell you one thing, before I go on. All the money I used for my travelling expenses and everything else, was money I had earned by hard work. I

had saved a little, and I was spending it all, not troubling very much as to what I should do when my savings were gone. Since I had begun to make money of my own, I had always taken it for granted that it would come. I was either very imprudent or a born optimist, according to the point of view; though I should hardly have known, if anyone asked me, what the word "optimist" meant; I was so ignorant still of most things which need no telling among your kind of people. It was only a little while, comparatively, before you and I met, that, waking up, I wanted to know everything in the world, and began to learn as a starving person eats. But even so, I learned all the best things in life through you afterwards. You may believe that, and be glad, if you will.

It was at Venice that I began to know the difference between *real* beauty, and what I had supposed to be beauty.

I have told you enough about myself to make you understand that even when I was little more than a baby, I hated ugliness, and loved things that were soft and smooth and delicately tinted. But I did not know the difference between the false and the real. Venice taught me that, and I learned as a flower must learn, once it has poked its head out of the earth for a first look at the sky.

From my windows, not only could I see the Grand Canal, and a little canaletto, where the lapping water had painted palace walls with gold and lilac and rose, but I could look across a high wall into a garden. Lovely rich vines and creepers poured over the wall in a green cascade with a spray of purple, and on the other side there was a gentle waving of misty tree tops. But what I loved best was a cypress that shot up like a pillar of black smoke out of the olive haze. When I

saw it against the morning blue, I knew that there was a God.

Some people would think me mad, or very childish, to find God through a tree, that seemed to point me up to him. But you are not "some people." You and I have had such miraculous talks, not about ourselves, but about the big mysteries, and the oneness of everything in the universe. I am not even sure that I have not told you once before about the tree in the Venice garden. Yes, I think I did tell you the day we went to the place where A—— lived on the river, and we watched the sunset behind those willows that dipped trailing branches into the crystal water. But I will let all this that I have written stand now, because it is connected with things which I know I never told you.

Could a tree be an "epoch," as Venice was to me, and the play? It was not the tree alone, but the tree against the sky which seemed to teach me in a moment the secrets of eternity. If a bad thought came into my mind, I hurried and looked at the cypress. I got to imagine that I could hear it give out a ringing note, and I associated it with bells in the open campaniles which I was seeing for the first time.

St. Mark's was a great epoch. I knew nothing about architecture, even less than I know now, for Venice sent me to Ruskin; and if anybody had asked me a few weeks before I came to Italy, I should have said that I hated cathedrals.

But St. Mark's! I sat for hours nearly every day, when the weather grew cool in October, just inside the door, gazing up the nave, soul and body bathed in the golden dusk. It was there I found out that to be really beautiful a woman must be of noble nature, because beauty comes partly from the inside to the outside. And everything round me, wherever I looked, was so

beautiful, that I longed more and more ardently to be in the picture, to become a part of it, not to be a dark blot splashed on the blue and gold. I saw *why* I had wanted to change my whole self, after going to that play in Paris—or, rather, I thought that I saw. But I did not really see the whole, only half the truth. Now I know that beauty and harmony are not all the soul needs. Then, it seemed all that could be necessary.

I used to say to myself as I sat in St. Mark's: "A woman such as I was is out of the picture of the world's beauty. She's an apple with a spot of decay on its rosy side." I thought of the girl in the play, and the dreadful end of the last act. I had seen the horror of her degradation with my uneducated, bodily eyes. But now the real Me had waked up and was seeing with spirit eyes.

Venice was a bath for my soul. I was never tired of washing in its rainbow waters of beauty, and trying to feel that I was one with all beauty. Beauty flowed in waves around me, while the waters of the canal flowed round the sides of the gondola, a stream of pale opal, lit with secret fire by each stroke of the oar, as a flame is lit by a match.

I began to think real thoughts, long thoughts, concrete thoughts, such as had never before shaped themselves in my mind. The second time I saw you—that wonderful second time!—it was in a garden, you know; and somehow we talked of thoughts and gardens. You said: "If you have beautiful thoughts in your mind, you have always a garden in flower." I never forgot that simile.

One Venice thought which pleased me (though it was really worth nothing at all) was about trees, and it came as I looked across the wall at the Venice garden I have just told you of. Whose garden it was I never

found out, for I made no acquaintances except Pietro. I thought that trees ran in types, like people. Olives were poets. Fruit trees in blossom and fulfilment were happy women, living in homes, among families who loved them. Pines were the explorers and pioneers. Willows were young and beautiful widows. Oaks were men like my kind manager, Mr. Otis, strong to rely upon; and cypresses were the monks and nuns of the tree world.

You, who have always had your brain filled with thoughts, can't realise what it was for a crude, untaught girl, to be able to call thoughts to her, like wild birds which she could tame.

It is perfectly true, I did not *think* consecutively in the other days that came before Paris. I only felt, and dreamed. I told you that I was asleep when I was a very young girl. But I came near to thinking sometimes, when I was a little child. If there had been anyone then to lead me out into a different life, I might have gone on thinking always, walking up, higher and higher, mounting a golden stairway of thoughts.

When there was moonlight, often Pietro did not bring me back from the lagoon till twelve or after. I wanted to wait until I had heard the midnight bells on the water. And I would say to myself, as I listened, "Is this I—is it I? Or was there no 'I' before? Am I only just born?"

I have found myself wishing since I knew you, that I had met you in Venice. But I think you *were* with me there. I think I must have begun to feel you in the world.

On the water at night, far out towards the Lido, when the gondola seemed to swing in the darkness between sea and sky, I used to pretend that I was the pendulum in a great clock of the universe, where the

numbers of the hours were stars, and the pointing hands were long white moonrays.

You see, my thoughts were not thoughts that would have mattered except to one just out of the desert, but, such as they were, I found them sweet, and hugged them to my breast like bunches of lilies after a long drought.

How I grew to love the things I began to see, that were not there really! The things I imagined into the Venice sunsets; the unseen flowers growing behind the walls of gardens I passed in the gondola; the man somewhere, who was for me. And that man was you. A——'s broad-minded advice, heard since then, to make all ugly things transparent, and see through them, would have helped me never to be ruffled by any modern vulgarity in Venice. But I hardly needed it. I saw things as I wanted to see them.

I was finding out too much about the deep and high realities of life to sleep much at that time. But I did better than sleep well; I lay awake well. I had no more dreadful fits of depression, such as I used to have in New York and on tour, when going to bed was like being shut up alone in a black tomb.

I wanted to listen to the new thoughts every moment. I wished that my mind could be concave, like an arum-lily cup, so that I might drink in each lovely sound and sight, and absorb them all, into myself.

Jane said that I was so thin, she could not make my frocks fit properly. But I liked being thin. It seemed as if just so much of my old self had gone away. Still, I did not feel any true remorse for my past. I was only dimly sorry to have been a jarring note in the harmony, although I was not clever enough to know how or why I had jarred.

I could not bear to think of Barron, or of poor Willy, of any of the men who had ever come near me,

except Mr. Otis, my one friend who was absolutely unselfish and true, who helped me to "find myself," when I was groping in the dark.

As I write them down, it comes to me that those two words of his mean a great deal, even more than I realised when they stepped forward in my mind, ready for the pen. "Find myself." Yes, they do mean a great deal. I think that to find God, we must first find ourselves; for God gives intimate help through the living spark of Himself He has put into our hearts, once we have found out what it is. That must be why, and how, He has given us Himself.

The beauty of Venice and the thoughts it gave me made me listen for messages to my spirit, and they often came. I grew to feel that it was worth being born and living a whole life just to see a single sunrise if one could get its message, for one might learn from it in a moment all that a long life ought to have taught but had not. And it came to me that the universe, with its suns and stars, the earth, with its seas and forests, we with our joys and sorrows, are all, all one and the same. Even the merciless storms are not other than our own moods, on a grand scale.

It was wonderful to dare feel myself part of the greatness.

One day a vast cloud-shadow sailed slowly over the lagoon, like an immense purple canopy. It darkened the water, and made Venice and her islands look livid as drowned corpses. Then, slowly as it had come, the deadly blackness passed away, leaving the lagoon and the sky above clear as crystal. Suddenly I wondered whether the black cloud-shadow which had passed over my soul would leave the stain of its darkness always, or whether I too might become crystal clear, and so be truly a part of the beautiful picture

life was making all around me. I wanted so much to become crystal clear, that I made the allegory fit, and I went on to tell myself that ugly images reflected in a mirror do not mark the glass.

It was the happiest day of my life, for the beauty of everything had begun to give me a shamed sense of my own shortcomings, the false notes my one little broken reed had been making in the harmony. I am not sure if that heavy load of regret was remorse or not. If not, I never knew a high, noble remorse until I wanted to be all good, so that I might be worthy of your love.

The happiness of that day, after the passing of the cloud-shadow, never quite died down in my heart, until after I loved you. It was as if I had confessed myself a sinner, and had been generously absolved by Nature. Yet, when I began to love you, I doubted that I had ever been really absolved. I saw how easy it had been to believe a thing because I wished to believe it. But love came to me not as he comes to happy young girls, in the form of a little laughing Cupid, wreathed with roses. He came as a stern accuser, and bade me fall on my knees. Then, in a vigil, kneeling on the threshold of his temple, which I hardly dared to cross, I saw that I had been dressing myself up in a fancy dress of spun glass, which I had thought pure crystal.

But all the days after that day, till my second meeting with you, I was happy.

I discovered Ruskin in Venice, and, better still—a thousand times better still—Browning. You know that beautiful bookshop at the corner, as you come out into the piazza of St. Mark? It was there I picked up "The Stones of Venice," and began to read, and read, standing with the volume in my hand, and only waked

up when someone pushed against me. I bought the book and took it home. Another day it was Browning who plunged me far down under the surface of things, so that I forgot where I was and what was happening around me.

Can you believe that, actress as I was, I had never seriously read Shakespeare since I grew up until I bought there, at that shop, a little volume containing "The Merchant of Venice" ? Yet it is true.

I had seen a few, a very few, of the plays produced by popular American actors, and I had been thrilled by them. But I imagined it was the acting that thrilled me. I had not been seized by any desire to read for my own pleasure. After "The Merchant of Venice," in Venice, I went on and read everything, every tragedy, every comedy, every sonnet. It was a wonderful time for me—the birth of my intellect.

From Venice, Jane and I went to Florence; and it was there I first saw olive trees massed together behind black cypresses. It was like looking at moonlight from between prison bars, just as I was looking out at the light from the prison of my past. But I thought then that the doors of the prison were open. Now I know that they were never open. It was a dream I had.

At last we went to Rome, and stayed there all winter. I took a little flat of a few rooms, with a servant to come in for two hours each day, for I had to economise. I knew that if I chose to go back to America, Mr. Otis would find an engagement for me somehow, though it was late in the season, and his companies were made up. But I couldn't go back. I would rather, as I felt, have lived on crusts of black bread and a little water in Italy than have luxury and a greater success than I had ever known, in New York. And that was not because I did not love my own

country. I did and do. I had short, sharp spasms of homesickness, even then, and I would have defended America eagerly if anyone had attacked her with a word of dispraise. Yet nothing would have tempted me, at that time, to go back. I was standing on tiptoe to catch the glory of the world, and Italy was the hospital of my mind and soul. I had gone through a cure for my body. Now I was having a cure for spirit and brain.

It may seem strange to you how sparsely I write about the best part of my life, and also of the worst part, though I spared you few details of my childhood. It is easy to explain why I give you only scattered incidents of my good years. Already I have talked to you of them, though never connectedly. When we were together, I have told you anecdotes of my two years in Italy, and of beautiful things which struck me in travelling there. I am not sure now what I spoke of, and it would be foolish to repeat. The rest is less easy to explain.

The worst years I hate to dwell upon. In recalling them and writing of them, on the one side I fear to distress you needlessly; on the other, I feel that my real desire to be truthful may make me morbid. It is difficult to steer between rocks in that channel. One thing I cannot myself quite understand. The years after I met Barron do not seem as much a part of me, the real Me, as the years before I knew him, and the years after I went to Italy. I feel as if my life were a puzzle, one of those picture-puzzles cut in little pieces to be matched together, and as if a part of the wrong puzzle had got fitted in. If it could be taken out, and the first half and the last half put together, then it seems to me that the picture would be complete, as it was meant to be by the Maker.

Be that as it may, it is a fact that I have forgotten many things in those four or five bad years which do not fit the picture I should have liked my life to make. I have to strain after recollections, whereas everything that happened in my childhood is clearly stamped in my mind as the impress of a seal in soft wax. And it is the same with everything that has happened to me since my first night in Venice. I could tell you all about every day since, I think, if it were worth telling; all I have done, all the people I have known, almost all I have thought—among the thoughts that count. And clearest of all are my meetings with you. I remember everything that we ever said to each other. I remember how you looked at me, each time, and even what you wore. I could describe your clothes, and your neckties; your scarf pins and your sleeve links. I remember every turn of your head; what I thought of you the first time I saw you; how I changed my mind afterwards, and how wonderful the change was, like a burst of sunlight.

I am not sure if I told you what I said to A—— about your eyebrows after that first time. But I think I did not tell you, though I have recalled it often since, and smiled a little. You know—for I have told you this—you were the first intellectual Englishman of the class to which you belong, whom I had met, socially, in England. In the first half hour I thought you were affected. A—— said, "It is the Oxford voice." And I said, "He has such dreadfully high-souled eyebrows, like Galahad's."

I never dreamed of caring for you then, though I admired you, almost in spite of myself. "It would be difficult to live up to a man with those eyebrows," I said flippantly to A——.

And it has been like a punishment for my flippancy,

loving you as I have loved you since, to remember those words of mine, knowing how hard it is for such a woman as I am to live up to such a man as you !

I wonder if you will think me ridiculous when I tell you that since I sent you away I have been twice to Oxford, just in the hope of passing a few "undergrads," or a couple of dons, in the street, and hearing the "Oxford voice" ?

Hearing it there, I found that yours is *not* the Oxford voice. It has only a trace of what A—— meant when she laughed that day, and said, "the Oxford voice." Your soldiering life has left a stronger impression on you, I feel now, than anything else.

XXIV.

WHEN I came to England, it was not so much because I wanted to see England, as that my money was nearly gone, and I needed to make more. I was not yet ready to go back to my own country. I shrank still from New York, and the people I might not be able to avoid there, and I had no eagerness to act. But I decided that, if I must act, I would rather it were in England than America.

So I left Italy, saying that I left the home of my heart, and that I could never feel for another land what I felt for it. But immediately I fell in love with England. I loved it even as the train took me from Dover to London. It was September, one of those dreamy, golden Septembers that come to England sometimes. I had never seen anything like the sweet peace of the English country, and I felt that London would be kind.

You know what one of my letters of introduction from Mr. Otis did for me. It seemed as if something had taken me by the hand and hurried me to England at precisely the right moment. The season that followed I thought perfect, for I did not guess what I lacked in not knowing you. It was then that I saw your photograph at A——'s, and she told me about you; but I had no presentiment of what was to

come. How strange that I had none! Where could my spirit have been wandering?

I met a good many interesting people that winter in London, but they were mostly in an artistic and theatrical set. It was London itself, not its people, that impressed me most. I have told you that I lived near Westminster, and the Abbey was more to me than anybody or anything else in the world. It taught me a thousand things, even about acting, for my hours there alone, nearly every day, gave my character mellowness and depth. If I live to be very old—which I am sure I shall not do—I can never forget the thoughts that came to me in Westminster Abbey, in my first winter in England. I told A—— a little of what I felt, and she wanted me to see King's Chapel, in Cambridge. It was arranged that she should take me there one day in early Spring; but she was ill and could not go. Somehow I could not bear to give up the excursion, and so I went alone.

I knew that the afternoon music was famous, but I had to be at the theatre before eight, so I dared not risk waiting, even to hear it begin. It was about three o'clock when I came into the Chapel, and no one else was there, for sharp flurries of rain had fallen, and frightened sightseers away. I sat down to gaze up at the beautiful roof, which A—— had sent me to see, because of its likeness to the Henry VII. Chapel at Westminster. Another shower had begun, and the dusk was so deep that I had to gaze steadily up with wide open, unwinking eyes, in order to make out the details of the carving, just as one can call stars out of a seemingly empty sky at twilight by looking for a long time. Slowly the details gave themselves to my persistence; the delicate uplifting columns, like rows of tall arum-lilies, with lovely heads meeting at the

middle of the roof; and I traced the carvings, trying to think out all their meaning. Then, suddenly a stream of sunlight poured through the black clouds, and in at the west windows. Between the tall, straight stalks of the stone lilies, hovering ghosts of rainbows floated, which dimmed or pulsed with colour as the clouds moved across the sky. It was as if the mirage of some heavenly garden glowed in the church. Rose and gold stained the ivory tints of the carved stone angels, as flower-pollen stains a cheek which brushes a lily. And, as I watched the colours pale and brighten, the organ thrilled, and music broke out in a glorious fountain of sound. It rose and fell with the floating rainbows, so pure, so sweet, it was like perfume—perfume of the tall, branching lilies.

Think of sitting there all alone among the rainbows, and hearing the voices of angels singing to me, and to no one else! I am not sure that this was not the best thing that has ever happened to me, except knowing you; both great things, and both memories now. Yet I won't say *only* memories. I tell myself, when I am lonely, but for the friend I have in my own heart, that memories are just as real and living presences as the hours of to-day. For this moment's present is the next moment's past, and what ought it to matter whether a joy is the memory of ten years or ten minutes ago? I have not strengthened myself yet to the point where it does not matter; but perhaps I shall reach that point in time, if I have to depend mostly on memories for my personal happiness.

The music was made by a great organist from London, who used to be a chorister at King's Chapel twenty-eight years ago. I found this out afterwards, and I did not need to find out that he was playing for

his own delight. He went on and on and on, for sheer joy, as if he could not stop, just like a nightingale or a lark. The music caught me up to a heaven I have never lost sight of since then.

Of this, and other things I have written about the years that brought me near to you, I wonder why I wrote them. And I wonder more often what you will think, than when I first began to write. In the beginning I told what had to be told if you were to see the making of me. Lately I have written now and then what I wished to write, because of the pleasure it gave me to put it on paper, perhaps for your eyes to see. If you think I am consciously trying to show contrasts, you will be mistaken. It is not that. Still, I have grown more self-conscious in writing, I feel, and know, as I have gone on. The heart-burning and the shame of laying myself bare, and breaking your ideal, has cooled a little. And in getting past the bad days, on paper, as I got past them in life, I seem to come closer to you, as if I were speaking to you, instead of writing. Sometimes, if I dared, I should believe that our thoughts reached each other; that my need of sympathy received its answer. At least, it does no harm to feel that.

I suppose the whole question raised by these extracts from my life, which I have tried to give you from inside and outside, is this: What would I—my Ego—have been if its earthly spark had been lighted in a different environment? If, for instance, I had been born as a baby into such surroundings as I, the thinking woman, was born into, and then, later, had been pushed down to the level of my real childhood?

For me, it is a question without an answer. I would give the little I have worth giving to know what

answer, if any, rises in your mind. Yet I can see no satisfactory answer as possible. If, in a different frame, I would have been different, that must argue inherent weakness. On the other hand, if I would have been the same, in spite of a happier start, it seems to argue inherent faults or folly in myself.

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XXV.

I WISH that my first impressions of England had been associated with you. But I had two years there while you were away; and then I went back to America to act, still knowing nothing of you except what I had heard, and the photograph A—— had shown me, in talking of you. Still another year, or nearly a year passed after I came again to live in England, before we met. Yet all the things I have loved best in England since I first saw it, remind me of you, as if we had seen them together.

I hardly know why I did not stay in America, after I went back, because the new point of view I had gained gave me a new interest in everything. And I liked the work, and people were kind.

It is rather wonderful, and very good, how soon evil can be forgotten or ignored. I had been gossiped about, and some worse things than were ever true had been said and printed. Yet no one seemed to remember. Or if a few did remember, they were silent, and none of the old stories were revived. Often, I scarcely knew whether to laugh or cry over the pressing invitations that came to me from prim ladies standing high on "society" pedestals. Just because I was trying to make up for my long, blank years of ignorant blindness, by reading and studying, I got a reputation as a bookworm and a "recluse," such an odd reputation for an actress, that by those who did not look back I

seemed to be considered quite a model of all the virtues. It was on the top wave of this reputation that I was swept back to England for the second time; and those who had been kind to me before were even kinder. I understand very well what sort of idea you had of me before we met. It was like an introduction to a volume, which gives the reader a clue before he begins.

There is nothing I need write about my life in America during the two years I spent there after my return, for I have no big things to repent of, or be glad of, during that time. But there is just one thing about someone else, not myself, I should like to tell. In a big city, far west, I met Alma—quite by accident. She was married, not to the man who for her sake had sent all her company east, years ago, but to a friend of his, whom she had known through him, and who knew the whole of her story. She was still lovely, though her outlines were sharpened; and she seemed happy in a quiet way. I was playing in the town where she lived, and she asked me to call on her. I went gladly, for I had loved her through all the years, and had never forgotten, though we had passed out of each others' lives. At first, she was slightly reserved, though sweet and affectionate; but one night her husband had gone east on business, and we sat up very late after the theatre, talking. She told me a good many things about the past, but dwelt mostly on her gratitude to her husband. I thought then, in my heart, that it should be the other way round, for she was so charming, so exquisitely refined and gentle, while he appeared not only commonplace, but even rather common. Now I understand exactly how she felt.

In describing the success her marriage had been, she attributed her happiness entirely to the fact that her

husband knew the worst there was to know before he asked her to be his wife. But she had been spared the dreadful ordeal of telling him. He had known much of her early history, and had seen the latter part shaping itself. In spite of everything he had been willing to take her. But whether he had condoned her past life because he was common and commonplace, or in spite of being both, I could not decide, and have never decided. Often and often lately I have asked myself—Which?

After you and I knew each other, and I began to care, I tried with all my might to stop loving you, for fear of the consequences. I foresaw that loving you would mean suffering for me, perhaps for us both. Sometimes I made up my mind that I would leave England, and go back to live in America. But I was not strong enough—or weak enough, to run away.

After we had our second talk together—the queerest, most starry talk any woman ever had with any man she was just beginning to know—I could think of nothing and no one but you. I could not imagine how I had found the world worth living in, before I knew you were in it.

Things you said made me realise how much I still had to learn, and how far off the horizon is. It was like climbing a mountain, to go up and up the path of friendship with you, finding with each turn a new and unexpected outlook. The higher the level I reached, the more mountains of almost unattainable knowledge and inspiration I saw, billowing away to the ends of creation, the borders of eternity. And I gloried in that great company of mountains, because you had climbed them all, and knew their names and their most intimate beauties.

Even if I had been the woman you nobly believed

me to be, I should have been ridiculously small beside you, hardly visible to the naked eye. I realised more each day how little I was, at best, how unworthy still, though worthier than I had been.

I said no longer with the same confidence, "the cloud-shadows can pass and leave no dark trace." I thought that a woman loved by such a man as you should always have walked on mountain tops, in sunlight.

But in the sudden radiance of learning that you cared for me (learning from your eyes, not your lips) I let myself go, almost deliberately, for a few days, so that, come what might, I should for once have lived. Never had I really lived till those days. I want you to know that now; never, even in Italy, had I lived with my whole nature, my heart, my blood, my mind, my soul—all, all! Those days nothing can take from me. I know and cannot forget till the end of me, if end there is, what it was like to love and be happy.

But the break came when you spoke. It had been only a mirage of happiness, like the rainbow mirage at King's Chapel. When you told me how you loved, and how high you held me, the vision was shattered. If I cou'd have died, with the white light of your reverent love shining on me, I would have thanked God.

Do you remember some words you quoted, not then (for we were living too intensely to think of what any other man or woman had said about love), but the next day?

"A kiss lays low the walls of thee and me."

If your kiss had laid low the wall of me, and let you see what was on the other side, what look would have come into your eyes?

You left me, on both days, believing that I loved you, and was happy in loving. But through both

nights I suffered as I had not known I could suffer. It was as if my soul were being flayed alive. I do not think human nature could endure more.

I wonder if Alma suffered so, when, knowing that all was over between her and Cyril, she bade me good-bye, and drank the poison?

I longed desperately, the second night, to go to A——'s door, and knock; to beg her to let me in, and then to tell her everything. I did get up at last, and go out into the corridor; but I went no further. I could not bear to be so selfish as to disturb A—— in the night with my troubles.

Next morning, when she came into the garden—the dear, enchanted garden—I was there. I had been there since dawn. The sunrise had given me back a little courage, and I had made up my mind to say nothing to her, for I was sure no one could really help me. I meant to let her think that I had only just come down, but she saw by my face that something had happened. She thought that you and I had quarrelled! I could not bear to have her believe that of us, and somehow she drew from me enough to make her understand.

Then she gave me the advice of which I told you when I began to write: to marry you, and keep silent about the past. She said: "A woman's past is her own, just as a man's is his." And on principle, I agreed with her. Only, I could not take her advice. She argued with me, insisting that it was a stupid convention for women to tell such things to men; that men did not wish them told; they would rather be happy, and not know; that "confession" was a selfish luxury, and the wish for it a sign of hysteria. I repeated over and over that perhaps she was right, and explained that I had no hysterical longing to confess,

rather the contrary; but that you believed me to be one sort of woman, whereas in reality I was another. And I tried to make her see that to marry you and keep silent, as she advised, would be like a woman who loved a man, disguising herself to represent another woman, whom he loved, for the marriage ceremony. Still, I did not convince A——. She said, "I am of his world, and ought to know what is best for him, better than you can." Also she harked back to that old axiom, "The outsider sees most of the game."

You know how eloquent and enthusiastic she is when she is interested. Almost she persuaded me to take her advice. I wanted so much to feel that she was right, and I was wrong. But when I saw you again, and looked into your eyes, I knew that for me there was only one thing to do, since I could not bear to tell you. I must send you away, and make you think I did not care enough to go with you, after all.

I am repeating this, so that you may be very sure I loved you, and love you now, and will love you always. Just in case it may be a satisfaction to you to know. But not for anything would I have you think that I suffer through all the days, as I suffered then. I am not writing to call you back, only to give you my whole truth.

Whatever you wish to think of me, that is what I pray you to think, for I know that you will think chivalrously.

I have read over again now what I have written up to this page, and although I am far from satisfied, at least I see that I have done my best to be true.

Above all things, do not feel remorse if, now that you know the real woman, you decide not to come and not

to write. Whatever you decide is best for you will be best for me. And you must not picture me as desperately despairing, or existing feverishly from day to day, only in the hope of hearing from you that I am forgiven.

It is true, that when I let you go, all personal happiness for me went with you. But long hours of calmness came, and I hope to find something like real peace in Venice again. I am going back there soon, to the place where I "found myself." And I tell you once more, I am a thousand times better and happier for having you in my memory, like a picture over an altar, behind a curtain.

When I think of myself, though I feel—often, not always—that intrinsically I am not worthy of such a man, frankly I am not sure that I would have been as good a woman as I am, if the cloud-shadows had never darkened the lagoon. It is not that I hold the belief, already as old-fashioned as the "new woman" of many years ago, that a woman has a right to the same experiences as men, without being questioned. It isn't that. It is only that I am not sure about myself. And I have a strange conviction that to the heart of the Real Me the black shadow never reached.

I want to be my new self, to shut the door on the past, and live in the present and future. But I can see, oh so plainly, that there is little reason for you to want even that new self at its best in your life. Search your own soul to decide. Yet I think, somehow, that now you will *know* without reflecting whether we are for each other or not.

You will not be "spoiling my life" by keeping yourself out of it. There will never be any other man in my life. There never has been any other who counted, in my heart. But while sunrises and sunsets throw their

banners across the sky, while winds call, stars throb,
and waters murmur to my soul, I cannot lose all that
is worth having or live behind prison bars.

So I say again: put my needs out of your mind,
and decide what is best for yourself.

THE END.

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d,

