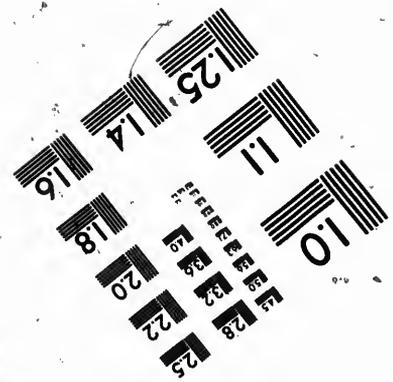
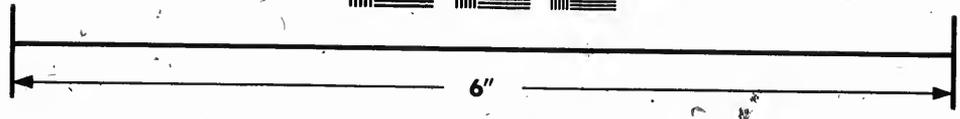
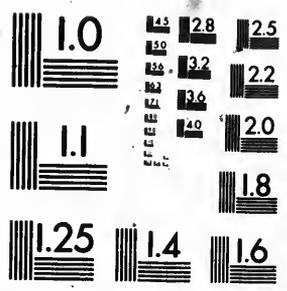


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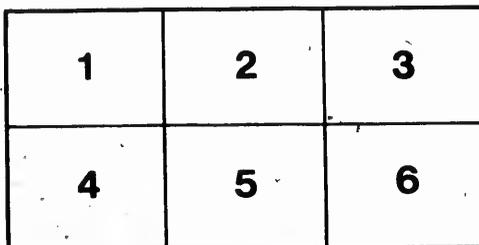
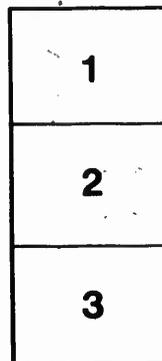
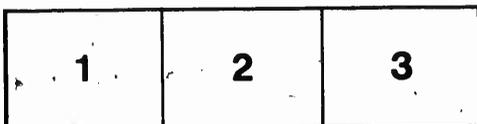
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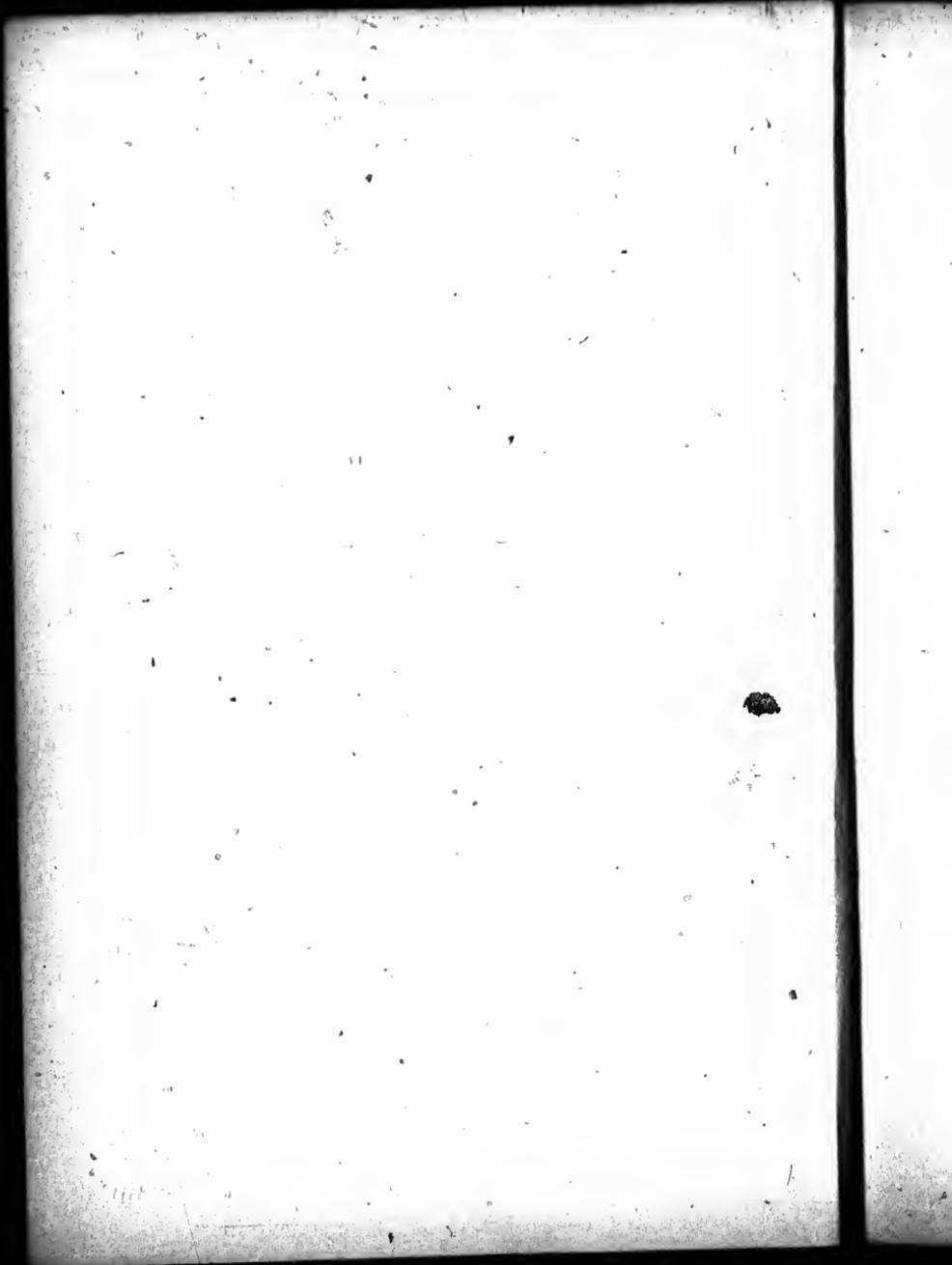
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THE LILAC SUN-BONNET

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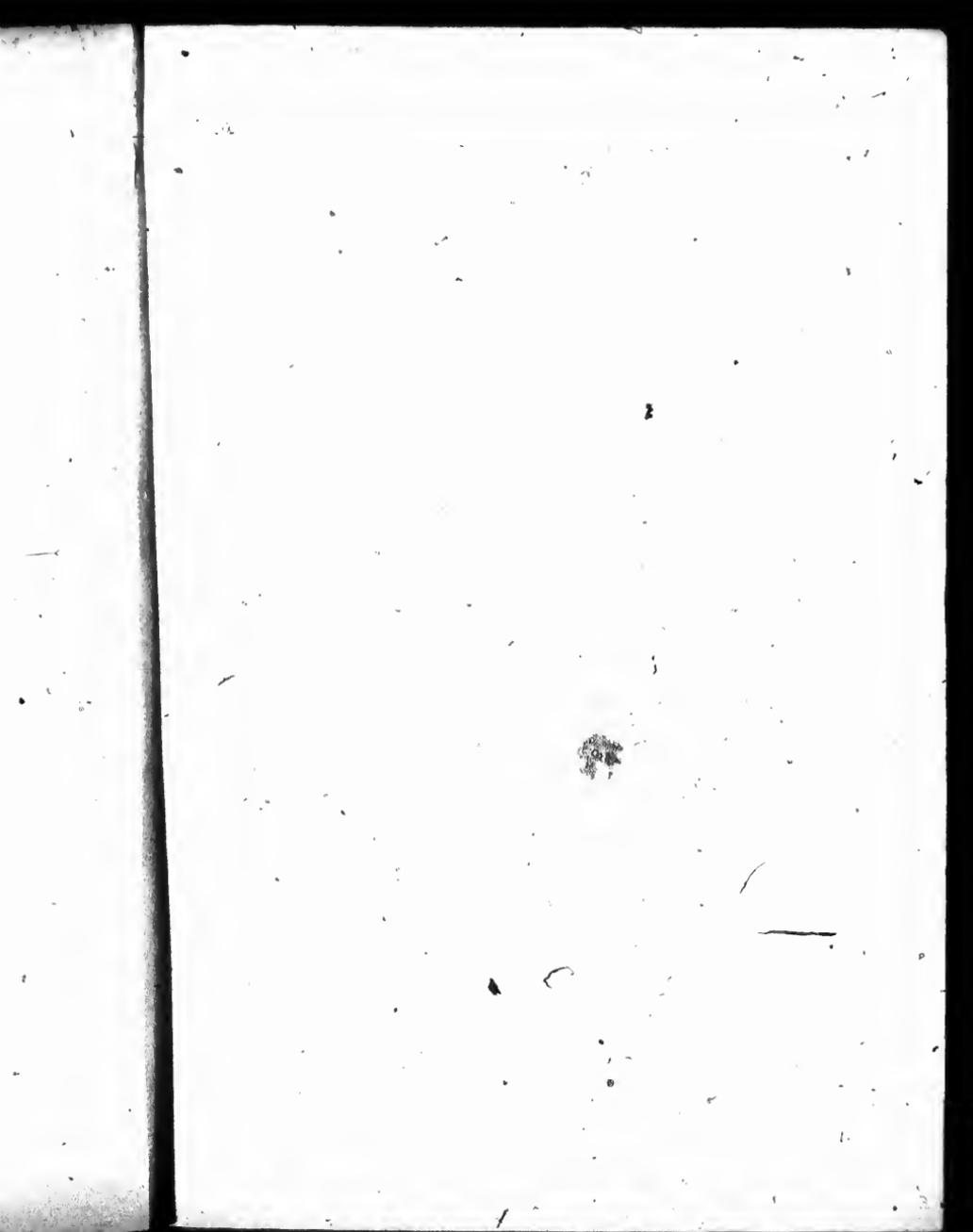
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THE STANDARD BEARER

THE RED AXE

THE BLACK DOUGLAS





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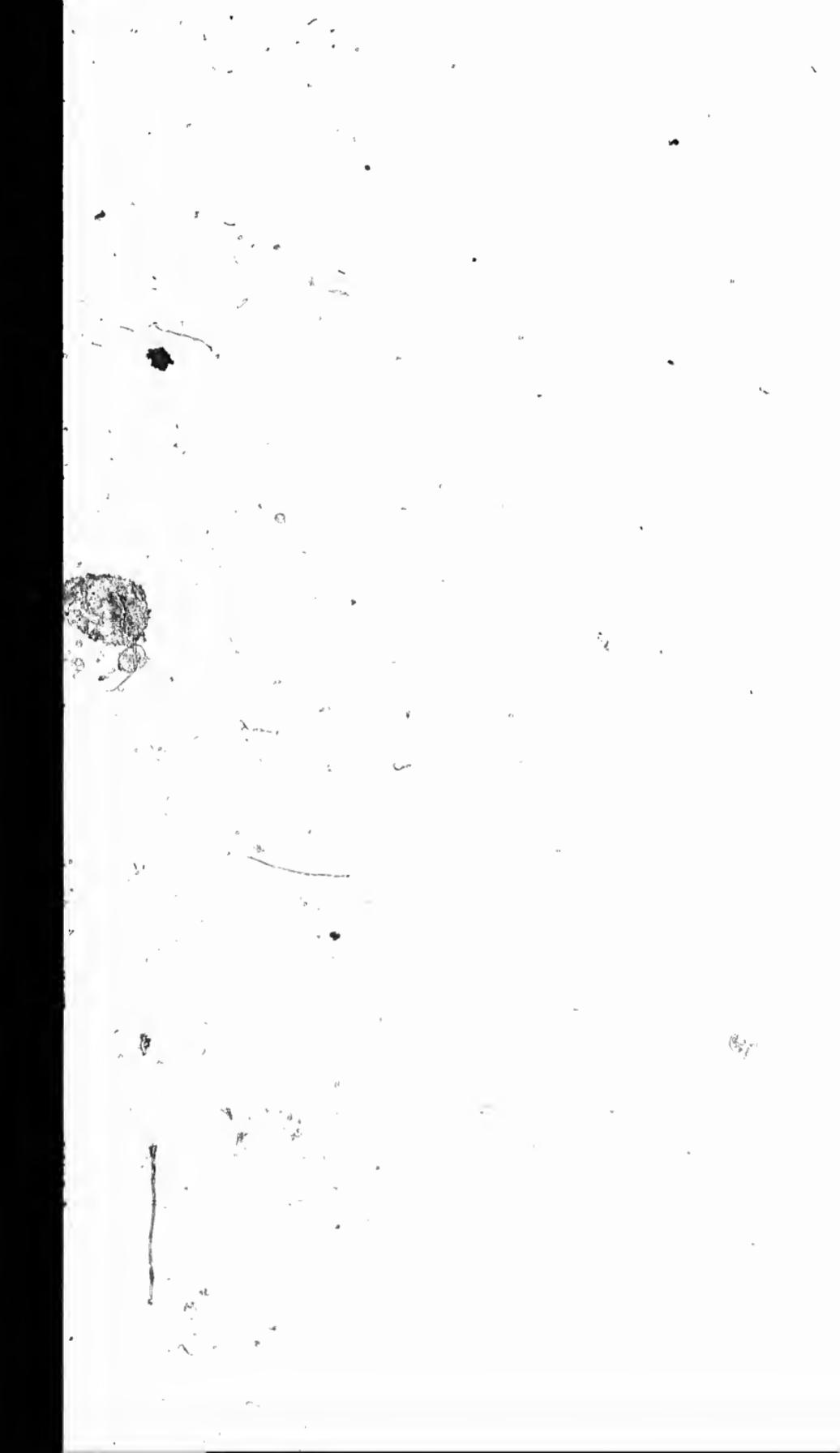
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To

MY EARLIEST AND BEST AMERICAN FRIENDS

MR. AND MRS. GEORGE L. JEWITT
OF NEW YORK

DEAR PEOPLE OVER THERE —

I send you this book knowing that you will understand (among other things) how deep and sincere is my love for America, and how much I owe to Americans of that heart-gold which alone does not take to itself wings and fly away.

There are several sorts of your countrymen and women in this story — all in their way as charming as I love to remember you two — that is, all save one.

I suppose there *are* bad Americans. I read the *New York Sunday World* and seem to have heard of such, though possibly they may have been of foreign extraction. But the mean American I had neither heard of nor yet read of, till we three met him together under the glittering stars of the winter Engadine.

I am certain that neither of you have forgotten Mr. Kearney Judd and the development of the various delightful traits of character which I have attempted to

Dedication

describe in these chapters. I remember with joy your own pregnant reply to that young gentleman's boast.

"I am not often taken for an American!" he said, and smiled.

"When you are, for heaven's sake don't give your country away!" said one of you; and the young man stopped smiling.

But enough of Mr. Judd: I send you this across the Big Water to certify that though the years and the fates divide, there are hearts over here that warm at the thought of you both. The gods who watch over friendships bring us to our next happy meeting!

S. R. CROCKETT

PENICUIK, *March 28th, 1899*

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ROCKETT

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CHAPTER I

HARK, THE LARK!

IT was an off day, yet Keith Harford was awake betimes in the tiny hostel on the Wengern Alp, held (as the sign stated plainly) against all comers by Johann Jossi. Keith awoke because he missed something. He turned restlessly in the little Swiss bed of five foot six inches in extreme length, over the terminal bar of which his feet projected like the "trams" of a wheelbarrow. The young man was wakeful from unaccustomed comfort. He had indeed taken his knapsack to bed with him, which, in addition to a spirit lamp and appurtenances, contained a camera built with knobs and acute angles particularly inimical to luxury. He had also entrenched himself behind half a dozen books and a field-glass covered in rusty leather.

All these were mingled and scattered about under the sheet, and as Harford lashed this way and that he turned now upon the edge of a book and anon upon the brass-bound corner of a box, with a sense of comfortable discomfort and stern refreshment which passed all too quickly. For hours he had wrestled with the fusty national coverture of feathers and had been overthrown, speaking in the dead unhappy night words better left unsaid. And yet at the time even these had been some solace to him.

Ione March

But now in the clean-washed morning air the vanquished feather-sack reposed without on the tiny causeway in front of the Eigerhof, and was indeed the first object that saluted the morning gaze of Herr Johann Jossi as, simply attired in shirt and trousers, he strolled barefoot and hatless out of the back door of his inn to arouse the sleepers in the stables to their daily work. For with the energy of despair Keith Harford had cast the devil out at the window. And the feather-bed now squatted on the path, a humorous broad-based round-shouldered gnome, one corner of it comically lurched forward like the ear of a dog that has been kicked once and now listens intently for signs of further hostility.

Through the twin green-painted leaves of the open latticed window Keith could see, as he drowsed off and waked up alternately, the darting swallows weaving intricate webs of air in the gulf between him and the distant mountain side. This seemed so near that he almost imagined he could reach those white patches with his ice-axe from the window. But Keith knew well that yonder blue scar, like a chip knocked out of a tumbler edge, denoted a bare spot of glacier ice fifty yards across, from which an avalanche of fragments had been precipitated sufficient to bury the Hotel Wengern-Alp, with all the stables, cow-sheds, goat-sheds, and sheep-pens thereto appertaining.

Sleepily he watched a white spot of the glacier slopes enlarge and slide downwards, pushing before it a little ruffle of greyness like a breeze on still water. There was a puff of smoke like the exhaust of a high-pressure engine at the black edge of the cliff, a hazy mistiness beneath, and yet so far away was all this that before the dull, long-resounding roar of the snow-slide entered through the open casement, Keith was once more uneasily dozing.

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Hark, the Lark!

Now the Wengernhaus under Johann Jossi was a good hotel, and the sleeper only restless from an overplus of comfort. For Keith Harford had spent much of the previous month in scaling new "faces" of well-known mountains, and in tracing out untried routes over passes of such extreme difficulty, that to the uninstructed eye it seemed much easier to go straight over the tops of the mountains themselves, and so be done with it. He had bivouacked in the huts of the Alpine Clubs, slept the sleep of the just upon the damp straw beds of the Swiss Union, lain like a log upon his back all night on the bare opportunist boards of France, and acquired on short leases the elegantly-fitted mountain mansions of the Tyrol — these last with real glass in the windows, a mirror on the wall, and a circulating library in the press by the German stove. Oftener still, remote alike from shelters and huts, he had shared with Marcus Hardy, his one chosen comrade, the discomforts of a nook among the rocks, where, as the latter sadly admitted, the sole amenities of the situation were, "Harford's knees in your back and half the Oberland in the pit of your stomach!"

Keith Harford had not slept when only the Thalwind sighed softly through his green lattices, like the whispered speech of lovers in the dark. He had waked before the first starling twittered under the heavy pine-smelling eaves; but yet, so perverse is man, so soon as the inn yard arose to cheerful bustle, when the clattering of tin milking-pails, the goatherds' cries of "*keets-keets*," the chink and tinkle of cow-bells, the whinnying of goats and the lowing of cattle were emulously at strife to deafen the clamour of shrill patois and the clatter of outgoing horses' hoofs, Harford turned to his pillow with a sigh of content and hope. This was something like. He felt that he could sleep now, and accordingly he slept.

Ione March

But the welcome oblivion was not to be for long. The light door of unpainted wood which separated him from a long barrack-like corridor, bent inward at the top like the leaves of a book turned over by the finger of an eager reader, and the seeing part of a jovial face looked in. It was Marcus the giant, making ready to wake his friend with a thunderous rataplan. For Keith Harford, aware of his comrade's little ways, had taken the precaution to fasten his door before going to bed the night before.

"Not that a little thing like that matters with these flimsy Swiss locks," said Marcus as he levered it open in the middle with the broad cutting edge of his ice-axe. The nails which held the lock parted from the new wood with a soft suck of wheezy discontent. "It's as easy to draw the things they call screws here as — the somniferous beggar! Keith, are you going to sleep all day?"

Then with his ponderous fists Marcus performed a deafening *obligato* upon the violated door, whistling shrilly and marking the time alternately with the heels and toes of his well-tacketed boots.

His victim sat up in bed with an expression at once bland and dazed.

The giant nodded confidentially.

"Wagner," he explained, referring to the music. "'The March of the Thingummies' — fellows with wings to their pickel-haubes, you know. Now then, drums, and trumpets! *Tarantara-ra-ra. Slap-bangity-whop, and — there-you-are — Pim-POM!*"

Having thus ended his fantasia he bowed right and left gracefully, as if acknowledging wild bursts of applause from a crowded audience, and ended by laying his hand upon his heart in the strictest Blue Danubian manner. Seeing a faint but sad smile flicker upon the

Hark, the Lark!

face of his friend, Marcus Hardy next hollowed his palms, and with his thumbs to his lips he began to play a soft and moving melody.

"Flutes and oboes," he explained, with a wave of his hand; "the Spirits of the Woods and Mountains descending to arouse the Sleeping Beauty of the Wengern!"

He broke off short, however, with quick alternate indignation. "I never saw such a fellow as you are. You don't deserve to live, much less to get any breakfast!" he cried. "You've no gratitude. Why, after all I've done for you, you sit grouting there as solemn as a brass monkey with the toothache. What's the matter with you, man? At your advanced age you can't be in love?"

"Oh, do go away and order breakfast, there's a good fellow!" said Harford, quietly sitting up in bed, and skirmishing with one hand under the sheets for a missile. Seen in the broad light of day, Keith Harford showed of very different mould from that in which the burly giant Marcus was cast. His finely-shaped smallish head was covered by a close crisp of dark hair, with here and there a thread of early grey running becomingly through it, and in his darkly-melancholy eyes dreams and disappointments seemed to have their dwelling. Keith Harford looked "interesting," which is a word foreign to the male vocabulary; and when he came out upon a hotel "piazza" anywhere from Chamouni to the "Three Kings" of Basle, appreciative maidens remarked covertly to each other, "I'm sure he's had a disappointment."

Marcus Hardy stood for a moment with a comical air of disappointment puckering his genial face.

"Well," he said, with an exaggerated sigh of resignation, "I never glimpsed such a chap — devil — bit of

Ione March

encouragement or appreciation! Here have I been all round the plate at the screech of day to swot up Wagner, and I've practised that fellow Strauss till I'm a perfect wreck — *Pulsationen, Vibrationen*. This sort of thing — ”

He showed symptoms of beginning again with the military comb which he had been covering with paper torn from a Tauchnitz volume, but his companion held up his hand.

“Now do go away, there's a good fellow,” he said. “I'll be down in ten minutes.”

“All right,” said Marcus, nodding. “Man's inhumanity to man' — or words to that effect! 'Tis the way of the world! I'll have the funeral baked-meats all ready.”

And so, tucking his ice-axe under his arm, he went playing himself down the long resonant alley of pine boards to the strains of “The Flowers o' the Forest,” cheerfully, though somewhat capriciously, performed upon imaginary bagpipes.

But Marcus was arrested ere he reached the stairs, and the melody cut off sharply as with a knife by the voice of Keith Harford behind him.

“Stop that, Hardy! Not that — make a fool of any tune but that, old man.”

The tones were earnest and full of feeling.

Hardy nodded his head to himself several times quickly, as if giving the matter up.

“Well,” he muttered, “it's much use a fellow trying to be cheerful, with poets and geniuses lying round loose. All right, old man!” he cried aloud; “I forgot that you were more than half a wild borderer. Have, you any sentimental objections to ‘Tommy, make room for your uncle?’ ”

And dropping his boyish boisterousness all at once

Hark, the Lark!

like a masquerading cloak, Marcus Hardy tramped down to the sanctum of Herr Jossi, cornered that potentate, and with practical directness began to arrange for breakfast on the short green turf in front of the house, beside the great brass telescope through which so many ascents of the mountain had been made, and which, tilted at a knowing angle, was sunning itself in the pure morning air and winking confidentially up to the Silver Horn of the Jungfrau under the indigo black sky of the Bernese Oberland.

CHAPTER II

THE WOMAN OF FORTUNE

MARCUS HARDY, late of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, and territorially of Rayleigh Manor, Hants, stood whistling softly upon the scant green carpet outside the Wengernhaus. He was watching the white whisks of snow shooting down the couloirs of the Eiger opposite him like slim coiling serpents — nothing but the sonorous after-roar from the valley beneath telling of the thousand tons of ice and snow which had gone plunging and leaping downwards to pulverise themselves a mile and a half below.

"Thank the Lord I'm no genius!" was the somewhat superfluous burden of his meditations. "If a fellow has to be as solemn as a boiled owl and as infernally touchy as a professor of poetry — by Christopher! I'd rather be a mole-catcher and tramp the fields with a flat spud under my arm!"

And the ex-student of Trinity Hall kicked up great grass tufts in his indignation. Then, quick compunction seizing him, he added in an altered vein, "Good old Keith! It would do him all the good in the world to tumble neck and crop into love. That would give him something decent to moon about, I know."

Marcus glanced at his friend's window with the air of one who, having tried all the hidden things of love, has come to the conclusion that these also are vanity. The next moment he received a shock.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed under his breath, as a shadow slanted quickly across the grass, and he lifted

The Woman of Fortune

his eyes instinctively to mark the shadow-caster as she passed. "Love! what a clipper!"

And the figure which occasioned the exclamation being now well in front, Marcus squared his shoulders, drew a deeply satisfactory breath, and gave himself up to a frank unashamed Anglo-Saxon stare, followed (as it often was in his impressionable bosom) by an equally unrestrained admiration.

"Oh, I say!" he communed with himself half aloud. "I tell you she's a beauty! No mistake this time, Mark! She's got a profile like Diana when she was giving that poor hunting bloke particular fits, proud and a little bit cold till you rouse her; and, I declare, just the very dark hair I like — light and swirly, like snow blowing off an arrête when there's a gale up aloft. Gad! a girl like that would make a poet out of me too! She would, in a week!"

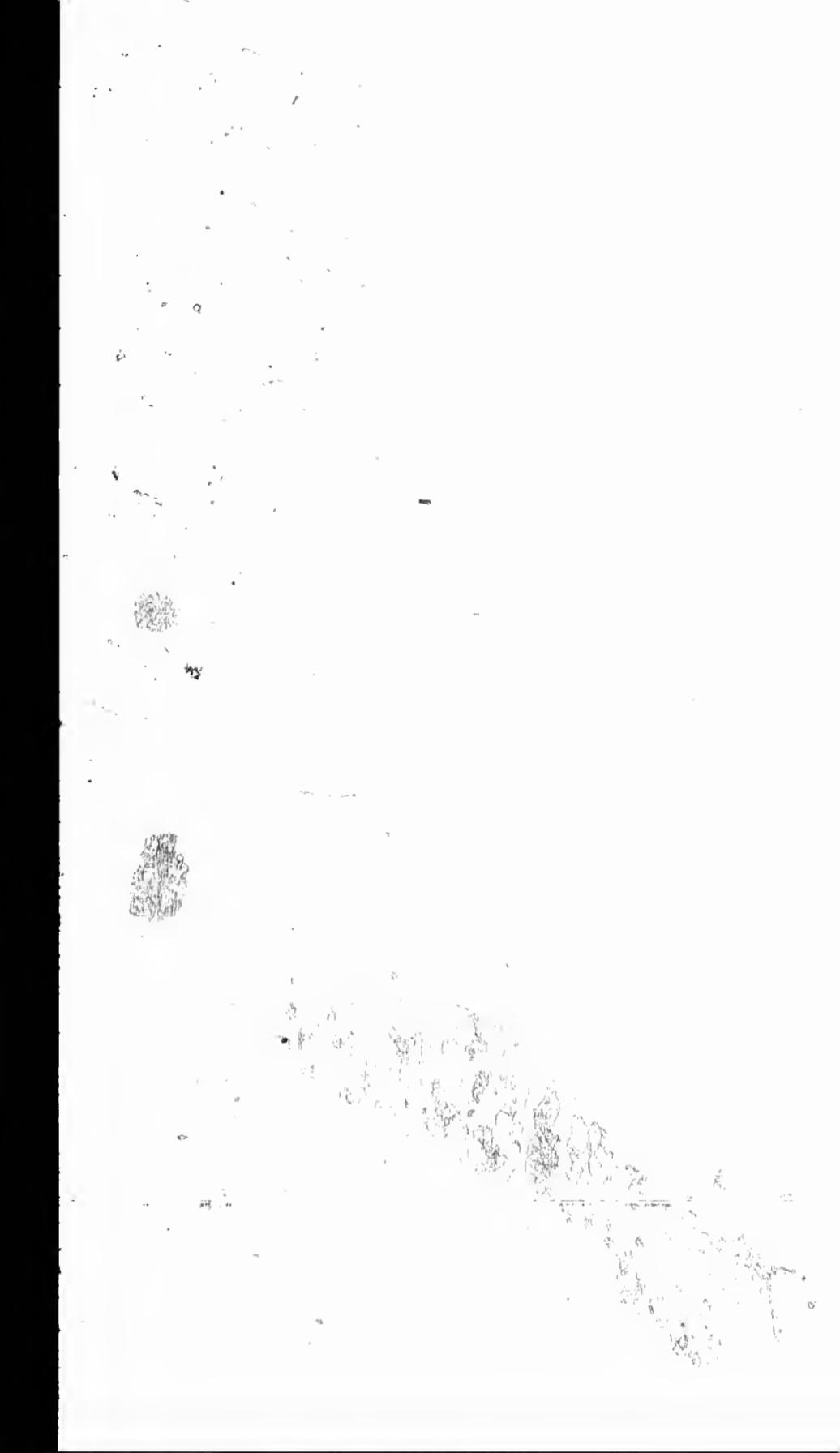
Another shadow fell upon the grass.

A tall, military-looking man, clean-run and grey-moustached, had come quietly out of the inn of Johann Jossi, and now paused by the table in front of which Marcus stood waiting for his friend, and watching this sudden apparition of radiant girlhood with widely-opened eyes of surprised admiration.

Secure in the fact that Dian's back was turned towards him, Marcus continued his observations aloud more than half consciously, and wholly without remarking the amused smile on the face of his new companion.

"I tell you what, Harford; she's a daisy! Why that girl's a tearing beauty any day in the week! Wish I knew her! *Wha-aat?*" He turned with such frank, boyish appreciation in his honest eyes that, catching the faintest quizzical flicker on the face of the military-looking man, he reddened a little.

"I beg your pardon!" he said, a little stiffly; "I



Ione March

thought it was my friend who had come out and was standing behind me."

The placid, tolerant smile remained. The military-looking man seemed unaccountably pleased.

"Yes," slowly came the reply, spoken with the most delicate suspicion of a drawl, "yes — she is a beauty. And more than that, she's the best girl in the world!"

As he said them, the words were more the statement of a universally admitted fact than any mere verdict of chance enthusiasm.

Marcus turned quickly upon him.

"You know her?" he queried. "Golly, wish I did! Who is she?"

"Well" — the monosyllable, more by a certain liquid dwelling on the consonants akin to the delicate Welsh usage than by any accent, proclaimed the speaker an American — "there are reasons why I ought to know that young lady well, though I'm not sure that I do. She's my daughter, sir!"

Marcus coloured hotly, like the boy he was in spite of his twenty-five years.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon," he cried, impulsively lifting his soft cap from his closely cropped head, with that characteristically eager gesture which endeared him to his friends. "I always *was* an ass. Do you know, I never think what I say till I get into some beastly hole. I hope you won't think me a common border ruffian. E—r—r! My name is Marcus Hardy — of Rayleigh, 'in Hants!" he added, with some vague desire to indicate himself.

The giant paused, blushing to his freckled temples. The military-looking man, however, only smiled benignly and bowed in his turn.

"My name, sir," he said very quietly, "is Henry Quincy March."

The Woman of Fortune

"Ah, Governor!" said Hardy promptly, "I heard you were over here — in fact, well, if it is n't cheek to say so, I'm deuced glad to meet the war governor of the State of Callibraska!"

Governor March looked as surprised as he was obviously pleased.

"But how?" he said. "I thought that the English cared no more for our Civil War than for the crow fights and kite skirmishes of the ancient Scots and Picts."

As he spoke he was looking the young man over, and saying to himself that he would never have suspected Marcus Hardy of any historical knowledge more esoteric than the annals of Rugby football, or the names and weights of the strokes in the last six winning Oxford and Cambridge boats.

"Well, the truth is, sir," answered Marcus, "I ought to have been a soldier. But the 'mater' shut down on it. My mother belongs to the Peace Society — that is, when she's not on the warpath. She thinks wars are all wrong, and just pitches it into me hot that I've got to stop at home and look after my stake in the country. Hang my stake in the country, say I! They can have the whole show to pasture their three-acre cows on, as far as I'm concerned!"

The elder man smiled indulgently.

"And so very naturally you come to Switzerland to do it," he said. "So do I. I've got a stake in my country, too, and that's why I'm here!"

After this there was a pause, and the two men silently faced the mighty mountain wall, which over against the Wengern Alp squares its shoulders and defiantly compels all eyes, like Atlas upbearing the vault of heaven. Far in front of them the girl stood, apparently on the very verge of the precipice, her elbow making a pretty angle

Ione March

with her head as she looked out under her hand. Her whole figure was poised with a certain indescribable lightness. She wore a plain but serviceable tweed dress, which fitted like an easy glove the slim alertness of her form. Outlined against the snow of a suckling glacier, her head seemed small and classical, so accurately had the dark-brown hair been collected into a knot behind, leaving only a tight ringlet or two of a more golden hue to spray upon the hollow of her neck. But upon her forehead, under a piquant yet business-like sailor hat of white straw, a little riot of loose curls stirred lightly and changefully in the breeze; and cast faint shadows upon the warm dusky tan of a complexion in which a vivid life thrilled, and through which the quick life blood could be seen leaping responsive to every thought. As the young girl turned away from the mountains, she compressed her lips in quick, petulant anger, and all unconsciously her head poised itself in fashion yet more goddess-like upon a neck round which closed, perhaps rather too rigidly and demurely, a white collar of military severity. White cuffs, turned over a little at her wrists like those of an hospital nurse, were fastened with plain gold studs.

"Are you looking for Kearney, Ione?" Mr. March inquired as the girl came towards them.

The Governor's daughter looked directly at her father with a faint shade of annoyance on her face, as Marcus lifted his hat with instinctive frankness. She bowed very slightly in acknowledgment, so slightly that Marcus felt indefinitely chilled, though somehow he had the consciousness that the girl's annoyance had been caused neither by his salutation nor yet by her father's including her in their conversation.

"No," she said; "I was only looking out for Ida and Astoria."

Governor March's face lightened.

The Woman of Fortune

"Oh," he said, "I saw them go up the mountain behind the hotel, armed to the teeth with twenty-four pounder field-glasses to look for their brother. I dare say you will find them around there somewhere, and also obtain a view of Kearney half way up the Eiger by this time."

"I have no intention of looking for Kearney, father!" said the girl, with an accent somewhat superfluously determined for the occasion.

"Well," said the Governor slowly, "perhaps you are right. I don't myself think that the young man needs encouragement — that is, on ordinary office days. But after all, isn't this a sort of Glorious Fourth? And when a youth has been carrying 'mid snow and ice the banner with the strange device, and shouting 'Excelsior' all the morning till he is crow-hoarse, you might at least take one peep at him just to show interest. Excelsioring without a gallery is not exactly Kearney's pet form of wickedness!"

The girl did not reply, but stood gazing abstractedly up at the vast mountain wall which rose abruptly out of the desolate Valley of Death beneath them, into which the avalanches spouted and roared every few minutes, being loosened and dispatched almost as regularly as trucks from a mine by the rays of the morning sun.

The three were still standing about the white-spread table when Marcus heard his friend's step behind him, and turned round to greet Keith Harford, and, if possible, to include him in the conversation. As he did so the girl bowed slightly and continued on her way to the inn. But as she went she turned her regard full upon the grave face and erect figure of Keith Harford, sometime tutor and now travelling companion to Marcus Hardy. Their eyes met and dwelt a moment

Ione March

each on the other, the girl's inquiringly, the man's abstractedly. The moment passed, fleeting as the waft of delicate air which accompanied Ione March's passage, apparently as like those before it and behind as any telegraph pole which scuds past a lightning express. But looked back upon, the momentary eye-blink now seems pregnant with fate and potent for the Eternities.

"A pretty American! Clearly we must get out of this or Marcus will be falling in love again!" That was all Harford's contemporary thought.

"He walks well and has nice eyes—but he does n't like me. I wonder why!" mused Ione March in the instinctive manner of pretty women as she went towards the house.

Governor March was not only a very agreeable but a very handsome man, and as he turned again towards the young Englishmen his look was full of kindly dignity and encouragement.

"This is my friend—and former bear-leader, Mr. Keith Harford," said Marcus, smiling, as Harford came up, "and the best fellow in the world, if he does write books which publishers won't buy!"

"Small blame to them," said Harford with a little laugh; "the publishers would publish my books quickly enough if the public would only read them. They can't make bricks without straw any more than other people!"

"Are your literary productions published in the United States, sir?" asked the Governor, after he and Harford had lifted their hats slightly but courteously to each other.

Keith Harford shook his head sadly, and with a kind of characteristic drolling languor in his voice, replied, "I fear, sir, my friend gives you a wrong impression. I have hardly written anything for publication. It is

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The Woman of Fortune

true, however, that I earn a few coppers by contributing to the monthly magazines and the weekly press."

"Ah," cried the other gratefully, at last striking a subject to which he could do justice, "you should come to our country, where the Press is a mighty power—one greater than President and Congress put together. You would find ample scope for your talent there."

"I fear, sir," Keith Harford answered, "that the Press of your country would have none of me. I am not a shining success even here, where methods are old-fashioned and slow. I have little ambition, and no confidence in myself. I have never made much of anything in this world, not even of my pupil here—to whom, for instance, I endeavoured to convey some skill in the use of the English language, but, as you see, wholly without success."

"You did, old boy," cried Marcus joyously, "you stuffed me no end with roots and derivations. But, praise the pigs, I could always go right outside and forget them like Billy-o!"

"And he calls that jargon English," smiled Keith Harford as he referred the matter to the Governor.

"No, sir," said Mr. March, whose thoughts refused any but the practical groove, "and you never will succeed if, as you say, you have no confidence in yourself. Allow me to tell you that such humility shows the poorest kind of judgment, sir. There now is John Cyrus Judd, the father of young Kearney Judd, to whom my daughter is engaged to be married—John Cyrus Judd, sir, is the most successful operator in bread stuffs and general finance our country has ever seen. You remember the wheat corner in '70, the year of the war and of the failure of the Russian crops? Well, sir, John Cyrus Judd cleared over ten millions of dollars in one year. But he did n't do it by going about telling

Ione March

every one that he was entirely unacquainted with the difference between a bean and a pea. No, sir; he was supposed to know everything. He did know most things, and what he did n't know he took the credit for knowing. And so John Cyrus scooped the land of promise from Dan even to Beersheba."

Keith Harford stood looking silently at the smooth round head of the Monk, who wore his cowl of snow drawn well down about his ears, and humped his shoulders a trifle as if the morning air bit shrewdly up there. The Governor followed the direction of the young man's eyes.

"Mr. Kearney Judd is making the ascent of the Eiger to-day," said he, "and his sisters have gone up the hill behind the hotel to look for him through an Alvan Clark telescope!"

"Is Mr. Kearney Judd the, ah — the gentleman in light gaiters and straight eyebrows who was here last night with his guides, Christian Schlegel and Peter Jossi?" queried Marcus with a sudden access of interest.

Governor March nodded humorously.

"I guess you have located my friend pretty descriptively, sir, though he had more clothing on than you say when last heard from. But now I will leave you to your breakfast, and see if I can find my daughter."

The young men followed the erect and handsome figure of the famous war Governor with their eyes till he passed round the corner of the inn.

"What a beastly shame!" cried Marcus, kicking up the turf discontentedly. "That toad engaged to a girl like this! Why, I listened to him bullying his guides till for two pins I'd have knocked his bally head off. I wish now I had!" he added regretfully.

But Keith Harford was not paying the slightest at-

The Woman of Fortune

tention to this enunciation of the sorrows of Marcus. His eyes were again fixed dreamily and sadly upon the mighty toothed pyramid of the Eiger.

Observing his abstraction Hardy put his palms to his own mouth and produced a weird imitation of the native *jodel* almost at Harford's ear.

"What's the matter now, you howling dervish?" cried his friend, startled, turning upon him indignantly.

"Well," said Marcus hotly, "if I see a man a thousand and one miles from his breakfast, I'm going to call him back to this world if I ruin my voice in doing it. I suppose you are such a hideous purblind old mole that you don't realise that you've just seen one of the prettiest girls in the four continents, and that she's engaged to a beast in spats — yes, in spats and brown knickers, with a voice like an infernal peacock squalling on a roof."

"Do you want any breakfast?" said Keith Harford with a great calm.

CHAPTER III

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF SHORT ENGAGEMENTS

IT was true. Ione March was engaged to "the beast in spats," as Marcus had so brusquely and uneuphoniously designated Mr. Judd, Jr. How it had come about Ione herself could hardly have told. Almost from childhood she had spent most of her life abroad; hence her ideas upon marriage were essentially different from those of the majority of her countrywomen. Her father had devoted the whole of his ample leisure to her service and pleasuring, ever since she left the Convent of the Angelical Sisters at St. Germain, in which (after her mother's early death) she had been educated. Her name was properly Hermione, but the childish contraction had been retained, probably because it had accorded best with her free and unspoiled nature.

Indeed Ione March had been made much of ever since she could remember. As an American baby of course her mother spoiled her. Her father and numerous bachelor uncles afforded her a choice of knees to ride upon and backs to bestride. Even in the staid and cloistered precincts of the Angelical Sisters a charmingly frank smile and a ringing voice have their privileges, especially when backed by undoubted wealth and the willingness to part with it. So it came about that from the Lady Superior to the lay sweeper in coarse linen and blue flannel, every inmate of the great white barracks petted and spoiled the daughter of the American millionaire. Her pocket-money expressed in francs was the subject of much hand-clasping and eye-upcasting between the Mother Superior and the visiting Father Confessor. It

Short Engagements

would be disaster intolerable if such means could not be sanctified to the service of Holy Church.

But all this had done Ione no harm. And now, after she had wandered Europe for four years with her father, going whither she would and moving on when the whim took her, the girl remained still frank, thoughtless, careless, thoroughly unspoilt — taking it for granted that all was well and that every one was happy in her presence. But it chanced that Governor March had been compelled, at an unfortunate time of the year, in the depths of a boisterous and stormy winter, to undertake suddenly a business journey to New York, in order to safeguard certain important interests which were threatened by the grasping and omnivorous talons of a gigantic trust. At this time the Judd family — the European representatives of John Cyrus Judd, “the second richest man, sir, in the world” — was wintering at Florence, with some subsequent idea of going further south when, along with the lengthening days, there should arrive even to mid-Italy the strengthening cold of early spring.

It came about in this way that Ione March, being aged twenty years, and the greater part of twenty-one, had been committed to the care of Mrs. John Cyrus Judd, and (generally) admitted to the privileges appertaining to the social branch of that great connection, as well as to the companionship of her daughters Astoria and Idalia.

For some months Ione found it very pleasant to “go around” with these two gay maidens and their complaisant comfortable mother, a lady from the Middle States — who, in the midst of such riches as the world had never seen, maintained her calm level-headed standard of housewifery and her faculty of considering the pennies, the while her lord, in the arid defiles of Wall Street, looked

Ione March

as sharply after the pounds, reckoning these latter, however, usually in terms of millions of dollars.

Nor did the situation become less pleasant for Ione when Kearney Judd arrived from America, having had the beauty, wit, and general eligibility of Ione March dinned into him by his sister Astoria in that cheerful daily cypher-gossip which brother and sister kept up by means of the private cable owned by the Judd combination. So soon as Kearney began to act as convoy and to do general courier duty for the ladies, it was found possible to dispense with the professional services of Signior Antonio Cæsari di Milano. So that the latter bland gentleman was no longer able to add fifty per cent. to all reckonings and shop accounts, and on most occasions to set aside the best room in every hotel for himself.

When Ione's father came over on the first boat by which it was considered safe for him to leave the shores of the Republic, he brought as his companion — who but John Cyrus Judd the Great and Only, Pontifex Maximus of all them that deal in scrip and share. For that potentate had come to the rescue of the endangered interests of Governor March at a most critical moment, and, by throwing his mighty combination into the scale, had easily established the former on a pedestal more dignified and commanding than ever.

It happened that on the night when John Cyrus Judd and Governor March arrived at Lugano there had been a thunderstorm on the lake, during which Mr. Kearney Judd had approved his knightly courtesy, at once by the gallantry of his oarsmanship and yet more by chivalrously casting about the shoulders of Ione the college jacket which had protected her from the sudden downpour. The gallant squire of dames accompanied Ione back to the hotel in dripping flannels, and instinctively seeing his

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Short Engagements

advantage, he promptly developed a chill and a yet more serious and opportune fever.

Ione was at once grateful and full of remorse. For it had been in spite of the repeated warnings of her companion that they had rowed so far out upon the lake.

Nay, even after the first mutterings of the storm had changed to a nearer continuous roll, she had perversely insisted upon proceeding farther from the shore, in order that she might watch the vivid pyrotechnic display over the lake and distant mountains—palest electric blue, brilliant white scribbled as with diamond point across the sky, broad green emerald illumination awash between the mountains, all sharply riven ever and anon by the fiery serpent's tooth of the descending levin bolt. The terror of the storm seemed to increase the young man's claims upon Ione's gratitude, and it needed but her father's urgent entreaties, still fresh from his debt of gratitude to the great Cyrus, the eager and affectionate solicitations of her friends Astoria and Idalia, her own utter indifference, her continental and conventual notions of marriage, and (last and least) the confidential twilight quiet of the garden of the Hotel du Parc where the band played late among the fireflies, for Ione March to awake one morning and remember with dismay that she had definitely affianced herself to Kearney Judd.

Words are weak to express her father's pleasure, and the girl found her reward in that. Though by no means mercenary, this union with the blood royal—as it were—of American finance would put all his future operations on a different basis. It was even an additional anchor out to windward that Kearney's intention should be known. And though Governor March was too kind and too American a father either to bid or to forbid any reasonable banns which Ione might have desired to publish, yet when the culmination came by her own initiative

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Ione March

Governor March kissed his daughter with the feeling that life held more of solid satisfaction than it had ever done before.

In fact every one was pleased, so much so that even Ione felt a certain glow of self-sacrificing satisfaction. But the Judd girls were especially jubilant and spent so much time with Ione that Idalia said, "You would think that it was to us you were engaged! But it serves you right for not having a couple of nice brothers to take such detrimentals off your hands."

But whenever Ione was left alone she had no illusions. She liked Kearney Judd well enough. He was polite, presentable, of more than passable exterior, and for the present convenient. That was all.

"It is nice to have a man round to fetch and carry!" she said to herself, as if that settled the matter.

Kearney played his cards well. He never intruded, and was yet always ready to do as she told him, whether it might be to take himself off to the Casino when she and Idalia desired to curl themselves up in hammocks and read novels all the hot afternoon, or to remain behind in the hotel dining-room with his cigar and keep Governor March company, while the girls in wet clacking waterproofs and knitted Tam-o'-Shanters ventured forth, like three wind-blown graces, along the lake-shore in the intervals of the sudden dashing thunder-showers.

"Poor Kearney does not seem to have many privileges, does he?" said Idalia to Ione, a little wistfully, after that young gentleman's *fiancée* had held out her hand to him with her usual careless grace that he might say "Good-night" over it.

"Why, what privileges ought Kearney to possess that he has not got?" inquired Ione over her shoulder. She was usually a step or two in front as the three walked together.

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"Well, Ione March," said Idalia, "you may call yourself an American girl if you like, but it is easy to see that you have spent the bulk of your time considerably east of Sandy Hook. Now, what would you do if Kearney were to arrive in your father's salon at the hour of afternoon tea?"

"Why," said Ione, "that's easy as falling off a log. I should get him a nice cup of tea at once—that is, as soon as ever the horrid kettle in the tea-basket could be induced to boil."

"Oh yes," scoffed Idalia, "and very likely you would tell the waiter who showed him up that Mr. Kearney wanted to see Governor March, and to find him if he were in his room or anywhere about!"

"Well," said Ione, looking tranquilly at the bright and piquant face of the brunette, "and suppose I did—what would you do, if you were engaged to Kearney?"

"Hum," said Idalia, turning up her pretty nose; "first off, I should n't be engaged to Kearney Judd."

"Idalia!" cried her sister in a horrified tone, "pray do think what you are saying."

For Astoria had sounder views of life and a somewhat less reckless way of expressing them than her irresponsible sister and junior.

"I don't care, 'Storia," answered Idalia, nodding her head determinedly, "you can tell Kearney if you like. I would n't be engaged to him—not for three acres of a diamond field. Kearney is too cynical for me. He simply dare n't be nice. It is n't good form in his set. You can't be good and own a racing yacht, you know. They'd turn you out of the club. And then the worst of it is that poor Kearney has n't got sand enough to be out-and-out bad—picturesquely bad, you know—like Bret Harte's people, or the Silver King, or a wicked *London Journal* baronet. So poor dear Kearney has just

Ione March

to be content to let things drift, and be as bad as he can all his life!"

"Idalia Judd!" cried her sister again, "you know you never were fair to Kearney. He is a good fellow at bottom, and Ione can do anything she likes with him. Why, he worships——"

"The ground I tread on—so he said," cried Ione, catching the contagion of Idalia's levity, "and I told him that in that case some very nasty sticky Swiss mud was the god of his idolatry. But, Idalia, tell me all about being engaged."

"Why," said Idalia, pouting, "I thought you were clever, Ione; but in some things you are no wiser than a New Jersey coot."

She gave Ione's arm a little tight clutch as they passed a herd of goats shouldering and pushing to get near a goatherd who was feeding them with large crystals of rough salt. Then she continued in a musing reminiscent tone, "I remember when I was engaged to Ralph Harden."

"Idalia!" cried her sister again in a yet more shocked voice; "do, pray, consider what you are saying. You never *were* engaged to Ralph Harden!"

"It was a pretty good imitation then," retorted Idalia irrepressibly. "It went all right. I was satisfied."

"What will Ione think?" continued Astoria with some show of asperity.

"Why, what should she think?" retorted Idalia promptly. "Except that I had a very good time—which I had, and Ralph too. Yes, 'Storie; don't you be sorry for him one little bit. He does n't need it. He enjoyed himself right along, and wished for more. I tell you that right now. Why, for six months Ralph Harden could n't call his soul his own, when I was engaged to him. Let us see—that was three years

Short Engagements

ago. I've been engaged two — no, three times since that!"

"And did your father approve of your breaking off your engagement?" queried convent-bred Ione, to whom a betrothal was a matter scarcely less solemn than a marriage.

"Approve of my breaking my engagement with Ralph?" said Idalia, with a little warbling trill of gay laughter. "Well, I don't think we troubled my father even with the knowledge that we were engaged! Did we, Astoria? It just did n't occur to us. What had Ralph and poor me to do with the Illinois Central or the latest straddle in wheat? Oh, no, Ione, it was n't pappa that burst the Harden-Judd combination. It was Billy Pitt that came along — no, I'm forgetting, he came after. It was Harvard Bobbie, such a nice boy I used to ride with — a dear boy. He used to hold my hand by the hour. Yes, he did. But then he held it so nicely, not a bit like Ralph Harden. I always used to have to take off all my rings before I could let Ralph Harden come near me."

"Idalia!" exclaimed her sister, apparently aghast. "If you don't stop, I'll go right home to mother."

"Oh, do hush, Astoria. I declare you are like the minute gun at sea, with your 'Idalia!' every half-dozen words, as if the sky were going to fall, just because I am trying all I can to give Ione some good pointers on the art of being engaged."

"Idalia Judd!" said Ione, with a dash of sternness in her voice, "how often *have* you been engaged?"

That too attractive young woman gave an impulsive little skip, like a sportive and innocent lamb in that first season when it goes so well with green peas, "How can you expect me to remember, if you will swing your long legs at such a rate over the ground? Ask me something easier, till I get my breath. Now, that's better. Let

Ione March

me see! There was Billy Pitt, and Sandy Mac — what was his funny Scotch name? But he was so good-looking for all that. Then after that came Jimmy Day, Oliver Haig, Harry Priestly, and that nice curly-headed boy at Newport — what did he call himself, Frank something, was n't it, Astoria? Or perhaps Fred. It began with F anyway. Then there were half a dozen Transatlantic mixed biscuits — three or four of them, all different colours — two 'Cities of Paris,' one 'Germanic,' one 'Pacific,' several 'Arizonas,' and oh, such a lot of Cunarders, all ending in 'A'!"

Ione looked at her friend in surprise.

"Yes, indeed; and it was rather like being Cunarders ourselves, Idalia and Astoria, see? Only Astoria is n't half so fast, and I've lost ever so many passengers!"

"You don't mean that you were engaged to the seven seas and the Continent of Europe with several of the Pacific States thrown in for the honour of the flag?" Ione cried, gazing at her friend in surprised horror.

"Well, you see, it was this way," explained Idalia: "'Storia and I cross the pond pretty often. I always go down early to get my cabin all right, tip the stewards, and — well, see the passengers come on board. Then 'Storia and I pick out the best-looking man as he comes up the side and toss for him! The loser to have second choice."

"I never did anything of the sort," protested Astoria, "and I think you are simply horrid, Idalia Judd!"

"All right, 'Storie," said Idalia calmly, "I was only giving you a look in. Well then, I pick out the nicest-looking man, tall, generally dark, with a moustache or well-cut beard. He must have something about him, a sort of air as if he were kind of sorry over things and generally low in his mind — as if he didn't care whether he got any breakfast or not."

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"Seasick?" suggested Ione, over her shoulder.

"No indeed, this is just when they are coming on board. Oh, no," continued Idalia, pausing to make things clear, "that's just the point. He must n't get seasick. If he does, he goes on the retired list at once, without a pension too. He must be able to sit in boats and read to me all the time, and carry deck-chairs, and know all about rigging up tarpaulins and things to keep the wind off me. Then, you know, after our first moonlight walk, looking across the weird ocean arm in arm, Astoria and I start in to comfort him and take that sad distressful Silver State look out of his eyes." On this occasion Astoria disdained any disclaimer.

"But the names 'Arizona,' 'Germanic,' and so on, what do they mean?" said Ione, who was curious.

"Why," said Idalia airily, "you see we generally cross by the Cunard, and it sounds silly to call men by the names of ships ending in IA, so we say 'Campania Brown,' 'Arizona Green,' but the silliest of all was the 'Nebraska Salmon'!"

"Why, I declare it's like getting engaged on a train and breaking it off when you come to the terminus!" said Ione, smiling in spite of herself.

"Oh, but I've tried that too," cried Idalia eagerly; "and do you know, it's rather nice, though hurried in parts, and you have to cut a good deal of the best dialogue. Yes, siree; you have got to make them go the pace. It was with a man named Kenneth Early that I tried it first, when father and I were going straight across lots to San Francisco without stopping. All through the Prairie States he told me how he loved me. And you just believe, it passed the time; you can't think. But alas! love's sleepers are no smoother than elsewhere on the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul's! We quarrelled on the platform at Salt Lake, all because

Ione March

he would go mousing after a pretty little Mormoness, pretending all the while he was only posting a letter! Now unfaithfulness is the one thing I can't stand, and I told him so.

"I did not ask you to love me long, Kenneth," I said to him, "only to attend strictly to business while you were about it."

"However, he was so heartbroken that I forgave him just before we got to Digger City, and at Sacramento I said I'd be his new-found sister. But he said he was n't annexing any more sisters, and so we parted for ever!"

And as she came to this most pathetic climax, the evil witch Idalia pretended to dry her eyes one after the other with the corner of a dainty lace handkerchief.

"I have never been quite the same since!" she added, looking up with a touchingly innocent expression in her eyes.

CHAPTER IV

THE SUBJUGATION OF THE ALPS

MR. KEARNEY JUDD did not do things by halves. So much he had inherited from the king of deals and corners who owned him as a son. His engagement to Ione March was an episode among episodes; but notwithstanding, he was sufficiently in love to be aware of the sensation Governor March's beautiful daughter would make in New York. Besides, the young man carried about with him the conviction whenever he talked to Ione that he was somehow in the presence of an incalculable force, and moreover, that this was a girl the possession of whom could not by any stretch of imagination be expressed in terms of millions of dollars.

"I tell you what, 'Storia," he said to his favourite sister one day before the tentative acceptance of his homage by Ione; "if she cared about me at all, she's the very girl to take me without a cent. But if I had the round world, with the moon thrown in, she'd give me the back of her hand if she did not cotton to me!"

But Kearney Judd's falling in love was strictly an accident. Primarily he had come to Europe in order to add the peaks of the Alps to the other scalps on his lodge-pole. It was the height of the athletic and adventurous era. Every young man of the first importance must now eschew culture and the elevation of the Bowery. While his sisters attended to such things, it

Ione March

was his duty to qualify as a first-class cowboy, to climb Cotopaxi, to kill twenty tigers, to cross Gobi or Shamo on a sledge drawn by yaks, or in some way or other to disprove his brain by proving his muscles.

Such were the times of derring-do which stood on tip-toe at the moment of Kearney Judd's coming to Europe in pursuit of athletic distinction of some sort. America itself was bald as an egg-shell. The last lock of its scalp had been severed. The final grizzly had yielded to the newest express rifle. The ultimate buffalo was rounded up in a reservation in Central Park, and guarded by blue-coated braves armed with the helmets and bludgeons of office, and speaking the English language with a Milesian accent. The last yacht, which had set out to discover the North Pole, had been found nipped by the ice. The last survivors had, with much good feeling, eaten each other — all except the boatswain, who for fifty years had subsisted chiefly on a diet of tobacco, and the cook, who had given his professional services on condition that he was placed strictly *hors concours*. The Purple East was far away, and the unspeakable Turk unspeakably dangerous. A crusade against Tammany was not in Kearney's line. There remained therefore nothing better or safer than Switzerland. So Kearney, having bought Mr. Conway's admirable set of guides to the High Alps, and acquired for much moneys (at Brentano's) the three volumes of "Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers," came over by the first Cunarder, firmly resolved to string the entire Oberland, together with the Pennine and Austrian chains, to his lodge-pole, and furthermore to complete the job within the space of one brief Alpine season.

Now it was Mr. Kearney Judd's boast that he and he only understood how to go about a thing — whether it were the making of love or climbing of a triply asterisked

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mountain.¹ And certainly he did not waste time. Sternly refusing alike the peculiar delights of London and the more esoteric refinements of the Parisian Elysée (Montmartre) — to which as the son of a distinguished American citizen (so he told his father), he easily obtained the right of *entrée* — Kearney travelled directly from Liverpool to Lugano, and then by more devious paths from Lugano to Grindelwald, where after a week at the Hostel of the Bear, he proceeded to engage his guides. He found that many of the best of these had been already verbally engaged for certain limited periods by former employers. These were men, for the most part Englishmen, who had cast longing eyes at certain new and impossible passes, or upon new "faces" the victory over which appeared as promising to the lay eye as the task of climbing the Monument upon one's hands and knees.

But Mr. Kearney Judd knew the power of gold and believed that, tempted by the "Sufficient Consideration," every man has his price. Accordingly he lavished broadcast such glittering promises that two of the best guides in the Oberland (which is the same thing as saying in the world) became bound to him by a stringent written contract for a period of four months, and were engaged to lead their master to the summits of an elaborate schedule of peaks — the conquest of which in one season, duly certified by the authorities in each district and reported in the Metropolitan Sunday papers over the paternal cable, would be fitted to shake with envy and hatred the soul of every "boy" left stranded on the bleak shores of little old New York.

So that Kearney found himself early in the year in

¹ Mr. Baedeker, of Leipsic, the true potentate of travel, considers Mont Blanc worthy of being distinguished by his highest mark of admiration, which consists of three asterisks.

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possession of the highly paid services of High-Mountain Guides Peter Jossi and Christian Schlegel, to the intense disappointment of a briefless London barrister and a climbing Scotch minister of limited means — who in the most unchristian fashion wished the wholesale American enterprise all manner of evil, and expressed vigorously the sentiments of their hearts in daily letters to one another.

And for a day, or rather for an hour, after completing his bargain, Kearney was happy. He loved the importance of possession, the halo which everywhere surrounds proximate and wholesale conquest. The regular climbers had not yet arrived at Grindelwald, and the village street from the Eagle to the Bear was all his own. Every unplaced guide, every porter emulous of rising from the pack-wallet to the rope and ice-axe, eagerly desired employment in this most luxuriously equipped and comprehensively planned expedition.

The leader, attired in the most complete and uncompromising of climbing gear, held daily public conference with his lieutenants, Peter Jossi and Christian Schlegel. Kearney Judd had made no mistake. Both men were superlative at their business, and trustworthy to the death — so long as they were confined to the staple beverage of the mountains — that which sparkles in the rainbows of the torrents and drives the swirling *moulins* of the glaciers.

But as soon as Kearney realised that the ascent of even a second-class peak involved sacrifices and discomforts which he had not contemplated, and especially when he discovered that the aspect of a glacier was much less prepossessing when its irregularities were underfoot and its difficulties overhead, than when pounded into lumps and floating in a tall glass of whisky and soda, he began (like the monkey discovered talking, and

The Subjugation of the Alps

set to earn his living) to turn over alternatives in his mind.

It was all very well to carry back certificates of the ascent of great peaks, and to be able to roll off the sonorous names — Matterhorn, Wetterhorn, Dom, Monte Viso, Lyskam, and that utmost Adamello which looks upon Venice. It would doubtless be especially pleasant at Delmonico's to patronise Mont Blanc — to nickname it "The Duffer's Walk." Better still, he would be able to approve reservedly of the Matterhorn — especially on the Italian side, "where there are no chains, and the climbing shows the stuff a man is made of, don't you know."

But even the first few trial climbs upon the Over-Ice Sea assured Mr. Kearney that there were more things in that white upper world of snow and rock scarp than had been dreamed of in his philosophy.

For instance, when a piece of slate, spinning upon its axis, whizzed down the cliffs of the Mettenberg at rather more than the speed of a rifle bullet, and neatly clipped a piece of skin the size of a shilling from his ear, the young man began to experience doubts whether Alpine mountaineering was indeed a sport for which he had been fitted by nature.

Anon, early on a succeeding morning, skirting the butt end of a glacier — cross, sleepy, following his guide automatically step by step, and thinking how many different kinds of fool he was for coming to such a cold, miserable, get-up-in-the-middle-of-the-night sort of a country, Kearney was suddenly aroused by certain sharp crackling sounds above his head, and immediately found himself almost jerked off his feet by the sudden spurt forward made by Peter and Christian. Then scarcely had they gotten from underneath that threatening glacier butt, when with an astounding bewilderment of noise the whole pinnacled end of castellated blueness nodded,

Ione March

wavered, and finally crashed downward, sweeping the path by which they had just come with the besom of destruction, as the ice avalanche went thundering and roaring into the valley a thousand feet below. When the first red level rays of the sun, which had been sapping the upper glacier for some time, and whose warmth had assisted its abrupt parturition, struck Kearney Judd, Alpine adventurer, it was a very pale and pasty countenance which that distinguished Herr presented to the curious eyes of his guides.

Whereupon with a sudden gravity Christian looked at Peter, and Peter as soberly looked at Christian. But what they meant to convey to each other remains a secret to this day.

However, very soon a great victory smiled upon the banners of Judd. By dint of exertions almost superhuman big blonde Christian and little brown Peter dragged their Herr up the snows of the Jungfrau, and by infinite precaution and the cutting of steps like those which approach a State capitol, enabled him successfully to surmount the last dangerous ice slopes.

Upon his return to what little Peter called poetically "the kind-hearted valleys" ("my wife, Herr, she loves not the mountains; she loves instead the kind-hearted valleys"), for the first twelve hours the hero resolved never again to trust himself out of sound of cow-bell. But he was induced to change his mind as the pride of his conquest began to wash away the memories of the passage perilous, and especially when, by means of the paternal cable, some part of the press of his native city was induced to sing the ancient song of "Arms and the Män" in admiration of "the unexampled feat performed so early in the climbing season by the son of one so notable in our highest money circles as John Cyrus Judd."

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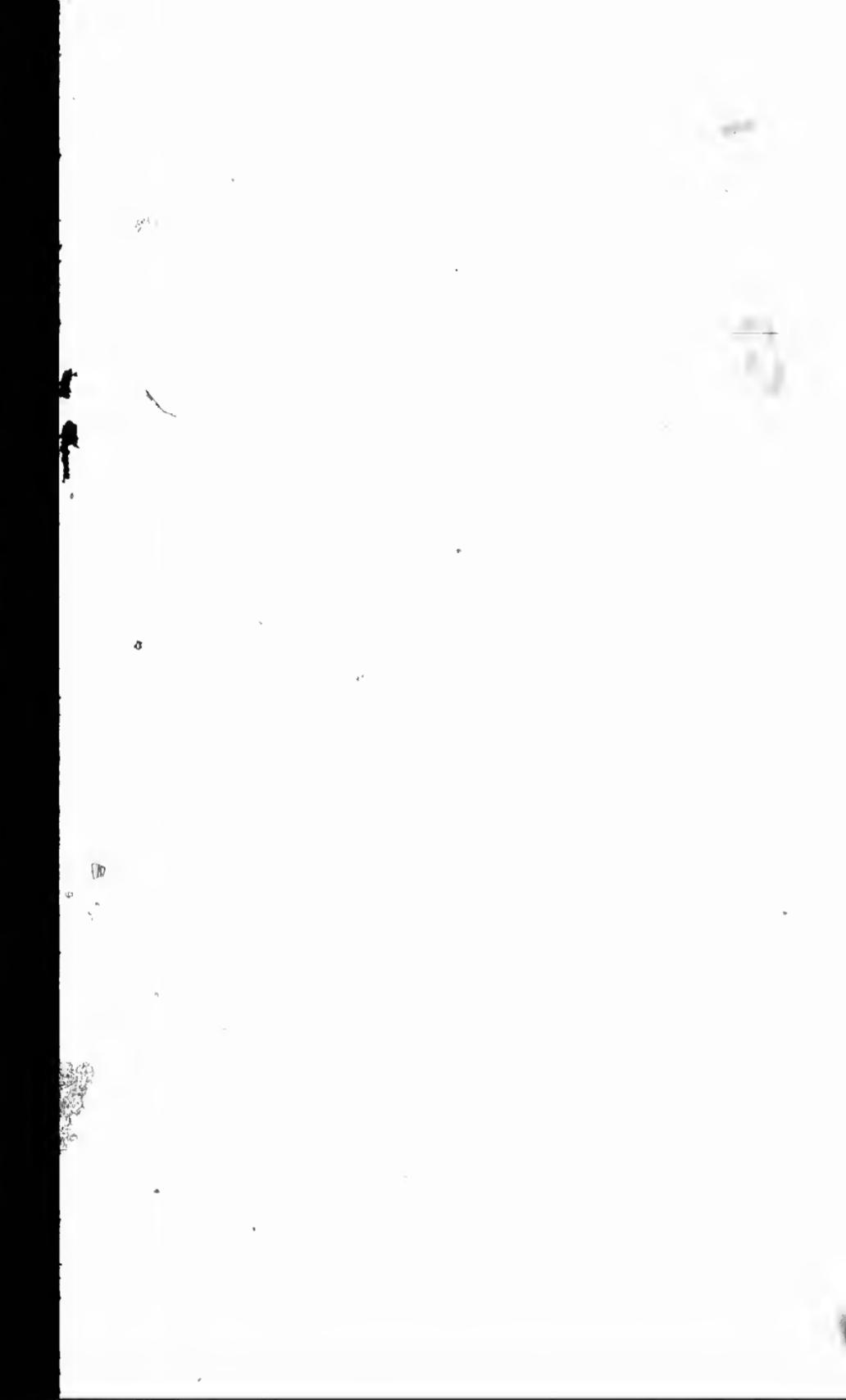
"This," said one prominent organ, in whose finances the Combination had unobtrusively acquired a controlling interest, "proves incontestably that the pluck and endurance which have so long ruled Wall Street are hereditary in the second generation, and that even the very snowy thrones of the gods of silence must yield to the plucky scion of the Judd-Peters Combination."

"That 'll fetch 'em," said Charlton Milholland contentedly, as he leaned back and contemplated this astonishing sentence with his head to the side as if he had reason to be proud of it; "it would be too strong for any human being except old Cyrus or his amiable son. But to them it will be balm in Gilead, and also mint julep among the flesh-pots of Egypt!"

That evening Milholland, most genial and good-natured of foreign editors, carried the matter to the N. Y. Press Club, where the turn of his phrases was highly appreciated. But before he left the *Times-Herald* building he saw that the full extract was cabled to Europe, where it had its due effect in inducing Mr. Kearney Judd to continue his series of triumphal marches over the effete and prostrate mountain ranges of Europe.

So on the morrow, Charlton Milholland (who at the time was sitting up in bed and casting an eye of tolerant humour over his own leaderette) had fixed Kearney's determination to attempt from the south the ascent of the noble toothed wedge of the Eiger—which is at once the Matterhorn and the Dent Blanche of the Oberland mountains.

Little brown Peter and big blonde Christian of the bowed shoulders smiled when they heard of the project and the name of the mountain. Little Peter, who was a wit, pretended to pull up his sleeves, and made the gesture of hauling a bucket up a well. But both rose





Ione March

to their feet with a sudden unanimous start upon learning that the assault was to be delivered by the south face, that which looks out towards the Wengern Alp and the hostelry of Johann Jossi. Little Peter even attempted a remonstrance, but he was cut short by the stern ultimatum of the son of the Napoleon of Finance.

"Can the thing be done?" asked Kearney the Dictator.

"Certainly it can be done, my Herr," began Peter, "but ——" And he paused, not daring to add aloud the remainder of his thought—"but you are not the man to do it!"

"Then I will do it!" said Kearney Judd, in prompt defiance of Peter's unspoken condemnation.

For remembering the storm on the lake of Lugano, he wisely calculated that the object lesson of his danger and success would do more to soften the stony heart of Ione March than the gift of all the diamonds of the Cape.

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CHAPTER V

NEMESIS STALKS

MARCUS HARDY, genial giant, and for the time being gentleman-at-large, sprawled in a cheap deck-chair with a cushion at the back of his head and a telescope glued to his eye, in front of the "Wengernhof held by Johann Jossi." He was giving vent to sundry explosive little snorts which betokened a high degree of mental excitement.

"Well, — I say — I'm dashed if ever — no, I never, in all my life!" These incomplete ejaculations were accompanied and unified by a soft whistling hiss between the teeth, which intensified or softened as events more or less interesting passed before the watcher's eyes upon the steep mountain slopes opposite him.

Keith Harford had finished breakfast, and was meditatively gazing at the distant mountains beyond Lauterbrunnen, under the brim of his white wide-awake, which he wore pulled so low over his brows that his tilted cigarette almost touched the brim as he smoked and dreamed in the soft warmth and breathing hush of the morning air.

It might have been supposed that Harford would have been affected by the excitement of his friend. But the fact that he did not even notice his extravagant exclamations of interest, tells much as to the relations of this curiously assorted pair. Keith had long given up paying the slightest attention to the fervent but passing enthusiasms of Marcus. Nor did Marcus expect him to do so. For that genial giant had lived, moved, and had his being

Ione March

in a constant state of high-pressure ebullition during all the years his tutor had known him. Life was full of interest, and every fresh circumstance a perpetual surprise to Marcus Hardy. Whereas in Keith Harford's opinion the period of the Delight of the Eye and the Pride of Life had long passed for him — if indeed it could ever have been said to exist. He therefore minded his junior's brusque exclamations no more than the interruptions of a dog who barks in his sleep, hunting alone in a paradise of rabbits where are neither fences nor rabbit-holes.

But the gasps and snorts of the gazer became rapidly louder and more furious, till at last he sprang to his feet with a jubilant shout.

"I say, Harford," he cried, "do come here and look at this. It's the best game going. Come quick!"

Harford turned a tolerant eye upon his friend, contemplating him much as one may follow the antics of a puppy, in the absence of anything better to do.

"Well, what is it this time?" he said listlessly from underneath his hat brim, without moving; "it can't be another pretty girl over there on the Eiger, surely?"

"Pretty girl be hanged!" cried Marcus ungallantly. "I tell you it's the Beast in Spats! He's stuck up there like a fly on a gumpaper! And I just bet a fiver he is wishing that he never had the eternal cheek to spar up to the south front of the Eiger!"

Keith rose and lounged carelessly towards the telescope. His mercurial friend was already back adjusting it to be ready for his inspection.

"I've got him again — no — yes, there he is! By hokey! Hanged if they ain't haulin' him up by the slack of the rope like a blooming bag of potatoes. You never saw such a degrading spectacle!"

Taking the cigarette between his fingers, Harford bent

Nemesis Stalks

and looked through the long tube of shining yellow brass which Marcus Hardy had pointed so carefully. He looked into the centre of the gloomy cleft which runs diagonally across the mountain, and, as it were, outlines roughly the basement storey of the Eiger pyramid.

He looked through a rushing, rippled, aerial river at the opposite side of the mountain. The Eiger, with all its rippled snows, storm-tossed crests, gashed crevasses, and terminal moraines, appeared exactly as if it had been seen through running water of a clear brown colour. This airy was the moisture-bearing Thal wind pouring through the valley towards Grindelwald.

Quite clearly, though with a curious blurring of their outlines, Harford saw three men struggling with the sternest realities of the mighty obelisk of rock. Or, rather, two of them were struggling with a third whose incapacities constituted the real difficulty of the ascent. Keith Harford, who knew with more or less intimacy every guide in the Oberland, was at once able to distinguish the vast tawny form of Christian Schlegel, who, with his feet braced against a rock, was straining with all his might to pull the reluctant body of his "Herr" up the steep slopes of the Eiger.

"They will never get him to the top that way!" cried Harford, interested in spite of himself. "It is already past nine, and at the worst they should have been within a thousand feet of the top by this time!"

"Ah," cried Marcus, who in the interval had run into the hotel and possessed himself of another and smaller glass in order not to miss a particle of the fun, "there's better than that to come. You hold on, my boy, till he goes whack on his face again. That's plummy, if you like!"

And so without moving from their places the two men watched the trio plastered like flies on the steep

Ione March

screes and concave snow-slides of the south face of the Eiger.

Presently they saw the traveller fall over exhausted on the snow, lying inert and prone on his face even as Marcus had prophesied.

"That 's about enough for him. He 's at his prayers now, I guess!" cried Hardy, slapping his knee in ecstasy. "I don't think Spats will take any more Matterhorns in his — this season, at least!"

But presently the two guides were again at the ropes, both this time standing high above the intrepid climber. With their feet firmly braced in crevices, and putting forth all their strength, they hauled their charge up the mountain from six to ten feet at a pull, their bent and straining backs telling of the violence of their exertions.

"That 's what I should call an assisted passage," said Keith Harford quietly.

"I'll wager that fellow has a groove round his waist like the middle of an hourglass for a month after this!" cried Marcus; and forthwith, as his manner was, he shouted with explosive laughter at his own humour.

Both the young men were so eagerly watching the comedy being enacted upon the opposing mountain, that they did not observe a tall, slender girl who had paused behind them, her summer dress of tweed blown becomingly back by the wind. She heard their laughter, or rather that of Marcus, which indeed might very well have silenced the noise of the avalanches round all the circle of the hills. Mostly she kept looking straight before her, but once she allowed her regard to fall upon the unconscious pair with an expression in which a certain personal feeling mingled with a prevailing disdain. But all unconscious the eye of the giant was glued to his telescope. He leaned back in his canvas chair in order more unrestrainedly to enjoy the scene.

Nemesis Stalks

His disengaged hand slapped his thigh in ever-heightening ecstasy.

"I declare the beggar is hanging on to the Eiger as if it were the mane of a kicking horse. It looks as if he were afraid the mountain would 'buck,' and pitch him into the valley."

Ione March stood a moment quite still, her hand held level and motionless above her brow, and her light wind-blown hair wavering in curls and wisps about her shapely head. Her eyes fell upon Keith Harford as, all at once catching sight of her, he rose to his feet with a flush of annoyance on his handsome face. Something of proud appeal in her attitude held him silent, and he stood staring at the girl, forgetful alike of conventions and proprieties.

But with his brow to the eye-piece of the telescope, Marcus blattered away unconscious, snorting and choking with half-inarticulate laughter.

"Never saw such a fellow! Keith, I declare he is blubbering like a baby. Hush up, will you, till we hear him howl! We could, if it was not for those blooming avalanches!"

The girl included both the young men in her look of chilling contempt. But her eyes, dark almost as the purple of the zenith on a summer midnight, dwelt longest and most reproachfully upon Keith Harford. And in that lingering moment she seemed to leave something behind her which rankled in his heart, and left him restless and ill content during all the remaining hours of that day.

But again, all unwarned, Marcus took up his parable before Keith could stop him.

"Hi! I say, Harford — look here, they're giving him pints of brandy. I tell you the Beast is feeling pretty rocky — teach him to fool with the Eiger, rigged

Ione March

out in Bond Street spats! — Hello though, where's the fellow gone? — Harford — Keith, I say," shouted Marcus, removing his eye from the telescope. But the grass plot in front of the inn was vacant, except for a fat tortoiseshell cat which blinked in the sun. Every window to the south stood wide open, black and blank under its green sun-blind. The valley beneath was crystal clear, so that even in the deepest shadow Marcus could see the steely aquamarine glitter of the ice-fragments freshly fallen from the glacier. Only on the slab face of the Eiger, towering pyramidal before him, Marcus discerned even with the naked eye certain black markings which closed and separated, each fine as the dot on an "i" on a sheet of folio paper.

But all beneath and in front of him was empty, vague, and large — flooded with sunshine and drenched in silence, while higher up, pile upon pile, rose the mountains — grim, indomitable, infinitely aloof, in the outer porch of which Nemesis was dealing after her manner with Mr. Kearney Judd.

CHAPTER VI

THE ELEVATION OF MAN

NEXT morning the pleasant party gathered in the house of Johann Jossi, upon the Wengern Alp, was broken up. Governor March, his daughter, the sportive maidens and staid maternal head of the house of Judd all winged their way to the chilly marble halls of the Hotel Wilder Mann at Meiringen, while Marcus Hardy and his friend Harford took to themselves provisions, porters, and guides, and set out for parts unknown. Their guide as usual was Melchior Almer, and their general intention, so far at least as they owned any to each other, was to "traversiren" various first-class peaks — that is, to use the summit of a mountain as a pass, and to climb up one side of it and let themselves down the other.

The small, badly-constructed carriages carried off the Americans rapidly enough, and the two young men were left alone on the steps of the hotel. Each avoided the other's eye, for Marcus had been unusually distraught and awkward, and Keith effusive in leave-taking beyond his wont. So each feared the comment of his companion, and both were silent.

Silent they remained until their own preparations were complete, and they set out. Marcus, whose spirits never suffered more than a momentary overcast, was sad for at least ten minutes at the thought of parting with the three girls — though whether the reserved and difficult Ione March or the many-conquered and amenable Idalia had made the deepest mark upon his heart, he could not, for the life of him, have told.

Ione March

Once, however, that he had settled to his stride, and the valleys began to show a tendency to close up behind him and fall back beneath him, the spirits of Marcus the giant returned. And though (as he said repeatedly) he did three times the work of the others, being taller and heavier, and sank to the knee at every step whenever the snow was soft, his jests and mad pranks filled Truffer, the chief porter, with explosive laughter, and at times even caused a smile to pass over the grave face of Melchior Almer himself.

At their rude shelter that night on the Glectstein there arose a noise among the mountains, which, as Almer avowed, must have made the devil stir under the "Pot-lid-of-Hell" — as the guides called the curious black "Hot-place" on the opposite Viescheraarhorn Glacier, to which the ice would not stick. For while Melchior brewed tea and Keith Harford brooded thoughtfully upon the great mass of the Eiger with the cowed Mönch sulking behind it, the lusty madcap Marcus had stripped and plunged into a little glacier lake, into which a tongue of ice projected at one end, while at the other its pale green waters lapped against a barrier of bare rock. Through this he wallowed and kicked his turbulent way, his white rind gleaming like warm ivory amid the pallor of the surrounding snows.

As he splashed this way and that, Marcus kept calling out how delicious the coolness was, and endeavouring to persuade his companions to join him in the invigorating refreshment of his bath. But Keith Harford took no notice of him at all, and Melchior only came to the door of the hut with the frying-pan in his hand long enough to watch him tolerantly for a moment. "Gott, what a ker!" said Melchior; "one never knows what these English will do next."

Marcus succeeded better, however, with Truffer, who,

The Elevation of Man

seduced at last by his wilful misrepresentations, stripped and plunged into the lake, while Marcus, affecting uncontrollable ecstasy, hung by his chin to the tongue of ice, and allowed his long legs to be carried beneath the glacier.

As soon as Truffer realised that the water was ice-cold and bit like frozen metal, he emitted a yell which echoed round and round the circling mountains, and incontinently endeavoured to get out again. But his deceiver caught him by the leg and he returned to his cold bath with a splash like that of a seal diving from a rock.

"Shut up, will you!" growled Marcus in his ear; "let us persuade the other fellows that this is just famous, and get them to come in beside us."

But Truffer continued to give vent to yell upon yell, being by this time convinced that the "mad Englishman" meant to drown him. At last, after many failures, he succeeded in getting on shore, though the enemy harassed his rear with blows and lumps of ice as he scrambled out, and then swam up and down explaining how delightful was the prickling sensation of the glacier water on the skin, and adjuring the others not to believe that cowardly fellow Truffer. But the appearance of the porter, whose hide shone with the raw-red of boiled beetroot, was proof more convincing than any of these interested protestations. Whereupon Marcus, being unable to find more victims, resignedly resumed his clothing, declaring that the spirit of enterprise and adventure was dead in the land.

All that week Harford and Hardy remained in the fastnesses of the central Oberland, making excursions in all directions, and either descending upon villages for additional provisions, or dispatching Truffer in the morning to bring up a supply to their camp amidst the snows.

Ione March

It was the evening of Saturday, and the marketing peasants were already in their Sunday best, when the party descended by the fairy azure stairway of the Rosenloui Glacier into the swart pine woods above Meiringen.

Keith Harford and his friend walked in front, carrying their "rüksacks" guide-fashion, with broad canvas straps passed behind their shoulders and crossed over their breasts. The Englishmen plodded on silently, but behind them Melchior and Truffer kept up a brisk fire of question and ralliment with the broad-faced, tightly-snooded peasant matrons and maids who were driving in the cattle, or carrying the milk from the higher pastures to the home dairy in the valley.

Suddenly, at the recurrence of a name, Keith Harford turned about.

"What did that man say, Melchior," he asked the chief guide.

The peasant, who had spoken in Oberlandish patois, dropped back into the shadow of the pines, so soon as he noticed that what he said was partly understood by Melchior's Herr. The guide seemed unwilling to tell; but at last he said, "This man, Johann Imfeld of Mannlichen, told me that the young American has discharged his guides for being much drunk on the mountain, and that they are to have their certificates and character books taken away from them by the Guides' Commission of the Swiss Alpine Club!"

Keith Harford stared at Melchior as if that gave man had suddenly gone mad.

"What guides, and on which mountain?" he asked hurriedly.

"The man said Christian Schlegel with Peter Jossi — they were drunk on the Eiger."

Marcus gasped. He was about to break out in vehem-

The Elevation of Man

ment denial; but with a quick gesture Harford laid his hand on his arm to restrain him from speaking.

"And do you believe this, Melchior?" continued Harford.

Melchior first shrugged his shoulders. Then he shook his head, turning and facing him so that the two English and the two Swiss were face to face.

"I do not know," he answered gravely, "it might have been. There are, alas! few enough of us whom you can trust all night with an unsealed cognac bottle. And Peter, poor fellow, as is too well known, has his failings. But it matters little whether they were drunk or not. Their word will go for nothing before the Alpine Verein if their Herr only swears strongly enough. For, of course, it is to their interest to deny such a thing. Poor fellows, they will have to become ordinary porters. They will carry the ice-axe no longer; and that foolish lad Christian has a large family."

"But heavens and earth, I tell you I saw them with my own eyes ——!" Marcus was beginning furiously.

But again Keith Harford's hand fell on his arm.

"Wait," he said in English; "don't say a word more now! We will work the thing out together to-night!"

The goldenest hour of evening had come. The paths played hide-and-seek with the pine-trees, and the slanting western sunbeams crissed-crossed both rocks and red boles with intricate patterns of orange light and purple shadow.

In the hollows of, the woodland paths, worn concave by ascending and descending generations, the drifted pine-needles were thick and soft to the feet as piled Turkish carpets. The aromatic wildness of dew-laden air sifted through upland fir-woods cooled the throat and lungs and freshened the sunburnt skin of the travellers.

Ione March

Keith Harford and Marcus were thus descending the last windings of the road beneath the falls, one a little behind the other, the guides still further back, as is the wont of tired Alpinists, when they came upon two girls linked closely arm-in-arm, and walking somewhat apart, a young man in attendance. Ione March was bare-headed, and carried her hat in her hand, swinging it daintily by the brim, while Idalia wore a wide soft mushroom of Siennese straw, which flapped about her face, and by its vagaries added value to her mirth-loving eyes, and to the piquant aspirations of her nose. It was characteristic of the nature of Ione March's engagement that she studiously kept Idalia between her and her not too fervent lover.

"The Beast in Spats, by all that's unholy!" growled Marcus, as they hove in sight. The young men, being yet travel-stained and unshorn, were about to lift their hats and pass on. But Idalia could not permit such a wicked waste of the opportunities afforded her by a merciful providence. So she frankly held out her hand to each of the climbers in turn, beginning with Keith. Ione contented herself with bowing quietly, while the Beast in Spats stood sulkily apart and switched the dust off his boots with a leafy twig, expressing protest, insolence, and discontent in every line of his figure.

"How funny you both look!" cried Idalia. "Mr. Hardy, your nose is peeling just like an onion, in five distinct coats — all different, as they say in the advertisements of stamp packets. No wonder we are warm; I never knew before we were done up in so many coverings. But Mr. Harford is only burnt nicely brown all over, like the crust of a well-done pie. And have you had a lovely time upon the mountains? I am sure you must, but for your guides. Ugh! how uncomfortable it must feel to be all alone with such horrid people."

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"Our guide, Melchior Almer," said Keith Harford gently, "is a sort of prince in his country. He is also the crowned head of all guides, and we count it a high honour to be allowed to accompany him."

"How splendid!" cried Idalia, turning mischievously to include her brother in the conversation. "Poor Kearney here has quite another story to tell. His guides behaved abominably, and it was all he could do to get them down off the mountain alive."

Keith Harford turned and looked steadily at Mr. Kearney Judd.

"Which mountain, sir, may I ask?" he said gravely.

"Oh, the Eiger," growled the sulky ex-mountaineer.

He was not in the best of humours at any rate, and it was simply insufferable of Idalia to insist upon carrying on a conversation with this pair of uncouth trampers.

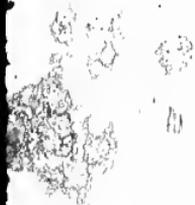
"And what have you been doing all this time?" said Ione to Marcus, speaking for the first time. She felt the insult of her betrothed's manner and tone more keenly than Idalia, both because she was less inured to Kearney's little ways by custom, and because she did not like that experimental maiden, cast her fly by all waters.

The giant (susceptible youth!) blushed to his brows.

"Oh, nothing very big!" he stammered; "just staying up there and making little trips, you know, trying for new passes, and running over peaks and things!"

"It sounds precisely like taking a penny bus," said Idalia. "And do you have it all put in the papers?"

"Well, no; not exactly," said Marcus; "but sometimes for a lark my friend writes yarns to read to the Club fellows in London. And then they all get up one after another, and say that he is a blithering idiot who has got his routes all wrong. That any baby could better his 'times,' and that each of them knows at least three better ways of getting up."



Ione March

"What Kearney does is n't a bit like that," said Idalia; "he gets yards and yards put in the papers, and —"

"If we do not get on, it will be too dark to see the falls," interrupted the ex-mountaineer, turning on his heels and abruptly leaving the party without salutation or farewell of any kind.

But as if to mark her sense of the omission of her lover, Ione March shook hands first with Marcus and afterwards with Keith Harford. "Good-night!" was all she said to the latter. But she allowed the dark sweetness of her eyes to rest on his face just that fraction of time which is longer than a glance, and which is not yet long enough to be a look.

Meanwhile Idalia was finishing Marcus Hardy's first lesson. With the quick instinct of the born flirt, she knew in a moment that Keith Harford was more attracted by Ione than by herself: a belief which she expressed with her usual crystalline clearness and directness that night in Ione's bedroom.

"He's your meat, my dear! I'm not talking rubbish. I know. Never mind how, but I know. Now do have some fun with him, or he'll be dragging my nice giant away before he makes up his mind to speak — and that, you know, is more than half the fun. You simply *must* be nice to Mr. Harford. I'm sure Kearney won't mind. And you know he's just your sort. If you were a man you would pull your moustache just the way he does, so melancholy and dreamy and don't care a — ahem! Oh, it's you, is it, Astoria? Ione and I were just talking about the young Englishmen. I wish there was one left for you. But there is n't, for Ione and I just have tossed for first choice. Happy thought! You can have one of the drunken guides to play with. It will be no end of fun to reform him. You know you are always reforming somebody, 'Storia."

The Elevation of Man

(Here Astoria turned on her heel.)

"Now don't go off in the huff! Listen to me, Miss Judd, from New York City. I am quite serious."

(The more sober-minded sister wavered whether to remain or go out.)

"And then, you know, you could read a paper at the next meeting of the Women's Society for the Elevation of Man after we go home. Think how something of this kind would fetch them — '*Haw I elevated a tipsy Swiss guide,*' by Astoria Judd!"

"It's very much easier to make fun of serious subjects, than to be willing to give time and money to help a good cause along!" said Astoria sententiously. "The Society for the Elevation of Man has already effected much. It has placed nice temperance cafés all over the business parts of the city, where, instead of spending their time in odious billiard-saloons and horrid reeking bars, men can have cheap and well-cooked meals, served by nice girls in pretty uniform caps, and so be made more amenable to the refining influences of domestic life. But you don't care anything for that!"

"Oh, but I do!" cried Idalia, eagerly clapping her hands. "I am dead nuts on the elevation of man. I believe in it just as much as you do."

"And pray what have you ever done for the Cause?" sneered Astoria. "You never do anything but carry on disgracefully with every single decent-looking man who comes in your way!"

Idalia clasped her hands and raised her eyes to high heaven as if to call upon it to attest her injured innocence.

"Listen to her, Ione," she cried. "I waste my time, my energy, my soulful aspirations, and my best pieces of poetry on the most unpromising material — all for the good of the Cause, and she calls it 'carrying on.'"

Ione March

Carrying on! Only a low mind would wallow in such unfounded accusations. Any one truly high-minded (like you, Ione) would see at once that I do it solely for their good — just to elevate them, in fact!”

By this time the young woman was talking so fast that her words tumbled one over the other.

“Now I put it to you, Astoria — I leave it to your honesty to say if this is not true. After a month of me you simply would n't know them — the very rawest and most base-bally of them? There was Billy Pitt — you remember Billy? Did he walk the same, speak the same, dress the same, after I had done with him? I found him a boor fresh from Princeton football field, with the sawdust sticking in star-spangled wads all over his snaky tresses. I left him a man and a brother!”

“You led him on, and threw him over most shamefully, that's how you elevated him,” said Astoria, with extreme severity.

“Listen to the voice of the scoffer,” continued the unabashed Idalia; “she's only jealous because she did n't get him to reform herself. But he had a much better time with me. Indeed, he always said so himself. 'Storia would have taken him to leagues and meetings, till the poor boy could n't stand. Astoria is a perfect rake on meetings. But Billy could lead the German, choose the right flowers, make love, brush his hair, wear his clothes, keep his shoulders square, look you in the face and speak up like a little man, all long before I got through with him. He was n't grateful much at the time — not to speak of, perhaps. He suffered some in order to be beautiful. But look at him now! Now you better believe I know what I'm talking about. I don't go to meetings, but I'll elevate six men to your one, Astoria; yes, and race you from the word 'Go!' — Ione to be referee and timekeeper. Ten in two

The Elevation of Man

years, and not an enemy among the lot, though one or two were a little sore at first. That's not a bad record —and all the fun besides! But Billy was the flower of the flock. Now he has gone into politics, and is the first really nice Congressman that ever was. And when he stands for President, the women of America will just elect him straight away, right from the drop of the flag! And, as Father of his Country, Billy will see old G. W., and raise him to the limit every time! So don't you talk any more to me about the Elevation of Man, 'Storia Judd!"

But Astoria was gone, and the door had shut with a slam.

CHAPTER. VII

COUNTERPLOT

ABOUT the same time, in their pine-built barracks of the night, Marcus was putting a question to Keith Harford. "Now that's all very well; but what are you going to do about it?"

"I think I shall first speak to Governor March," said Harford.

"Nonsense!" said Marcus emphatically. "That is as much as to give away all we know. Let the fellow have it hot, and in a way he will remember to his dying day."

"We must first be sure that he is guilty," suggested Harford.

"Guilty! Why, is n't he guilty? Did n't we see him with our own eyes? What more do you want?" cried Marcus as vehemently as if he were on the eve of committing a personal assault.

"I'm not exactly deaf," pleaded Harford; "and if you can be reasonable for one lucid moment, why should the son of a multi-millionaire take away the character of two poor Swiss guides?"

"If I can be reasonable — Why, man, don't you know? He had engaged them for the entire season at a howling figure. And when he got enough of the high mountains — when he found the south face of the Eiger was n't any sort of picnic, he wanted badly to get out of his agreement. So, as the easiest way, down he comes and swears till all is blue that his guides were both drunk on the mountain."

Counterplot

Harford shook his head. He could not believe in the possibility of such conduct. Nevertheless, as it proved, the words of Marcus contained a pretty fair statement of the actions and intentions of Mr. Kearney Judd. That hereditary financier knew the value of money, and was perfectly well aware that in this matter his word would be taken before that of a couple of guides, whose self-interest would discount their denial of his statements, and whose silence would be taken for the sullen consciousness of guilt.

"And I'll tell you what, Harford," Marcus went on. "There's that deuced pretty girl he's engaged to. If we smite the beast hard enough and openly enough, she's not the sort to put up with a sweep like that. If we let him have it good and straight, so that he will think he's struck an avalanche, I bet four to one we smash the March-Judd engagement all to bits."

"That," said Harford, exceedingly deliberately, "is the very reason why I cannot interfere."

"Well," said Marcus, "if you are going to be so hanged top-lofty and scrupulous, put on your cap and step down the road. And if in half an hour I don't show you a dozen very excellent reasons why you should interfere — why, I'll give you my word you can boot me back up the village street right to the top of the hotel steps!"

A moment more and Marcus and Harford, having found their caps, stood in the long white highway, with its thin straggling trees — poplar, beech, birch, and pine — mingling as in a border land between two climates. It was still a sort of golden dusk, the mountains retaining an after-blush of the rich carmine glow which an hour ago had illuminated their tops and filled the valley with strange luminous haze.

"Come on!" cried Marcus, striking into his quick

Ione March

homing stride, as soon as ever they drew out of the blazing circle of lights and pedestaled glass balls which surrounded the hotel fronts, "pit-a-pat it down the road, me boy!"

And so, with the mountains looking down upon them, and the overhanging cornice of a stray snow-crest far and glowing a strange, forlorn, amethystine blue (which again reminded Keith Harford of the eyes of Ione March) they made straight into the country, tracking from one rugged pathway to another, climbing low walls, and striding stake-fences as at a steeple-chase.

Most of the chalets were dark. In one or two a light was still flickering, showing where a douce good-wife had not yet finished the preparations for the frugal family supper. But in most the peasants were already asleep, and a gentle gust of snoring wafted out from them like the muffled thunder of a land of dreams.

For it was high summer, when the days are long for labour, and the nights short for rest in the Oberland.

It was quite in keeping that Keith Harford, a man of strong impulses, but much abstraction and reserve of character, should never ask his companion where he was taking him. Presently, however, the two young men stopped at a chalet built by the end of a little wooden bridge which spanned the torrent beneath and rang hollow under their feet as they stepped upon it. The dash of the waters came soothingly up to Keith Harford's ear. He stopped and looked over. He could see the grey-green phosphorescence of the glacier stream glance here and darken there, cabined and tormented between the black rocks. Lower still, a thin, grey tooth of stone jutted up the stream sent out a white spume straight into the air. The noise of the waters in his ears carried away his thoughts. Keith Harford would very contentedly have stood there

Counterplot

night with his arms folded on the slight rail of cloven pine, had Marcus not caught him by the elbow and drawn him away by main force.

Ascending a little flight of roughly hewn wooden steps, they came upon the unmistakable odour of a seasoned Swiss chalet, a perfume compact of ancient wood-fires, smoke-dried rafters, airless rooms, fusty bed-quilts, onion strings, aromatic herbs tied in hour-glass bundles, and, above everything and overwhelming everything, the keen breath of upland pastures, saving, sweetening, and vivifying all. They stumbled noisily in without knocking, the bulk of Marcus the giant taking the breadth of the passage, Keith following more easily in his wake.

Going quickly, like one who knows his way, Marcus dashed open a door to his right, whereupon Keith found himself suddenly in the wide, dusky house-place of an Oberland chalet. Red ashes glowed on the hearth. A girl of eleven, with long hair tossed in gipsy fashion over her neck, was breaking bits of green pine knots and tossing them on the embers. Each fragment hissed, spat, shot up momentarily into a clear spurt of flame, and then died down again to dull red.

"Christian!" cried Marcus, as the gloom of the small-windowed house shut suddenly about them, as it were throttling them after the largeness of the night.

A man who had been sitting upon a low chair, with his head sunk between his palms, raised his face. A larger piece than usual of the girl's pine fuel shed through the house, a momentary radiance clear as a lamp.

Keith Harford looked long at the fallen-in cheeks of the guide. Christian Schlegel seemed older and more gaunt than he had ever seen him before. His blonde locks appeared suddenly to have become bleached and grey. His coat was off. His arms, bare to the elbow, lay hairy and corded upon his knees.

Ione March

“What is the matter, Christian?” said Marcus; “tell me, is all this true?”

For a while Christian did not answer; but his wife, with a babe on her arm, broke instantly into shrill denials and bitter accusations against all foreign Herrs, as being the ruin of the men of the valleys. Stirred by her vehemence the infant awoke and feebly joined its outcries to her denunciations.

The sound appeared to jar upon Christian. He raised his hand and brought it down with thunderous force upon the little “dresser” of cleaned-scoured pine, on which sundry dishes of green and white ware glistened.

“Be quiet, woman!” he cried. And for very fear and surprise both mother and child instantly fell silent.

Then the man looked long at Marcus, studying his face before speaking. “I think you are a friend,” he said at last, in the broad-vowelled, German speech of the Oberland valleys. “yes, I do think you are a friend. What have you come to hear? There is nothing good to tell. They have taken away my Führerbuch, my papers, my testimonials. I am fit for nothing now but to go and work with the Italians upon the railways —”

“And he was so good a guide, my Christian, so careful, so strong,” cried the wife, again breaking silence, “and only takes drink a very little, even on holidays, never once on the mountains. And that day there was not one drop — not one single drop. For he and Peter had to work hard to drag the Herr up but a little way! Also, we are respectable, and have paid our taxes to the commune regularly for twenty years!”

“Hold your tongue, wife!” cried Christian, but not so harshly as before; “of what use is all this? These gentlemen were not that day upon the Eiger, and there

Counterplot

is but Peter's word and mine against that of the rich American Herr."

Then Keith Harford came forward, and laid his hand gently on the guide's shoulder.

"Be of good courage," he said. "For the present say nothing to any one. Do not stir from your house till they send for you to go before the Court of the Alpine Club. And we will be there to see that no harm befall you."

"May God bless you, Herr!" broke in his wife; "they will perhaps listen to you. You will not see them do wrong to my Christian?"

"I promise you they shall not," said Keith very quietly; and somehow the tone of his voice was more comfort to the woman than the gold which Marcus placed in her hand.

"Well," said Marcus, when they found themselves out again in the dusk of the night, "have you had enough, or would you like to go along to the cottage of little Peter? He has nine children."

Keith Harford was silent for full five minutes. "Let us go over to Grindelwald at once," he said. "I have a friend there with whom we ought to consult."

Marcus, ever ready for adventure, caught eagerly at the idea.

"I know a path through the pine woods," he said; "it is difficult to find even in daylight, but if we can hit it, it will cut off a couple of hours."

"It is too dark to see in the wood," said Keith; "we shall lose time."

"Let us buy half a dozen penny dips!" cried Marcus, who scented an experience. And Keith had had too many instances of the practical pioneer character of his companion's expedients when in difficulty to enter a faintest caveat. So, without going back to their inn,

Ione March

the pair struck into the village again, winding their way rapidly among intricate lanes and alleys, till presently they were knocking at the door of the general dealer (not he of the English stores and English prices, but the worthy villager who supplies to native Grindelwald the staples of life and luxury).

The merchant was already in bed, and muttered lusty anathemas at being disturbed. But the cheerful apostrophes of Marcus, and the devil's tattoo he beat on the panels of the door with antiphonal knuckle and toe attracting the attention of the neighbours, the worthy chandler was compelled to arise and come out upon his balcony, clad most unholily all in yellow flannel, and with a red night-cap stuck awry on his head.

"Six candles — devil's nonsense! What do a couple of mad Englishmen want with six candles in the middle of the night? Is it not enough that they run the mountains all day? Must their father, the Evil One, permit them to come rousing honest men out of their beds? But the price shall make up for it! Yes, the price shall make up for it!"

Yet, after all, under the influence of the cheery and irrepressible *bonhomie* of Marcus, and, perhaps, also owing to Frau Ortman's opinion of the good looks of his silent and thoughtful companion, the overcharges (or compensation for disturbances) did not amount to more than a couple of small nickel coins. So presently, with a pocket full of candles and three boxes of lucifer matches, Marcus was leading the way into the forest above Meiringen, an alert happiness showing jauntily in every line of his body. For Marcus was a born pioneer. From a child he was ever most happy in planning and carrying out his plans. Keith Harford dreamed, thought, and in general cultivated melancholy like a fine art. To him action was generally secondary, mostly vulgar,

Counterplot

and nearly always superfluous. Now, however, he was pushed forward by the shrill misery of the wife of Christian Schlegel, and perhaps as much as anything by the jarred and jangled temper shown by that usually good-tempered Samson of the Hasli Thal.

As they struck into the forest, the trunks of the pines shot up above them far out of their ken, huge and black, striking through the sky; while the path wound circuitously among them. Presently Marcus stubbed his toe against a rock, and, as he stood looking over and nursing it, he saw the lights of the hotel Wilder Mann shining three or four hundred feet beneath them.

"It is time to light up our candles," he said, "if we do not want to fetch up all standing on the roofs of the village, in as many pieces as the twelve-times divided *city in the Bible!*"

So he groped for a forked branch, whose extremities he split cunningly open with his knife-of-a-hundred-blades, so that they held a couple of candles commodiously in their notches.

In another cleft lower down he placed a curved piece of bark, so as to shade the flame from his eyes and cast the light full upon the path. There was not a breath of air stirring. The flame of the candle rose straight up in its amphitheatre of barken lantern. The long mossy beards upon the trees hung limp and still. The only sound was the deep diapason of the torrent bringing the latest news from the world of glacier and avalanche overhead. A dog howled fitfully in some upland farm, and was silenced with blows, which changed his long ulultrious baying into short, snapping yelps. Marcus laughed aloud in sympathy with the castigator.

"That is just what we are going to do," he said; "the Beast in Spats bays at honest men. We will make him yelp like a twice-whipped cur."

Ione March

But Keith Harford was silent. The subject did not amuse him. He was trying to decide whether the eyes of Ione March were sapphire, like the sea, or amethyst, like the depths of the evening sky.

And before them both, as they ascended the darkling forest path, Marcus Hardy's improvised lantern burned like a steady star in the hushed and windless night.

CHAPTER VIII

PRESBYTERY AND PRESBYTER

THE Presbytery at Grindelwald was shining rosy red in the reflected rays of the rising but still unrisen sun when Marcus and Keith stood before it. Already there came a noise of young labour from the yard behind, where in the shade some one was getting through morning duties to an accompaniment of cheerful song. Presently a stripling lad came round the gable with an axe upon his shoulder. A pretty country maiden, short-kirtled, barefooted, was singing over her milking-pails, scouring them with white sand, her elbows showing pink against the green gloom of the pines. At sight of her the youth dropped his axe, and finding the girl's fresh round cheek, as an Irishman would say, "convenient," he helped himself to an almost pardonable kiss. But to this the girl did not tamely submit. The sound of a hearty palm smitten fair upon resounding flesh rang instantly out. Then the young man, divided between the pleasure of achievement and the pain of punishment, snatched up his axe and ran off rapidly down the path, laughing triumphantly back over his shoulder as he went.

The girl stood up, eloquent of tongue — so long, that is, as the aggressor was in sight. Then she also smiled, then grew thoughtful, lifted her apron as if to wipe her cheek, but picked at it instead, and did not for a long minute resume the scouring of her milking-pails. Marcus was delighted with the whole scene. He considered himself something of a connoisseur in these matters.

Ione March

"Did you notice," he said softly to Harford, "that she was only angry after it was all over? Even then she scolded just so long as she could be heard. You believe me — the next time she will forget to scold at all."

Thus far the wise and much-experienced Marcus, who at an early age prided himself on his knowledge of women — and so was laying up wrath against the day of wrath.

But Keith Harford did not smile. His thoughts were, as usual, alike dreamily distant from bold wooers and from maidens, willing or inaccessible, at play among their milking-pails.

Marcus and Harford sat down on a fallen tree and smoked steadily till the door of the Presbytery opened, and the burly, rosy Presbyter himself, clad in an old ecclesiastical garment which was seeing out its last days as a dressing-gown, stumped down the wooden stairs with a towel over his arm. He was going to the little spout of water at the end of the garden to make his morning ablutions — a foreign habit which, in his capacity of mountaineer, he had contracted from the English.

He stopped a moment, aghast at the sight which greeted his eyes, and then came hurrying forward with both hands outstretched to welcome Keith Harford.

"My dear friend," he said, "this is truly unexpected; but then, all accidents are good that bring you to my door. Go in, and I will get you some breakfast after the English mode — the beefsteck, the cole-meat, the ham-negg. I will be with you and dressed in a quick time!"

Marcus and Harford made their way into the Presbytery and sat them down in the little room with shelves of unpainted wood, filled mostly with tattered paper-

Presbytery and Presbyter

bound theological books printed in crabbed, eye-destroying German characters. Wide-spaced fiction, of origin obviously Gallic, their lemon-yellow covers carefully torn off, elbowed the theology. Standard English books in stout binding were not wanting; and, indeed, everywhere there was evidence of wide reading and liberal culture. In the corner reclined several ice-axes of the full-shafted, workmanlike Grindelwald type. These stood slanted at various angles, amid a pile of ropes, woven leg-gear of coarse grey wool, wire goggles, and much-enduring straw hats. It was the sanctuary of the mountaineering pastor of Grindelwald, chief of the Swiss Alpine Section, and president of the local commission to which had been given all power in the matter of guides.

Back through the roses and ant-heaps, came the pastor to breakfast, loudly exclaiming upon them for not arriving the night before, when he could have given them beds more comfortable than the fallen tree-trunk upon which he had found them. Moreover, he laughed heartily at Marcus Hardy's candles.

"You are a wonderful folk, you English. If in the heaven there is no moon, you invent one and carry her before you in a cleft stick. If there is no bed, you find a fallen tree, and make yourselves comfortable among the branches. No wonder that you conquer the world and make all the money in it. But what brings you here into my house so early?"

They were sitting in the bare dining-room of the Presbytery, and the maid of the woodman's morning salutation, now demure as any Calvinistic acolyte, had just retired with a lingering glance at Keith.

Briefly and clearly Harford told his tale, the story of the morning at the hostel of Johann Jossi on the Wengern Alp, and of what the shining yellow tube of the

Ione March

telescope had revealed. The pastor, who, upon finding the two young men in trouble, had expected to hear something very different, listened at first with wonderment, and then with a certain grave approbation.

"And why should you care for two poor men of our people?" he said; "it is not expected of your countrymen to show such anxiety as to cause them to undertake a night march to get a couple of village guides out of trouble."

"Well," Harford replied, "it was just because they are two poor men, whose chances of justice seemed somewhat scant, that we did come."

The pastor considered awhile, humming a German hymn, which, even when delivered through the nose, held in it the tramp of armies. After a while he spoke.

"I will call in due order a meeting of the court. I will preside over it myself. We will have this Herr Judd before us to tell his story — how he broke his contract, and why he dismissed his men. Meanwhile, of course, you will not say a word — keeping what you call 'mum.' Then there will a grand mine explode under his very feet, and your so rich man will learn what it is in Switzerland to take away the characters of honest men."

◆ Whereupon the three clasped hands, drinking "scald" to each other in good Vienna beer, and parted — the two Englishmen once more taking the path through the wood, along which, led by Marcus with his moon waning on its stick, they had descended upon Grindelwald in the rosy dawn.

The pastor stood and watched them out of sight.

"Perhaps I have misjudged the English," he said; "sometimes they appear stiff and sullen of temper only because they cannot speak a language well, and are

Presbytery and Presbyter

too proud to speak it badly. But if they would consent to learn a little kindly folk-speech, take their meals at reasonable hours, and do deeds like this — perhaps one day the rest of the world might even begin to like them."

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CHAPTER IX

BEFORE THE DISTRICT COMMITTEE S. A. C.

THE S. A. C. Guides' Committee was in session. The president of the district, in whose hands was the oversight of all high-mountain guides' certificates, was none other than our burly parson. With him were conjoined three or four men, prominent citizens of the commune — Herr Adler, the mountaineering landlord of the principal inn; Oscar Conrardia, a dark Italian-looking man, a rich proprietor from the neighbouring valley; the local doctor, and an assessor or legal adviser all the way from Thun, with a wooden gargoyle face, like those which they carve on pipe bowls in that enterprising village.

These men sat on cane chairs in a semicircle, silently waiting for the opening of the court of inquiry. Before them, standing in a down-looking, hang-dog way, like criminals already condemned, were the accused men — great Christian Schlegel, his blonde hair frosted with the grey dryness which comes early to all fair mountaineers, and beside him, fingering his hat-brim awkwardly, little brown Peter. Their Führerbuchs lay open on the table in front of the pastor, ready to be cancelled or restored to them, according to the result of the trial. For to be "drunk upon the mountain" is the only deadly and utterly unpardonable crime in a first-class Swiss guide.

Now Peter and Christian had no confidence in the value of their denials. They knew well enough that their word would go but a small way against the oath of the rich Herr who had accused them; and as for their

Before the District Committee

characters, though they had never been guilty of excess upon duty—well, at other times they were as other men.

Left to themselves, they would simply have listened patiently and without defence to the burden of accusation, and submitted silently to the punishment. Yet this would not have proceeded either from stupidity or indifference. Christian and Peter were men of some local reputation as good men in an emergency, but neither were quite blameless in the matter of occasional brandy. So now, as they stood waiting for their accuser, their eyes turned again and again with eager inquiry towards the door. At last the tall, slight figure of Keith Harford appeared, carrying a certain indolence about its pose which strikingly belied the owner's active habits. At this point Christian Schlegel furtively kicked little Peter behind the table, as he would have done at the chamois hunt when a big buck stood up against the sky-line and he dared not speak.

But, meanwhile, where was the accuser? Justice stood on tiptoe, and Harford was ready to give his testimony. Marcus too ought by this time to have been at the Presbytery: Also where was Marcus?

Alas! beauty in seductive guise had claimed him. On his way to the court he met Idalia Judd, who stayed him in the pleasant gardens about the dependence of the Black Eagle (which her father, returning from Meiringen, had hired for his family), where under the pines the ants were scurrying to and fro with their pine needles, or busily transporting their eggs from point to point.

"You may come and sit down by me—surely it is much too hot a day to break your neck on glaciers," commanded the imperious Idalia, swinging her Japanese fan by one charming finger. Whereat, looking at her, Marcus swung a moment on the apex of temptation,

Ione March

walked solemnly forward, and sat down at Idalia's feet.

"I have to go to the pastor's house on urgent business," thus he salved his conscience. "I can only stay a minute."

"Oh," said Idalia, with a start; "yes, I know — about my brother's guides. Do you know, Mr. Hardy, I am very sorry for these two poor men!"

"Oh, the two poor men are all right," said careless Marcus, nursing his knee and looking up into the blue eyes of Idalia Judd.

Now up to this point only amused mischief had been dancing in those clear orbs, but now, though they still continued to smile, a clever brain was working like yeast behind them.

"You mean," said the girl, apparently as carelessly, "that my brother will do something for their families, or that the fault is too common here to be thought anything of, and they will escape punishment?"

"No," said Marcus, breaking a stick slowly into finger-lengths, and throwing the pieces at a large ant which was packing the dead body of a relation over one shoulder after having unfraternally bitten off his head; "and, do you know, if I were your brother, I would not go down to the court to-day."

"No," said Idalia, leaning nearer to him and speaking a little breathlessly; "and why not?"

Though not, like her sister Astoria, favoured with her brother's confidence, she knew enough of the peculiar talents of Mr. Kearney to feel some apprehension.

"Well," answered Marcus, "ask him if he knows any reason why he had better not appear. And say to him that whatever he knows, other people know just as much!"

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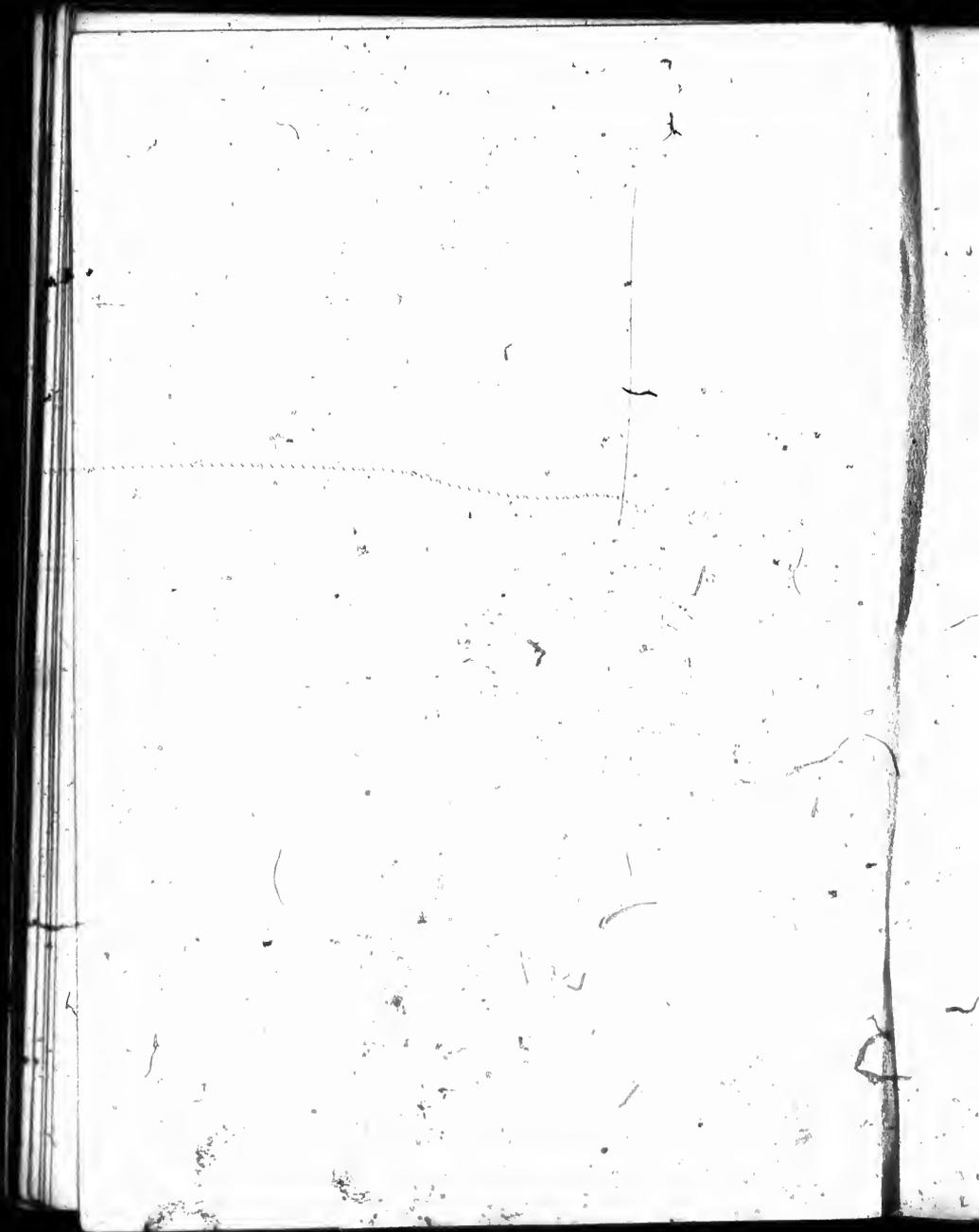
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"NO," SAID MARCUS, BREAKING A STICK SLOWLY INTO
FINGER-LENGTHS."



Before the District Committee

"Thank you," said Idalia, smiling and rising; "I shall not forget."

"I tell you this for your sake, not for your brother's!" said the traitor, rising also and looking after her as she moved light foot to the door of the hotel. Idalia nodded gaily over her shoulder and the blue eyes smiled sunnily as ever. But there was trouble in her heart, for though she did not love her brother with any overpowering affection, yet nevertheless, for her mother's sake, she did not wish him to be caught in any snare of his own devising.

So effective were her words, and so active and potent, the power of Mr. Kearney Judd's imagination, joined to what remained to him of a never very active conscience, that in five minutes that young man was making his way through the skirting woods by a path which joined the main road to Interlaken some distance below the village; Kearney was hatless and in some disarray, for he had been so startled by Idalia's impressive warning that he had in no wise stood upon the order of his going.

It was early in the season and the full fury of the tourist stream had not yet set in; otherwise the strange spectacle might have been seen of a young man in a neat, London-made tweed suit running hatless down a white Alpine highway. By the bridge of Zweilutchen he found a return carriage, and, jumping in, bade the driver go as swiftly as possible to the station at Interlaken. At which being arrived, and mounting into one of the little rabbit-hutches on wheels which at that period served as carriages between the lakes, he passed for the present out of our ken.

Meanwhile the court was proceeding with that leisured and headachy dullness which characterises all continental official procedure, legal and semi-legal. Out in the garden of the dependence of the Black Eagle, Marcus the traitor waited and yawned. He sat down again on

Ione March

the plank from which Idalia had risen. He was in hopes that she would come back ; but, though that ingenious maiden was not too proud to watch the garden seat from behind her closed green blinds, the eyes of Marcus saw no more than the white front of the house staringly hot in the sun, with its freshly painted shutters closed on account of the noontide heat. After a long pause, the faithless Marcus strayed towards the court-room.

He arrived just in time to hear the conclusion of his friend's story. Keith Harford gave his evidence in a quiet voice and at the first sound of his clear, fluent German the faces of the two accused men had turned wondering upon him. But as he recounted each incident with precision and a certain grave detachment and dispassion unusual in so young a man, the sullen indifference of the accused was broken up, and they nodded vehemently as point by point the story of the abortive attempt upon the Eiger was told.

No sooner had Keith Harford sat down, after answering the questions put to him by the pastor and several other members of the court, than a tall, slender girl rose and gently requested to be permitted a word.

The pastor nodded kindly and with sympathy.

"Understand, madam, we do not claim any legal powers," he said ; "we are only here to find out the truth. But if you can tell us anything pertinent to the occurrence or reveal anything which may cast light upon the conduct of these two accused men, we shall be very glad to listen."

"I can cast no light upon the circumstances," said Ione March.

"Then on whose account do you appear ?"

"On behalf of Mr. Kearney Judd," she said firmly, looking past Keith Harford with a certain hard pride in

Before the District Committee

the set of her finely cut features, as if she had a secret shame close to her heart, and were making a conscience of glorying in it.

"Are you Herr Judd's wife?" asked the pastor innocently enough.

"No," she answered, with the same proud look at Keith, in which anger and defiance seemed to mingle; "but I was engaged to be married to him."

The tense of the verb was not lost on Keith Harford. He looked up quickly, and, though she did not appear to be aware of his existence, it seemed to him as though the information that her engagement was a thing of the past had been meant for him alone.

"And why is Herr Judd not here to answer for himself?" asked the president.

The girl went on bravely, the only woman in that silent company of men.

"I do not doubt but that Mr. Judd will be able to set the matter right as soon as he is able to appear. He has many interests and much anxiety. I do not know why he is not here. He may have been summoned hastily away on business. But in the meantime, as his representative, I ask to be allowed to pay these men their wages and board wages for the complete term of their engagement, together with any sum which the court may direct, as compensation for the loss of Mr. Judd's employment."

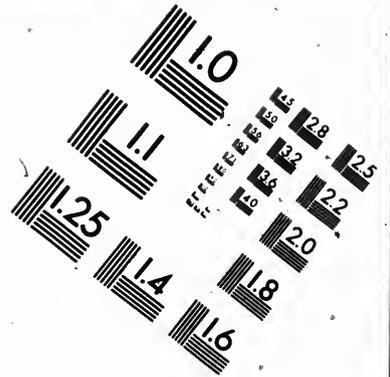
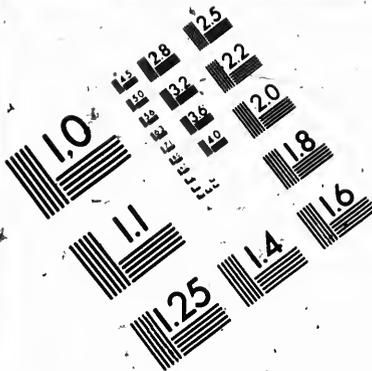
The pastor smiled and bowed amicably. He was glad to accept a proposal so satisfactory to his compatriots, and which had also the merit of avoiding so gracefully all international complications.

"Madam," he said, "your proposal is such a handsome one that we leave the amount of compensation to your discretion and sense of justice, and postpone the hearing of Herr Judd's explanation of the circumstances

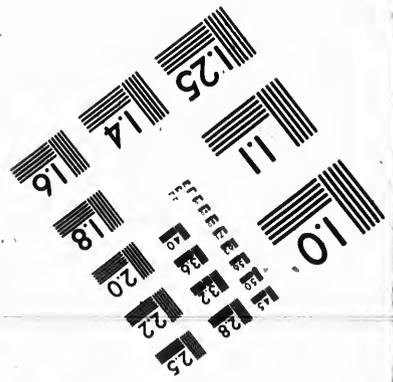
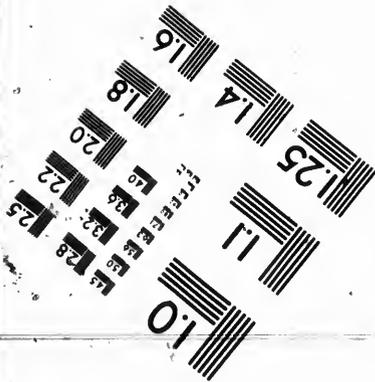
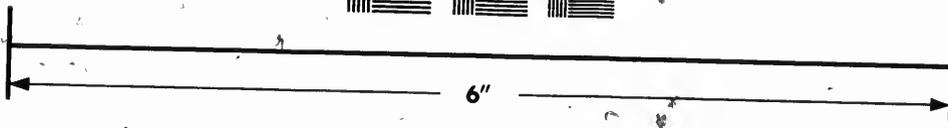
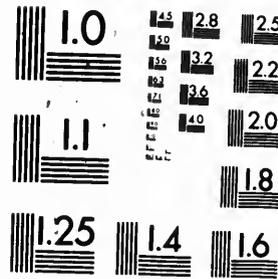








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Ione March

to a future occasion. Doubtless if he had not been summoned away by business he would have been able to clear up the discrepancies between his sworn account of the ascent and that given by the men, which has now been so amply corroborated by my friend Herr Keith Harford, of the English Alpine Club. Peter Jossi and Christian Schlegel, I shall ask leave of the court to endorse your certificates on behalf of the S. A. C. with an honourable testimonial of your faithfulness. The court stands adjourned."

And as Ione March passed out of the cool shades of the Presbytery, in which she had taken the burden of another's shame upon her, she looked once at Keith Harford. It was a strange glance whose meaning the young man could not fathom, save that she seemed to see him, as it were, diminished to a point, across an infinite and impassable chasm, and that her eyes were no warmer or more friendly than the frosty winter stars.

CHAPTER X

IONE CLEARS THE SLATE

IT was a week later when Ione March explained her position to those concerned. It happened at Dijon, in the wide and pleasant garden before the cliff-like wall of the Hôtel de la Cloche. The Judd family was again reunited there, and Ione had readily enough acceded to her father's proposal that they should rejoin them. Governor March and his daughter arrived from Pontarlier by the evening train. Her father had talked to her gently and affectionately most of the way; but in the intervals of her somewhat perfunctory replies Ione had been revolving many things, while the train snorted this way and that up the beautiful valleys which lead through the Jura Mountains towards the inquisitorial purgatory of the Pontarlier custom-house.

The pursuit and cultivation of rich idleness had brought her to this (so the girl meditated bitterly), that, with her father's approval, she had come within measurable distance of spending her life with a man like Kearney Judd. Nay, even now she was on her way to rejoin him, as if nothing had happened. Her father had settled himself in the corner of the carriage, and applied himself to his fortnight-old file of American papers. Ione, sitting silently opposite, gazed steadily out of the window, and set herself to construct another world, in which all the old weary things should have become new and beautiful.

It was on the following morning that she explained herself fully to Kearney. That young man since his

Ione March

flight had found means to provide himself with another outfit, and had returned from Paris after three days of varied enjoyment to rejoin his father and sisters, and to spend ten days in the society of his betrothed. As to the little incident just closed at Grindelwald he had no fears and no regrets — save that he had not been able to “even things up” with Keith Harford. This, however, he promised to himself to do some other day, if the tides of the world should ever bring them together again.

This morning Kearney was sauntering about from seat to shady seat along the pleasant boulevard of Dijon, shifting with the sun and waiting for Ione March. His sisters, as was their custom when travelling, lay long abed, and his father had departed for Paris by the early train. The youth was distinctly bored, but, nevertheless, he lounged and twisted cigarettes with ease on the hotel door. At last he saw Ione issue forth from the Hôtel de la Cloche and come directly towards him. He welcomed the girl's appearance with genuine delight. Her step was quick, light, elastic. Kearney specially admired her way of carrying her head. He hastened to meet her, lifting his hat and holding out his hand.

“I am so glad you have come,” he began, rather ineffectually; but who in a public place can extemporise an effective lover's greeting?

Ione did not, however, take his outstretched hand, which, after remaining unsupported in the air for a long moment, fell again to his side.

“I have come to tell you,” she spoke determinedly, “once for all, what I think of you and your conduct. Do you know that I went alone to that Grindelwald court, and that I heard all that was testified to there?”

“No doubt — sworn to by your friend, Mr. Keith Harford!” retorted Kearney, who was resolved (as he

Ione Clears the Slate

put it delicately to Astoria), "if he had to take it, not to take it lying down."

"By Mr. Harford and his friend," Ione continued calmly, "as well as by the men themselves. You were at the time skulking in the woods, or flying like a coward from the consequences of your dishonesty. To the last I hoped you would return to support your accusations, or accept the consequences. I spoke on your behalf. I settled matters with the men, and now —"

"Bad as you think me, Ione," smiled Kearney, with an air of large tolerance, "I suppose I am solvent enough to see that you do not lose by your quite foolish generosity. But girls never can look at such things reasonably."

Ione went on as if she had not heard him.

"I wish you to understand exactly, and once for all, where you and I stand. First, there is not now, nor ever will be again, any engagement between us. I do not purpose to marry a cur. But I like your sisters. Your mother has been as kind to me as if she had been my own, and for their sakes you are at liberty to speak to me in their presence, but in their presence alone."

Kearney bowed ironically.

"I do not see that I shall lose very much," he said. "When I had the honour of being engaged to Miss March, that constituted the bulk of my privileges."

Ione continued to look straight at him. She was wondering if any form of words permitted to women would express the loathing with which she regarded this man. He stood carelessly before her, drawing pentagons on the walk with his stick, to the displeasure of the Republican guardian of the park, who contemplated the intruder with a severity of censure which doubtless would have ended in active remonstrance save for the man's

Ione March

national admiration for a pretty woman. He would not disarrange so charming a demoiselle — but wait !

Ione decided that clearer speech would do no good. When you have called a man a cur and he does not resent it, there is no more to be said.

“ You can tell your father and sisters exactly what you please,” she said ; “ I do not ask you to humble yourself at all. The main fact — that for the future there can be no talk of marriage between you and me — I shall make sufficiently clear myself.”

“ I do not doubt it,” interjected Kearney, cavalierly flicking the dust off his boot with a switch ; “ that was always a branch of business in which you excelled. But, if it is agreeable to you ” (at this point he motioned her to one of the green-painted seats near the entrance of the gardens), “ I should like, before you go, to make my side of the matter a little more obvious to you.”

Standing up very erect, Ione interrupted him.

“ The time for that was surely in the Presbytery at Grindelwald, in the presence of Christian Schlegel and Peter Jossi,” she said.

“ And of Mr. Keith Harford, your English milord ! ” said Kearney, unabashed ; “ quite so. But I was not referring to the matter of the guides. The simple, and to me sufficient fact, is that I found I had no use for the fellows. So I got rid of them in the easiest way possible — that is, by ‘ bearing ’ their market. And if the thing, owing to the interference of certain officious friends of yours, went a little further than I intended, surely that was no fault of mine. But it was rather to this late engagement of ours that I was about to allude.”

He paused and contemplated her. Formerly she had always seemed (as he confided to Astoria) to be looking

Ione Clears the Slate

through a fellow and out at the other side ; but now the directness and personality of her gaze left nothing to be desired.

"To be frank," he began, "I do not see what I was supposed to get out of it. I might just as well have been Mr. Keith Harford or any one else, who was *not* (at that time) engaged to Miss March. I never saw you out of the company of my sisters. Now you treat me as an outcast, merely on account of a little matter of business, in which your judgment did not happen to agree with mine. But I think I have been fairly straight, and certainly exceedingly long-suffering where you were concerned."

The girl moved her feet restlessly on the gravel, knitting and unknitting her fingers.

"Have you finished?" she said. "Please say all that you have to say now."

"I will," he replied promptly. "I decline to resign you in this manner, or for a cause so trivial. I do not consider our engagement at an end. One day you will be compelled to reconsider your decision, and if I understand the position of affairs, that day is not far distant. When that time comes, you will find me a pretty decent sort of fellow. Good-bye, Ione."

He lifted his hat and was gone.

Ione stood thinking over his words. What could he mean by the position of affairs? And why the tone of concealed threat in which he had spoken? However, in any case, she had had enough of the life she was leading. She would go directly to her father. She would tell him all that had been in her mind for weeks past — how she was sick to death of this empty, useless life, with no aim or object, save amusement and the killing of time. She wanted to be one of the workers. She would make a niche for herself somewhere. She

Ione March

could not any longer rest content to be simply Governor March's daughter.

But on her way to find her father she encountered Idalia Judd, in an entirely new suit of daintiness, fresh bathed, fresh clad, fresh parasoled, a white dream of lace and fluttering ribbons. Her sunshade was a separate poem. Its solid, protective parts were about three inches in diameter. The rest was composed of a creamy extravagance of lace, through which the dimpled lights and shadows danced and played bo-peep with the ever-varying expressions of the most bewitching face in the world.

At the sight of Ione she gave a little scream of joy.

"You dear! I'm so glad to see you!" she cried; "you are the only girl in the world I prefer to a sweetheart. And I think you like me better than poor Kearney. Have you been *very* cross with him? Yes, I suppose so; but now you've made it up, have n't you, like good children? That used always to be the nicest part. I wonder if you make up nicely. I do. Billy Pitt — no, Harvard Bobby it was — used always to say that it was worth while to get up a quarrel just for that. But he could n't have loved me much when he said that, could he? Afterwards he married one of those horrid McEnricks, the pork girls, you know — which proved it!" She added the last sentence reflectively, with a sigh of renunciation.

"Yes," smiled Ione, who never could be quite insensible to the bright irrelevancy of her friend; "but something happened in between, I think. Did n't you refuse him, Idalia?"

Idalia thrust out her short upper lip with a pretty grimace.

"Well, yes, perhaps I did," she admitted slowly and candidly; "you see, it is never any fun unless they propose. Anyway, it is always the quickest way when

Ione Clears the Slate

you get tired. Besides, it is such fun. They all do it so differently. There is the Shy Nice Stupid Boy, whom you have to boost up to the top of the wall, but who shuts his eyes and goes it head-foremost when he does make up his mind. That kind always kisses you unexpected-like, jumping for your cheek the way an East River boy ducks for apples. Boston Bobby was that kind — that is, at first. I was real sorry for Bobby. Then there is the Handsome Condescending. That was Percy Attwood's style — sort of first-family-of-New-England tone about Percy. Been doing it this way for several centuries — generally considered an honour, don't-you-know. That is the very kind of young man who always does have a bad time if a girl has any snap. Did you ever have any one propose to you, Ione?" Idalia hurried on — "except Kearney, of course — being engaged never counts if you mean to stick to it?"

"But I do not mean to stick to it, Idalia," said Ione very seriously; "indeed, Mr. Judd and I have agreed that there shall be no more of it. I am not engaged to your brother."

Idalia threw up her hands with a little cry.

"Oh, I am so sorry. Poor, poor Kearney! I know he has behaved so badly. But you won't cast him off, or refuse to see him. That is sure to make him just horrid and unbearable for weeks. At any rate, you might have waited till the day before he sailed. Ione — I did n't think it of you!"

And Idalia's eyes were so tearfully reproachful that they made Ione laugh.

"It won't matter," she said; "I am going away. I think I am going to earn my own living."

Idalia's face became at once a study of wonder, not un-mixed with horror, at this bewildering announcement.

"Going to earn your own living!" she cried. "Ione

Ione March

March, what *are* you talking about? You a shop-girl — though, to be sure," she added, dimpling thoughtfully for a moment, with an air of taking in all sides of the case, "even that might have its advantages. There are such nice-looking clerks in really first-class dry goods stores. Oh, I wish I could go too! Would n't we just make things 'hum,' you and I? And then we could pick up such bargains, being in the inside ring, as it were. But no, Ione — you are not in earnest. Besides, your father would never consent to your being a shop-girl. Suppose he went in for a pair of mittens, and you had to serve him. What fun that would be!"

"I was not thinking of going into a store," said Ione. "I have not yet decided what I shall do — only that I am utterly tired of doing nothing!"

"Oh, so am I, heartily!" cried Idalia. "I wish I had gone with papa to Paris. I can't imagine why any one stays in Dijon, can you? It is so dull. Not a soul worth looking at, and the soldiers all such little fellows. Now at Saumur on the Loire, or one of those rivers where father had a chateau once, there was a cavalry school, and quite a lot of nice men. Cavalry are nice anywhere, don't you think so? Only just a little stupid. Perhaps it's the oats and forage they have to know about! And, do you know, I made all the officers learn English. Talking to me quite helped their studies, they said."

Ione smiled more brightly as her companion rattled merrily on her way.

"But where was I — tell me, bright waif?" she cried, clasping Ione's arm; "I've got lost. Oh, yes, I remember; I started in with your sending poor Kearney about his business, and I had got to Saumur where school did n't keep. But seriously, Ione, you will make it up with Kearney, won't you? And if you want

Ione Clears the Slate

badly to earn your living he will get you a sweet little office all to yourself on Twenty-Third Street, where you will be fairly near our house on Fifth Avenue. If I were you, I would set up a typewriting bureau. I am sure, if I were a man, I should be just dying to have you type my things. And you would soon be quite popular, and have a *lovely* time with authors and dramatists. But dramatic critics are the handsomest — only *so* conceited. And they are tremendously high-toned, they won't mix with the others; so you would have to run a little branch establishment specially for them. I could manage that, if you liked."

As she made the suggestion Idalia patted her fichu laces into the most bewitching shapes, and smiled at her friend through the interstices of her parasol fringe, as if Ione were a dramatic critic who was in danger of taking his typewriting business to some other office.

CHAPTER XI

THE CONSENT OF GOVERNOR MARCH

BUT Ione had still a much more serious ordeal of explanation to face with her father. He had been confined to his room all the morning with a chill, and Ione found him busily working up his arrears of correspondence. When her light knock came to the door of his room Governor March answered with the nervous irritation of a man who has yet much to accomplish.

"May I come in, father?" said a fresh young voice outside, high and clear.

At the first sound of the words Mr. March passed his hand rapidly across his forehead, as though sweeping away some invisible cobwebs. Then he pushed a collection of letters and papers hastily into a table-drawer and turned to open the door to his daughter.

"Why, Ione," he said, "I call this a treat. I am glad to see you. I thought that you had gone off somewhere with the girls and Kearney."

The girl patted her father affectionately and indulgently on the head. Then she rearranged his still abundant hair with a couple of swift finger-passes, seized him determinedly by the chin, brought his head up to a convenient kissing level — and kissed him.

"It was just about Kearney Judd that I was going to speak to you, fatherkin," she said. "I want you to know that I have given him up. I never did care for him, and since that business at Grindelwald I simply could not bear to go on a day longer thinking what such a man might be to me."

The Consent of Governor March

Her father's face seemed to grow greyer and older as he listened. His nether lip quivered, but he would not let his daughter see his emotion. He walked to the window and looked out upon the long clean-swept street and at the well-behaved little children in the park, walking two by two, with a white-stringed *bonne* behind each couple. After a while he spoké.

"But have you thought what this will mean to us all?" he said, a little unevenly. "How can we remain friendly with the Judds if your engagement is broken off, Ione?" He spoké gently; yet the girl felt instinctively that he waited her answer with a certain trepidation. But she resolved not to be more serious than she could help. So she answered lightly enough, —

"I have thought of that, father. Idalia and her mother are all right, and as for the rest, they don't matter a row of pins to us!"

"Perhaps not," replied her father, rising and beginning to pace up and down the room restlessly, as he had a habit of doing when his mind was disturbed; "but the truth is, Ione, I am engaged in very extensive operations with John Cyrus Judd, — operations involving many millions of dollars — and I cannot tell all in a minute how this news may affect me. I am under very deep obligations to Mr. Judd, and —"

Governor March stopped, and looked at his daughter, as if for a moment he meditated some appeal to her. But, instead, he only sighed deeply and was silent.

"I came to tell you something else too, father," she said, laying her clasped hands palm downwards on his shoulders, and looking affectionately up in his face. "I am tired of being no better than a drag and a burden upon you. I do nothing, and I never have done anything, to help you. Let me go out and work for my living, as you did. I have been educated expensively,



Ione March

yet you know I have never earned a penny. My whole life has been swaddled in cotton wool. It is a dead life, a useless life. Father, I would rather sell flowers on the street, I would rather peddle candy on a train, than go on like this. Let me go out and do something. I know French and German well enough to teach a little, I suppose." She smiled. "You yourself made me learn shorthand and the typewriter, like the good old dad that you were. That surely is some outfit. I have good health. I know I have a spirit which will make me go through with things. Let me swim out a bit into the open and feel the need of keeping myself afloat, as you did when you were a young man."

Almost at her first words Governor March had thrust his hands deep in his pockets, and now stood silent, with his legs wide apart, staring down at his daughter as if she had suddenly gone mad.

"Why have you taken it into your head that you must do this wild thing, Ione?" he said, drawing his hand from his pocket and laying it tenderly on Ione's arm. "My girl, you are as innocent of the world as a week-old kitten. And you want to earn your own living! Why, what do you suppose I have been toiling for ever since I buried your mother, but that you might be able to go where the best go, know the best people, and (when you felt like it) marry among the best."

Ione could not resist a little shudder at the idea called up by her father's last words, and a bitter word slipped out before she knew it.

"Mr. Kearney Judd is of the best, I suppose?" she said.

Governor March winced a little, as if he had been smitten lightly on the face with a glove.

"Well," he answered slowly, with the level courage which had carried him through his war-governorship,

The Consent of Governor March

"Kearney Judd is in one sense of our best. His father represents some of our greatest interests. I think that the young man has behaved very badly in this matter, perhaps. But there may be circumstances which we do not know. There generally are in such cases; and when you are older you will know that the world never listens to more than one side of any controversy. But this wild idea of going out to work for yourself — you do not mean it seriously?"

"But that is just what I do mean, father," she answered, with something of his own grave decision; "I have been thinking of it deeply. I cannot bear to be useless any longer — just a thing to be provided for, petted, coaxed, my slightest tastes consulted, a limitless bank account at my disposal, to be expected to care for nothing but shopping and visiting and entertaining, on the Continent to-day, in England to-morrow, at home the week after next. Such a life may suit many girls, but it would kill me. Besides, you know, if once I had tried the other and satisfied myself, I might be able to settle down to this."

Governor March laid his hand on his daughter's arm, as though touched by the gentle tone of the last words.

"Ione," he said, "I loved your mother. I never spoke a cross word to her in all my life. Neither have I ever refused you anything you have asked me. If your heart is set on this thing — why, Ione, you are of age, you are an American girl, you are my girl. I will not say you nay. But — you must promise me that if you are in any trouble, in the least difficulty out of which I can help you, you will wire or cable me at once, without waiting a moment."

He lifted his hand from her arm and laid it on his brow, pressing the fingers down hard, as if on an aching nerve.

Ione March

"I do not know what may come out of all this for us, Ione," he said slowly; "but if it be your wish, and you have set your heart on it, I will help you to do it."

The young girl went over to her father. She put her arms about his neck, and drew his head down with loving compulsion.

"My boy," she said, using the name he loved best, because Ione's mother had called him by it, "you are the best friend in all the world, and the soundest-hearted. I am an ungrateful girl to speak of leaving you. But you know you never did give me a chance to do anything, or to earn any money. And you know too that at my age you would not have liked it yourself. And then — who knows? — you might have grown up like Kearney, instead of being as you are, my noble, handsome old sweetheart of a father."

And with her fingers she rumbled the abundant grey hair, which still curled crisp and vigorous about his temples.

"Well, Ione, my little girl," he answered, after he had kissed her cheek with the grace of a cavalier, "you know your father is not the man to forbid you even if he could. What you say, goes. And if you feel a serious call to black boots on the streets of London for a living, you can do it. Only do not quite forget your old dad, who has worked so proudly for you all these years, ever since he took you out of your mother's arms that night. She smiled and said she was glad you were a pretty baby. And so, still smiling, she slipped away, and left behind her — only you — and me!"

CHAPTER XII

THE CUCKOO IN THE NEST

WHEN Ione came to London to begin life on her own account, she obtained a situation with almost suspicious promptitude. Upon her first arrival, she had applied for work to several prominent typewriting agencies. These had no vacancies, but in every case her name was taken, the rate at which she could write shorthand noted and filed, presumably for reference, together with an impromptu specimen of her by no means discreditable performance upon the nearest machine which happened to be disengaged.

Then it came into her head that in the advertisements of the typewriters which she had always used with her father, the purchase of which had been committed to her, she had observed it stated that typewriting in all its branches was carried on by the company. She found the offices of the Gopher & Arlington Company in a new building near the eastern end of the Embankment. The firm was a dignified and exclusive corporation, and the announcement upon the door without simply intimated the fact that the Gopher & Arlington typewriter might be purchased within. But in the hushed yet busy office a score of clicking machines were being driven along at different rates of speed, each shrilling its own peculiar note of irritation as busy girlish fingers tripped lightly over the keys.

At the first mention of her name, Ione March was shown at once to the manager's room. Her heart sank

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as she entered. She made certain that she had been mistaken for a customer, and now that she was an applicant for work such a supposition was inauspicious. But yet, on the mere declaration of her needs and capacities, she found herself engaged. At least, she was to be accepted on probation, and the wages were a pound a week. In five minutes Ione found herself with her hat and coat off, seated beside a beautiful new machine, close by one of the largest windows of the wide City office.

Her heart beat quickly as after a draught of wine while she fingered the keys and tried the paces of her machine. Definitely this was life at last, she thought. She stole one glance at the busy girls around her, and observing that not one of them paused to lift their eyes or appeared to observe the new-comer, a strange elation and joy pervaded her whole being.

"At last I too am a worker," she said to herself; "I am on the street level of humanity. I am a unit in the great army of those who earn the bread they eat."

Her meditations were cut short by the appearance at her side of a girl with eyes of a faint and cloudy blue and hair rebelliously wispy, which stood out in auburn tufts about her brow. She set a black japanned structure before Ione and was retreating without a word. Ione looked up inquiringly. The girl with the blue tired eyes surveyed her sternly, but when the bright frankness of Ione's glance encountered hers the hard expression melted a little.

"The manager sends you this copy-holder," she said quietly, and forthwith vanished back towards the upper end of the hall, among cashiers' desks and multitudinous obstructions of polished hardwood.

Ione was at first exceedingly grateful, but after she had finished a sheet or two, and was pausing to read her work over, it struck her that she alone of all those bend-

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ing and clicking workers possessed such a thing as a copy-holder. It was strange, and Ione strove to fathom the meaning of this especial favour. It seemed a singularly delicate compliment to pay to a new-comer.

But the matter did not long disturb her. She was delighted with her new avocation, and tingled with happiness as she touched the keys of the beautiful machine she had been set to "operate." They went down easily as her slim but capable fingers pressed them, and they rose with a fine crisp insurgence which imparted a feeling of life to the keyboard. A corresponding elation took hold of Ione. She had never, she thought, been so happy before. She felt that she could pass her life amid such surroundings.

"How could my father," she meditated, "know the happiness of work himself, and yet deny it to me, his only daughter?"

Promptly at the stroke of one all the girls rose quietly and went to a little dressing-room in the rear of the main building. From this they presently emerged in straggling groups, silent so long as they were upon the premises tenanted by the Gopher & Arlington Company, but (as Ione was enabled to see through her window) voluble enough so soon as they reached the pavement of the dingy little lateral street, on the side-walk of which they formed a troublous eddy, tossed aside, as it were, by the stream of traffic which poured ceaselessly up and down the great thoroughfare in front.

Ione noticed that not a glance betraying the slightest interest was thrown in her direction — not a smile nor so much as a nod was wasted upon her. This, she thought, might be business etiquette, but it did not at all accord with that good comradeship which she had always heard obtained amongst fellow-workers. She had never doubted her power to make people like her; and

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now, though she would not own it to herself, she was intensely disappointed. Two girls only were left in the working hall after the general exodus — the girl with the pale clever face shaded by the jagged wisps of ruddy hair above her brow, and a dark silent girl who clicked steadily at her machine in a dusky corner near the door of the manager's room.

Ione took a sheet of her manuscript in her hand, and, for the first time in her life, hungry for recognition and sympathy, started towards the dark girl, resolved to ask her a question. But as she went she saw the girl with the blue eyes watching her as a cat watches a mouse. There was something strangely attractive about the face which was turned to her, something of the keenly defensive look of a frightened wild animal that has been hunted and expects to be hunted again. Ione changed her mind, and went towards her instead of in the direction of the dark girl.

She smiled frankly as she advanced — that trustful smile which had enslaved the Sisters of the Convent, and which had never been crossed by ill-success or any angry word.

"Would you mind telling me, please," she said, "how I should do this note? Ought I to put it at the foot of the page under a line, or place it here in the margin?"

The girl averted her eyes, so that she should not look Ione in the face.

"I am not hear to teach other people their work!" she replied brusquely, and forthwith turned to her own machine.

For a moment Ione was stunned. Tears rose involuntarily in her eyes. She was turning away, when it suddenly struck her that there must be a misunderstanding somewhere.

"Do you know, that was not very kindly said," she

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answered slowly; "I am a new-comer. We would not do that to you if you came to my country."

"Yes, you would," answered the girl defiantly, "if I came to your country as you have come to ours."

"I think there must be some mistake," said Ione, faltering a little; "I am an American girl. I came to London simply to earn my bread."

The girl darted an angry look at her, and not even the anger of dark eyes is so wounding as the steely glitter when kindly blue ones glance suddenly keen as rapiers.

"Earn your bread!" she said scornfully. "Oh, yes; we know all about your bread."

"Indeed," said Ione, in some distress; "then you know more than I do. For it will be a week before I touch a penny of my wages."

The girl with the pale face shook her head angrily, so that the ruddy elf-locks stood out more belligerently than ever. Ione was turning away sadly, but with an instinct for the right word at the right moment, which never deserted her in an emergency, she sent back a Parthian shot over her shoulder.

"I am sorry that you are unkind. I was sure from the first that you would like me!"

The girl looked up quickly, and turned her head very slightly to see whether the dark girl was listening. She was clicking steadily and sullenly, in the dim corner by the manager's door. Then, with the slightest movement of her head, she recalled Ione to her side. And the daughter of the millionaire went with gratitude and joy.

"When you get out, go up the side street out there," she said. "Meet me at the east corner, behind the office, at half-past two, and I will talk to you."

The sullen girl had lifted her head and was looking at them with a peculiar expression on her face. Ione's

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companion, observing this, shrugged her shoulders and tossed her head.

"I have nothing further to say to you, miss!" she said loudly to Ione, as if she had been answering a question or refusing an appeal.

Whereat, understanding that she was dismissed, Ione returned to her place.

Precisely as the clock struck the hour, the girls began to return in twos and threes. As they entered, they went first to the cloak-room, and then, as directly as a homing bee, each returned to her own work. No one stole a glance in her direction, and Ione understood that this inexplicable lack of interest meant that for some unknown offence she had been sent to the typists' Coventry, for her intrusion upon the offices of the Gopher & Arlington Corporation.

"Never mind," so she comforted herself; "the pale girl will tell me all about it, and I shall know how to make it all right with them. They *shall* like me before I have done with them."

It was her first rebuff, and it came specially hard upon Ione just when her heart yearned wildly to be friendly with all her fellow-workers.

Exactly at half-past two she was at the east corner of the side street so lucidly designated by the girl of the revolutionary love-locks. She was not to be seen. Ione walked two or three times backward and forward, growing gradually conscious of the eyes which followed her from first-floor offices, where young gentlemen with pens in their hands called each other forward to look at her. Just as she was beginning to fear that she might have mistaken the place or gone to the wrong corner, her arm was seized from the dark of a doorway beside a little pork shop, and she was pulled inside. She found herself face to face with the pale girl. Without speak-

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ing a word, they went up the stairs to a barren little landing paved with stone flags round which closed and grimy doors frowned at the two girls, as if demanding their business there.

"I am glad you have come," said Ione, without circumlocution; "now tell me, what have I done wrong that the girls do not like me?"

"They think you are a 'cuckoo,'" answered the pale girl promptly.

"A cuckoo!" said Ione, bewildered. "Is this a joke?"

"You will find it no joke!" said her companion, nodding somewhat truculently, yet with an obvious effort, and she averted her face as often as she met the honest forth-looking eyes of Ione March.

"Why, then, do you call me a 'cuckoo'?" said Ione.

"You want me to tell you — then I will!" burst out the pale girl. "You are a 'cuckoo' because you have been 'planted' upon us. Oh, we know all about it at the Gopher & Arlington. We've been there before. You don't earn your own living. A gentleman came and arranged about you with the manager. He, and not the company, pays your wages. That is n't any pound-a-week dress. These are n't pound-a-week shoes! No, nor what you have got at the end of that gold chain under your dress — that's no pound-a-week locket. I don't ask what it is. Maybe I don't quite blame you as the rest of the girls do. But just the same, you are a 'cuckoo.' If you are square, then you don't need the work. Or else you come to improve, so that you may undersell us, and cut our rates for the sake of a little extra pocket-money. You take the bread out of somebody's mouth — you that don't need it. And you are so good-looking that you should be sent to all the fat

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jobs. You'll have the nicest letters to write and all the easiest pickings — just as you've got the new machine and a copy-holder. Look here, did you see that girl in the dark corner? Well, she was told to give up her seat near the window to you, and her eyes are weak. Is n't that enough reason why you are a 'cuckoo'?"

The pale girl had grown excited with her oratory. Courage had come to her in the act of speech, as, indeed, it has a trick of doing. Her eyes engaged somewhat fiercely those dark ones of Ione's, over which there was now spreading a surface-mist of unshed tears.

But in a moment Ione had commanded herself.

"There is some mistake," she said quickly. "I came to the Gopher & Arlington quite by chance, after trying several other offices. The manager was very kind. He questioned me and asked my name. As soon as I told him, he engaged me at once. But certainly no one came to arrange about me, for I don't know a soul in London at this moment except yourself and the people at the hotel where I have always stayed!"

The girl still regarded her somewhat suspiciously, but Ione's eyes had their wonted effect, and doubt shrank before the level loyalty which shone out of their depths.

"What is your name?" she asked less aggressively.

"My name is Ione March."

"Mine is Jane Allen," volunteered the girl, tacitly acknowledging the courtesy and speaking with more equality than she had yet shown. "I do like you — and if what you tell me is true —"

Ione's eyes were still upon her, and she could not this time drop hers. Jane Allen moved restively and tapped the grimy flags of the landing with her foot.

"You know that what I say is true!" said Ione quietly.

The Cuckoo in the Nest

"But there certainly was a gentleman here. We all saw him — very handsome, with grey hair, and he had a long talk with the manager. He brought him a letter of introduction from the manager of the First National Bank of Chicago. I know because Ruth Menks, who is in the private office (she writes ninety words a minute), found the envelope in the waste-paper basket and showed it me. Then, after the gentleman went, when she was called in again, she got orders that Miss Briggs was to give up her table, that a new machine was to be sent there and the place left vacant. These were all signs. We had seen them before. And so the girls nodded to each other and said 'Cuckoo!' Then you came along, and were engaged like a shot."

A sudden thought struck Ione — a thought which heated her cheek, and yet which made her inclined to laugh:

She took a photograph out of a small leather case she carried in her pocket, and handed it to Miss Jane Allen.

"Was that your handsome grey-haired gentleman?" she said.

The girl looked at Ione with a sudden contemptuous sharpening of her features, expressed by a certain narrowing of the eyes, and a quick droop of the muscles at the corner of the nose. "That's the man," she said in a low voice. "I thought so. The girls were right, after all!"

"Open the case at the back," answered Ione calmly, "and read what is written on it."

The girl touched the catch somewhat contemptuously, and pulled open the little leather flap.

"To Ione March, from her affectionate father, Henry Quincy March," she read aloud.

"Is this your father?" she asked; "and are you really called Ione March?"

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"That is true," smiled Ione; "I see it all now. My father wished me to get an easy situation; and in his innocence he thought that he would arrange matters quietly — 'man to man,' as he always says. So he went straight to the manager and, well — arranged them with a vengeance."

"Now look here," said Jane Allen, jerking her head emphatically, "of course you might have written the whole thing yourself. I don't know your handwriting. But all the same I believe you, though I warn you the girls may not. But what made you leave home if your father is as rich as all that — the boss seeing him to the door as if he were the Managing Director, and everything arranged in a minute?"

Ione hesitated. It seemed strange that she should be willing to make the most private explanations on the grimy first landing of a dismal London staircase, to a little cockney girl with pale blue eyes and wispy locks of reddish hair beneath her shilling hat. "There was trouble at home," she said slowly, and looked away through the window.

"Ah," said Jane Allen, with the instinctive sympathy of a fellow-sufferer in her voice. She came very quickly a step nearer, and looked piercingly into Ione's eyes. "It was about your young man, was it? Would they not let you have him?"

"Hardly that," said Ione gravely, wondering how she would put the matter. "I — he, that is —"

"He was not true to you?" questioned the pale girl, a light beginning to burn like a lamp in her eyes and a hectic flush beaconing on her cheek; "he went away, did n't he — cast you off, did n't he? I know them!"

"Not exactly," said Ione, hesitating. "I was engaged to a young man, and — well, I found him out; that's all!"

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And a little throb came into her throat which the pale girl mistook for tears. It was really thankfulness.

Jane Allen's eyes blazed. She breathed quick and short and caught Ione by the wrist.

"Thank God for that, Miss March, if you did it in time!"

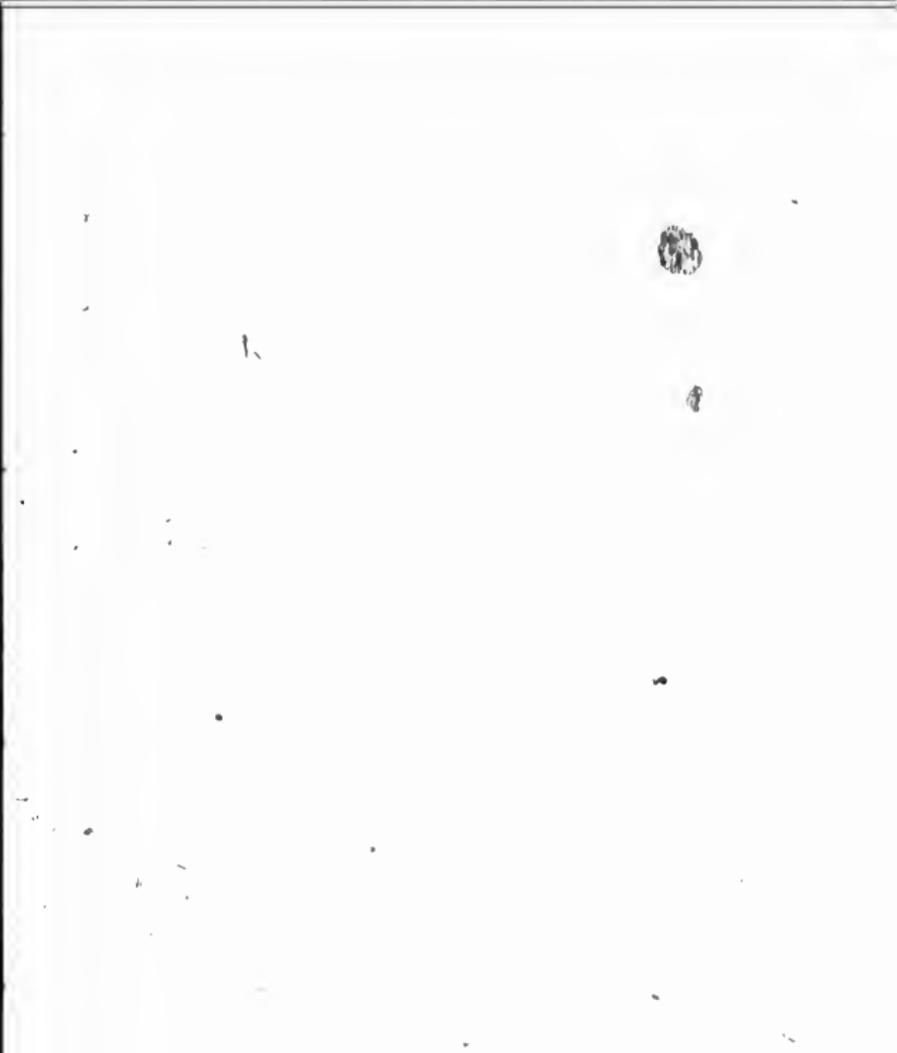
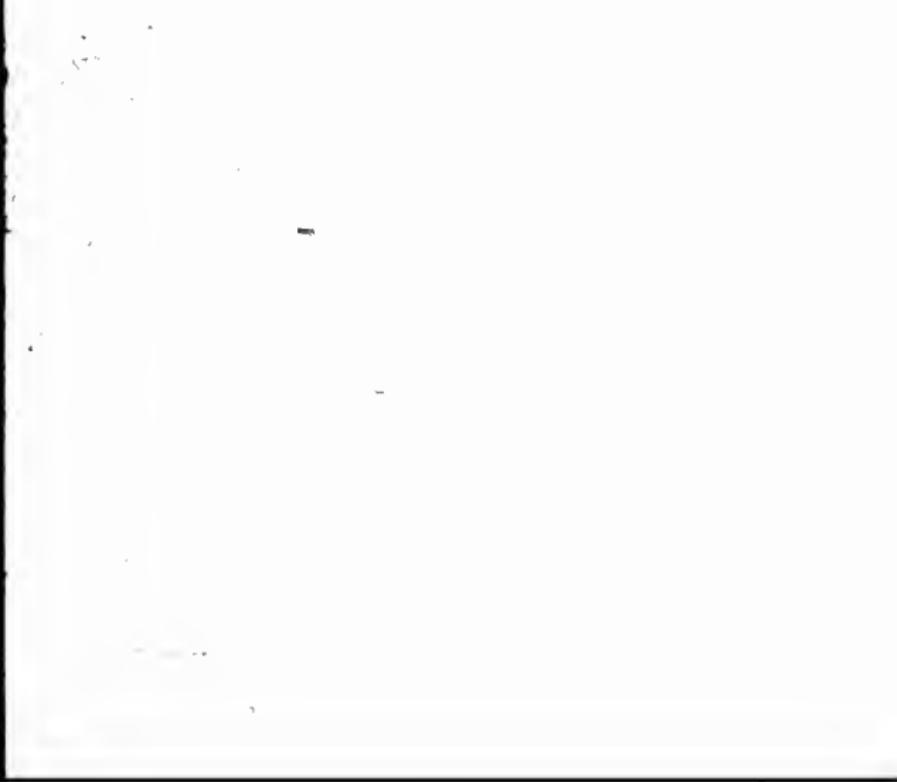
"So I left home," continued Ione; "I could not stay any longer there: and I came to London to earn my living."

"Of course you could n't!" cried Jane Allen. "I know!"

Ione held out her hand, but the pale girl, with a quick and lively joy on her face, threw her arms about her neck and kissed her.

"I'm so glad you found him out," she almost sobbed.

"I'm so glad you found him out in time!"



CHAPTER XIII

THE CUCKOO LEAVES THE NEST

NEXT morning Ione was first of all the girls at the office. The manager only was before her. He stood at his desk in the inner office arranging the work for the day, and looking over the pile of letters requiring attention. Ione went up to him with her usual light, quick, decisive step.

"I am obliged to you, sir, for your courtesy to me, and for the attention which you were good enough to pay to my father's wishes," she said; "but you will not be surprised that when I know the facts I cannot continue to accept work on these conditions. I shall have to give up my position here."

The manager was a young man still, though lifelong absorption in a rushing business had aged him before his time.

"Miss March," he said earnestly enough, "I hope you will not do that. Apart altogether from your father's wishes, you do your work very well. Yesterday you read that difficult scientific manuscript, after two others had failed. We cannot afford to do without you."

He smiled and resumed the scrutiny of his letters, as if he considered the matter at an end. But Ione had no intention that it should be settled so easily.

"I am indeed sorry, sir, that I cannot agree with you. You mean it in the kindest way, I know. But by receiving wages on the conditions which my father arranged with you I am keeping some one else out of an excellent position. I am usurping some other girl's

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place. Be good enough to inform me what notice I must give to the Company, in order that I may make other arrangements."

"I trust you will see things differently and remain with us," said the manager, coming round from his desk, and standing up (as he did to a good customer) with his hand on the ledge of his bureau. "The girls will soon get over any little feeling they may have at present, and I can assure you that you will find yourself better off in a large and well-appointed office than elsewhere."

Ione shook her head and smiled at him.

"I did not propose, when I left home and undertook to earn my living, that my father should pay my wages."

"I assure you, madam," said the manager emphatically, "that, though we were certainly glad to oblige a man so well known and influential as Governor March, we should be sorry to lose your services for their own sake."

"Thank you," said Ione; "but, nevertheless, I should like, if possible, to leave to-night."

The manager was more and more anxious to get back to his correspondence. He had been casting furtive glances at it over the corner of his desk. He had done his best. The daughter of the rich war governor was well enough, but, after all, he had a long and complicated day's work before him. In a few minutes his town travellers upon commission would be upon him, and he did not yet know how many machines he had received from New York ready to be put upon the London market.

"I am indeed sorry," he said, bowing to the girl with an air of finality, "if it is your intention to leave us. But, of course, so far as the Gopher & Arlington Company is concerned, you are at liberty to come and go at your pleasure."

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Ione thanked him cordially, and was turning away.

"Miss March," he continued, "if you wish at any time a testimonial from us to enable you to obtain another situation, I shall be glad to be of any service to you. I am sure you will find such a guarantee almost essential."

"I should like to take one now," said practical Ione, smiling upon him.

The manager gasped and started, glancing piteously at the pile of letters still unopened before him.

"Very well," he said; "I shall make a note of the matter and dictate you a certificate in the course of the day."

Ione went to her place. The girls were already passing in, and with business-like quickness arranging their work upon their little tables. One or two of them even glanced distantly in her direction. Jane Allen walked directly up to Ione and shook hands.

"Good-morning," she said. "I am glad to see you. And so will all the other girls be soon. They are coming round."

"It will have to be very soon, then," said Ione, smiling, "for the nest will be empty this evening at six. The 'cuckoo' is going to fly sharp at that hour."

"You are not leaving?" queried the girl, astonished.

Ione smiled and nodded as she inserted more sheets of "scientific" in her copy-holder.

"My dear," she said, "what I told you is true. You believe it, but the girls might not. Besides, when you leave home to earn your own living, you don't want your father to help pay your wages."

There was a flush of reproach on the pale face of Jane Allen.

"You are not going to make it up with *him*?" she whispered suspiciously, with an accent on the pro-

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noun which showed that she did not refer to Governor March.

This time Ione laughed outright.

"There is no fear of that!" she said, smiling down at the fierce impetuosity of her companion.

"Ah, you never know," said the pale girl, speaking in a low, intense whisper, "when they come excusing and explaining, and coaxing and petting. At first you tell him that you hate the sight of him. But if he catches you round the waist (as he will be sure to do if he knows his business), then sharp little strings begin to tug about your heart that you never knew were there before — why, then there is no saying what you may be fool enough to do."

And again the blue eyes filled with fire, burning with a dry and tearless flame, which lighted up the pale face with a certain fierce dignity.

"Do not be afraid," said Ione gently, putting a hand on her arm; "he will never come back, nor trouble me any more."

At that moment the manager came out of the inner office, and the girls were soon clicking away for dear life. Jane Allen went to her place, and began to rattle faster than any of them, as if to work off some hidden emotion. Only once she leaned over to her neighbour with a paper in her hand, as if to ask a question. When she returned to her work the fluttering sheet had disappeared.

Instantly a leaven of interest and kindliness began to spread about the room, washing unregarded round the window-seat where Ione sat, unconscious of all save her task. Soon the girls no longer avoided the place. One came and asked the loan of the office dictionary, "if Miss March was quite sure she was not using it?" Another took one of two damask roses from her bosom and laid it on Ione's desk as she passed.

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"It's rather faded," she whispered, "but it has a nice enough scent, and it will suit your colour of hair."

As Ione thanked her, with the smile which had been as irresistible to women as to men, she became conscious of the new atmosphere which had begun to pervade the large workroom, and of course put the change down to the beneficent influence of Jane Allen.

It was at the dinner-hour that these manifestations reached their climax. As the girls were filing out, the dark, sullen girl whom Ione had dispossessed in passing laid a paper on her desk, and without a word or moving a muscle went her way. Ione opened the note, which was folded in the orthodox manner, and written upon a slightly damaged sheet of office paper. It read thus:—

"Gopher & Arlington Type-
Writer Co.,
1005, King William Street,
E. C.

"We, the girls in this office, are sorry for our rudeness to Miss March, the result of a misunderstanding. We beg to offer sincere apologies. We also join in hoping that Miss March will remain among us."

Then followed a strange variety of marks, asterisks, double hyphens, broken single letters, twenty or thirty in all, arranged at intervals down the page like a Chinese ideograph.

Beneath these was a note written by hand in the upright civil service handwriting authorised by the direction for the insertion of corrections which could not be typewritten:—

The Cuckoo Leaves the Nest

"I don't mind about the table in the window a little bit. I can see just as well where I am. I hope you will stop."

"Cissy."

The tears welled up from deep down in Ione's heart. For the first time since she had discovered the hollowness of her life on the Dijon boulevard she felt inclined to cry. She started up impulsively to follow the dark girl. But there was no one in the room except Jane Allen, who as usual took her dinner interval at a later hour than the others.

Ione went over to her with the paper in her hand.

"You did this!" she said, with a kind of uncertainty in her voice, which in another woman would have been the prelude to hysterics.

The pale girl looked up quickly.

"Now, don't," she said, rising to her feet; "that never does any good — except sometimes when he is near and you have a chance to cry your cry out comfortably."

"But what are all these marks?" asked Ione, with a somewhat strained little laugh, in order to change the subject. For Ione had an idea that in talking to the pale girl she was somehow treading perilously near the verges of a tragedy.

"Oh, the things on the paper," said Jane Allen. "These are the girls' own marks — private signatures, that is. You see, all our machines except yours are old ones, and though they look the same, so that most people can't tell one from the other, there's always something different about every typewriter, so that we can distinguish their work. See that capital F — it has got no fore-serif. It's like one of those long s's in old books. That's the typing signature of the tall fair girl, Milly Nunn, who runs machine number ten over there in the

Ione March

corner. That 'period' below the line is mine, and the dagger with the point broken off so close that it looks like a cross is Cissy's, the girl who gave you the paper."

A warmth ran round Ione's heart.

"They are good, kind girls," she said, softly, meditating to herself. "I shall be sorry to leave!"

"Then you won't go?" said Jane Allen, who misinterpreted the signs of resolution.

"No," said Ione, "I must leave all the same. Only now I shall be sorry to go. That is all the difference."

A flash lit up the face of the pale girl — something hopeful and glorifying, as if sudden sunshine had lighted upon her ruddy hair. For the first time it struck Ione that in health and the elation of hope she must have been very pretty. Her hair was of the richest Venetian red, with golden lights and mahogany shadows in it; and it stood out round her face in a misty aureole, all wisps and streaks like a stormy sunset.

"I say," she said eagerly, "if you mean work really, will you room with me? You are a lady. You've lived in hotels, and abroad. You've always had pretty things about you, and you don't know a bit what a single room up Clapham-way means. But with me I think you would be fairly comfortable — at least, till you get something better."

Jane Allen had grown suddenly shy, and Ione's pause of silence disconcerted her. "Of course if you'd rather not —" she began.

Ione put her hands on the girl's thin angular shoulders and looked into her eyes.

"Do you know, Jane," she said, "I feel as if my life were just beginning. You and the girls have melted me more than all my past life put together. I am really quite poor. I am stopping at an hotel, which is much dearer than I can afford. I am leaving my situation.

The Cuckoo Leaves the Nest

I have a quick temper; but if you will have me, I shall be glad to come with you."

Jane Allen threw her arms about Ione's neck.

"Oh," she cried, "don't be alarmed, we'll knock it out together right enough. Most of us are a pretty decent lot — as good as you can expect for fifteen shillings a week — and overtime. And as for temper, you will find that there's a good deal of that about in the hot weather. I've got a prime sample of my own. Only I don't keep it to myself, nor put it out to nurse. Oh no; it comes away like snow off a roof, and for five minutes every one gets the benefit of it — first come, first served. But you and I will hit it, so long as we agree never to sulk or bear grudges without speaking out."

"Oh, I'll tell quick enough," said Ione, with that perilously sweet smile which several times had brought her lips into danger in conservatories and upon moonlight promenades. Ione had a way of confiding a smile to a spectator as if it were meant as a personal compliment — which is well enough with women, but may be dangerous with men.

"Do you know, Ione (may I call you that?), I'm going to kiss you just once for keeps, and then stop. You'll think I'm a great one for kissing. Well, I'm not. I have not kissed any one — since — ah, since ever so long ago!"

She caught her hand to her breast quickly, as though a memory took her by the throat.

"But there's something about you. I don't know what it is; but I'm sure if I were your sweetheart I would kiss you hard — yes, hard and often. And yet you never have been kissed?"

A bright and hearty laugh from Jane Allen's new room-mate destroyed the tension of the situation.

Ione March

"Oh yes, I have!" she cried, with humorous indignation. "Why do you think I've never been kissed?"

The pale girl had the hectic brightness on her cheekbones now, and her eyes were dark and dewy, the fire in them all quenched in dreamy retrospection.

"Oh, no — you have n't," she said, smiling softly at Ione; "you know nothing about it. But you will, yes, you will — some day!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE PROFESSIONAL ADMIRER

THE girls stood about the door that night to bid Ione good-bye. They were genuinely sorry now that she was going, but half consoled when they heard that they would be able to hear of her from Jane Allen. The dark girl Cissy came last.

"Don't you give in or take a penny-piece from one of them!" she said, and pressed Ione's hand.

"She thinks it's your people who have been horrid to you," Jane Allen explained. "I let it go at that — I thought you would not care to have me say anything about *him*."

Jane Allen and Ione took the Underground Railway at the Mansion House for the station which was nearest to Audley Street, Battersea, where they were to "room" together. At the pigeon-hole they obtained third-class tickets, and went tripping and chattering down the dark steps. Ione had never been on the Underground in her life, but her heart was jubilant within her. On former visits to London she had often seen, from carriage or hansom, white wreaths of spume slowly sifting through occasional blow-holes, or belching suddenly upwards through blackened gratings, mixed with soot-flakes and jets of steam. On these occasions she had been informed by her father that an engine on the Underground was coaling up, and that the Elevated system of passenger carriage used in New York was infinitely to be preferred, being at once healthier, more accessible, cheaper to build, and infinitely more lucrative to those who controlled the stock.

Ione March

On the platform one of two young men were waiting for west-bound trains. Most of them turned sharply to watch Ione's tall lithe figure and quick grace of movement. But the girl never so much as saw them. She was not even conscious of their presence, still less of their very evident admiration. Her mind was busy with what she would attempt on the morrow, where she would apply for work, and what future amends she would make to Jane Allen for her kindness.

But not a look or a whisper was lost upon Ione's companion. When the train slid alongside the platform, with that purposeful growling rush which characterises all underground trains, one of these young men, dressed in faultless frock-coat and tall glossy hat, followed Jane into the third-class compartment. He sat down opposite Ione, keeping his eyes all the time steadily fixed on her face, even when he pulled on his gloves and crossed his hands on the knob of his umbrella.

Ready anger kindled in the heart of Jane Allen, who in her turn watched him as a dour-hearted bull terrier may watch a bigger dog in order to select the exact spot on the neck for a first hold. A middle-aged, comfortable-looking woman was broadly occupying much of the middle of the opposite seat.

"Ione," said Jane Allen sharply, "you had better sit over there. This side is draughty. Perhaps the lady would be good enough to make room for you beside her."

"Aye, that I will," said the woman, with a broad country accent, "and bless yo' bonny face. I've been at t' market to buy a bit o' fish for my man's breakfast. Eh, but my William's main fond o' flounder — nobbut he can ate cod — aye, or salmon either, when he can get it."

Ione went contentedly over to the corner indicated, where, under cover of William's missus and the basket

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of flounders, she presently found herself deep in conversation upon the merits of fish as a regular diet for husbands. But Jane Allen moved directly in front of the young man, and stared fiercely and disdainfully back at him.

"There, mister," she seemed to say, "you can't see her you want to see. But you are welcome to stare at me, Jane Allen, as much as ever you like. I know your sort. All the same" (she meditated), "that tailor-made tweed suit of Ione's won't do. We must get her a nice black merino before she is a day older."

"Ah, lady," William's missus was saying meanwhile, all unconscious of Jane's angry by-play, "there's them that likes 'em fresh at nine for a shillin' — and they're welcome to spend 'stravagant if they can afford to fling good money in the fire, as it were. And there's them that likes 'em salted, and I winnot deny but they're tasty so, and go a long way in a family. But then, bein' briny by natur', they stimillates a thirst and sends men to the beer-shop. Not but what my William — bless him! — would scorn to do such a thing, for a more sober man — But, as I was saying, for a downright tasty dish that's as good as any Lord Mayor's banquet, give me a couple o' nice full-flavored red herrings, with a gloss on them like a peacockses' neck, and done on the tongs over a clear fire. Why, the very smell o' them alone brings William hoppin' up them stairs three at a time as soon as ever it ketches his nose half-way down our street."

When they reached the station at which they were to get out, Ione remained obdurately interested in the merits of red herrings, as expounded by William's missus, and profoundly unconscious of the attractions of the young man who was still sitting opposite to Jane Allen. He had been trying to fascinate Ione, by circumventing

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with looks of admiration the voluptuous outlines of the lady of the market-basket.

William's missus was still busy at her explanation when it was time for Ione to get out. "And you see, my dear, says I to him, 'Weelum,' says I, 'I ha' been a long-sufferin' woman and a hard-workin' all my days, and I have n't come to this at my time o' life that a cherry-faced traipsin' hussy like Marthy Burton can reproach me for wearin' yellow gum-flowers in my bonnet. Ah, good-day to you, lady, and blessings on the sweet young face o' ye!"

For the smile had done its appointed work, and Weelum's missus would have fought a pitched battle with Marthy Burton or any other for Ione March before she had been five minutes beside her. Yet Ione had scarcely spoken twenty words to her.

The young man in the tight frock-coat got out and walked along the platform and up the stairs immediately behind Ione and Jane. The latter kept her eyes straight before her, but, as she said afterwards, her ears were laid back till they grew perfectly stiff with listening for his footsteps. And all the while the unconscious Ione chatted gaily on, her hand on her companion's arm, for the excitement of a new life was upon her. The sounds and scents of this world of hard-working millions were like notes in a song to her. Each little gate and brass plate — they were passing the Battersea model cottages — waked a very pæan of gladness in her heart. She was in the midst of a fresh burst of wonder and admiration at the flowers and plants which she had seen at one of the windows, when a shadow seemed to fall across them both. The frock-coated young man was at their side with his hat off, and, though his words did not reach Ione, he was apparently inquiring whether he might be permitted to "see the ladies home."

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"JANE ALLEN MOVED DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE YOUNG MAN."



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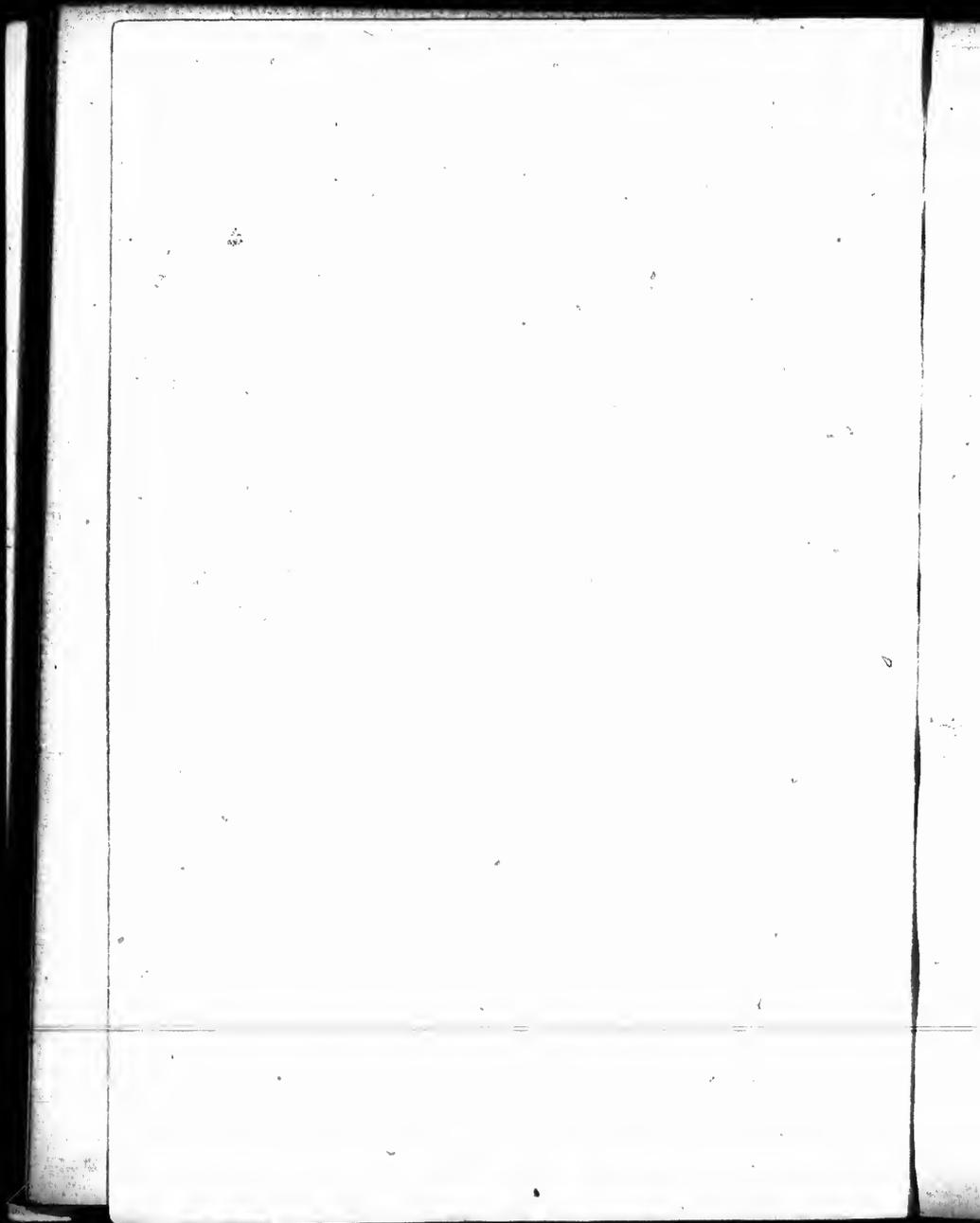
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Ione looked him over with a certain cold, disapproving inspection, but she was wholly unprepared for Jane Allen's burst of passion. Left to herself, she would probably have dismissed the youth as she might an intrusive dog, and passed on her serene maiden way without a thought or a tremor. But Jane (as she herself put it) had been saving it up for this young man.

She turned upon him with her hands clenched, and a deep glow of suppressed anger in her eyes.

"You cur!" she almost hissed. "If you dare to utter another word or persist in following us another step, I'll put this into you."

And she opened a little knife with which she did her pencil-sharpening and erasures in the office. The young man appeared half amused and half intimidated. But apparently he was used to such adventures. For he made the girls a still more profound bow, and, speaking clearly for the first time, began to assure them that, though only his sincere admiration could justify his intrusion, he could not think of their going alone through so dangerous a district, and that he was resolved to see them both safely home.

Jane Allen's teeth glittered and her lip curled with contempt in a way which might have warned any less self-satisfied wooer.

"Oh, you will — will you?" she said. "We will see about that as soon as we meet a policeman. Stand back, I say!" and she poised her arm like a black-skirted St. George getting ready to spit the dragon on a broken-bladed pen-knife.

The young man continued to smile, but now somewhat less assuredly.

"I did not mean to offend you, young lady," he said; "besides, if I may say so without offence, it was your friend's acquaintance I particularly wished to make."

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"I dare say," retorted Jane shortly. "Stand out of the way!"

But the young man did not leave them.

Walking abreast, with Jane Allen in the middle, the three now arrived at a lonely, unfrequented place between the bounding walls of a large engineering works. Here the young man thought he saw his chance. Ione's air of having heard nothing alarming deceived him. He came round and walked beside her, trying to look back into her face with his most fascinating smile.

Thus, while Jane became every moment more and more speechless with indignation, they arrived opposite a gate, one half of which stood open. They saw a long array of machinery in all stages of repair and resolution into component parts, whilst a pulsing recurrent thro' from somewhere unseen told of a prisoned heart of steam. Jane Allen looked through the gate with anxious eyes. Her face suddenly brightened. A figure in a dingy blue jacket was walking away from them with slow steps.

"Tom!" she cried eagerly — "Tom Adair!"

The figure in dingy blue turned, and seeing the girls, came towards them with ever-quickenng steps as he caught the anxiety on Jane's face.

"Tom," she cried, "don't let this fellow follow us. He says he will go home with us, and he won't leave us — All we can do we can't stop him — Oh, I hate him!"

And Jane Allen stamped her foot, and if looks could have killed, the young man in the tall hat would have fallen dead at her feet.

Meanwhile the blue-jerkined figure which had answered to the name of Tom Adair continued to advance rapidly, yet with the same deceitful appearance of leisure. He was grimy and shiny from head to foot. His cap

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fairly glistened with oil and engine-black. But his eyes were blue, and shone strangely pleasant out of his streaked face. And as he took off his cap with a quick movement of respect, Ione saw that his head was covered with a crisp crop of yellow curls.

"Oh, this kind young gentleman won't let you alone, will he not? — says he is bound to see you home, does he?" said Tom Adair, with his hands in the pockets of his light loose working jacket. "Well, we will see about that."

Tom had by this time insinuated himself between Ione and her too intrusive admirer, and stood close by the gatepost. He touched a knob with his finger. An electric bell rang somewhere in the rear, and a man promptly appeared out of a little cabin like a couple of sentry-boxes placed side by side, with a turnstile in front. There was another turnstile, and a corresponding double sentry-box on the other side. But between them the high gate stood half open. The man who came out of the cabin to the left, in answer to Tom Adair's summons, had also his hands in his side pockets; but he was neatly dressed in brown tweed, and wore a hard round hat upon his head.

"Peter," said Tom Adair, "just walk with these ladies as far as the corner of Ely Street, will you? They will be all right after that. And, I'll look after your gate till you get back. The night draft won't be tumbling in for an hour yet, and you'll be back, and I'll have finished all I have to say to this gentleman, long before that."

The Professional Admirer no doubt wished by this time that he had not come, but he put a bold face on the matter and disclaimed any intention of insulting the ladies. He only wished to see them past a dangerous part of the town.

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Tom Adair, standing between Ione and the young man, still kept his hands in his pockets.

"Yes," he agreed, "this part of the town is a little dangerous — for cads like you. Go on, Peter. Good-night to you, ladies. No, you don't, sir; I have something to say to you first."

"Don't hurt him, Tom. Don't get into trouble yourself, mind!" cried Jane Allen. "He isn't worth it."

The two girls, with the friendly time-keeper of the Riverside Engineering Works in attendance, walking silent and embarrassed by their side as if he were counting their steps and checking their progress by the lamp-posts, turned the corner and were out of sight in a moment. Then Tom Adair's attitude underwent a sudden alteration. He was probably younger by ten years than his antagonist. Indeed, his whole appearance, in spite of the deforming grime and oil, was singularly boyish.

"Well," he said, coming nearer to the gentleman in the top hat, who stood his ground with a certain sneering confidence which betokened the professional bully, "you would not leave these ladies alone when asked."

"It is no business of yours, young fellow, whether I would or whether I would not," replied the other, putting himself into a posture of defence. "But anyway, I'll teach you to interfere where I am concerned. It will be better for you in future to keep to your smithy, and leave gentlemen alone."

"Oh, don't be in too great a hurry; I'll oblige you in a moment when the ladies are out of hearing!" said Tom Adair composedly.

"Oh — ladies," sneered the other; "that one in the check suit was a lady, was she? And your friend the little milliner was another? Ladies — ha! ha!"

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Tom Adair did not answer in words. His chin sank an inch or two, and his elbows took a somewhat sharper angle where they pressed against his sides. But his hands remained easily in the pockets of his working slop. He walked quietly closer to the bully. He glanced keenly up and down the road which passed in front of the engine-shop.

There was no policeman in sight. A stray cur, with his ribs showing outside like hoops on a decrepit barrel, and his tail tucked in between his legs as though kept in place by a strong spring, slunk along the opposite side of the way. It seemed a misnomer to call Tom Adair's adversary a cur. He was well nourished, tall, and a little puffed under the eyes. His arms were in the correct posture, and his hands were clenched. Tom's hands were still in his pockets. Then something happened.

"*Thud! thud!*"

There came a couple of dull, crushing sounds, quite peculiar and indescribable, but not to be forgotten or mistaken when once heard — the impact of knuckles upon bare flesh. Tom's hands were out of his pockets now for the first time since he had lifted his cap to Ione and Jane Allen. Yet they had come so quickly that his adversary had never seen them move, till the tall hat flew one way, the rose in his button-hole went another. He himself sat down in the midst, while Tom Adair stood over him, and with his hands once more in his side pockets, besought him to get up and have some more.

But very naturally and with excellent judgment, the young man declined. Instead, with his elbow raised defensively above his head, he began to cry somewhat half-heartedly for the police.

Tom Adair stepped a little back and contemplated

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the bloated face, one side of which was now swelling so rapidly that the left eye was almost closed already, while a thin stream of blood and a thickening lip informed Tom where he had got in his left.

"Help! Murder! Police!" shouted the bully, but with somewhat unequal vigour.

Tom drew a whistle from his pocket.

"All right," he said cheerily; "if that is what you want, I can accommodate you in five minutes. We have an officer on the premises, and as I am foreman of the yard I can give you in charge for creating a disturbance. Don't apologise — no trouble at all; it is as easy as hammering in a tintack!"

The rascal rose quickly enough now, and without a single word he went down the road towards the river, holding a handkerchief to his face. Tom Adair looked after him. His muscles twitched with desire to take a running kick at the brute. But he only shrugged his shoulders instead, and muttered, "As Jane said, he ain't worth it! Hillo! here's Peter got back."

Peter nodded without speaking, and would have gone off at once to his sentry-box.

"Well, how did you get on with the girls, Peter?" he asked.

"Oh, so-so," he answered. Then appearing to recollect, he chuckled and said, "We had such a talk."

"Talk, Peter? I didn't know you could talk. What in the world did you talk about?"

Peter appeared to consider deeply. Then he said, "Well, I don't know as I talked much, but I listened like all afire."

Whereat he whistled melodiously and brushed the crown of his round hat with his sleeve with an ostentation of exceeding ease.

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"I say, Tom, ain't she a beauty — what?" and Peter winked at his friend meaningly.

"Which?" said Tom stolidly, with a perfectly expressionless face.

Peter looked at him with contempt and incredulity.

"Which! — he asks me which. Garn, don't kid me; you don't know which is the good-looking one! I suppose you would n't call the ——"

"Shut up, Peter," said Tom Adair suddenly, "if you don't want your nose flattened!"

"No," answered Peter, meditatively feeling that organ, "I dunno as I do, exactly. But what's happened to the fellow I left with you? Had he been up to any monkey tricks with the young ladies?"

"There's all that's left of him," said Tom loftily, pointing to a slight depression on the skirting cinder path, which ran towards the engineering shop, on which lay a desolate rose.

Then without another word he stalked haughtily within and shut the great gates.

"'Ere, Tom," cried Peter; "don't get the hump on you for nothing. I was doing for the best! 'Ow on earth was I to know that the little 'un — I mean the pretty little 'un — was your mash?"

But Tom Adair was too much offended to answer.

Peter winked at the cur dog, which had come back and was apparently on the point of shaking itself to pieces in an attempt to attract his attention. Then quite suddenly he slapped his thigh, whereat the dog, whose nerves were set on hairsprings of well-grounded distrust of all such movements, bounded away and vanished round the corner.

"What a game!" said Peter.

The abandoned rose took the time-keeper's eye. He picked it up, dusted it, and stuck it in his own button-

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hole. Then he turned his head to this side and that, contemplating with approval the effect upon the brown tweed. This being completed to his satisfaction, he unlocked the turnstile and took down his check-list to be ready for the night shift, whistling softly the while, "T is but a little faded flower!"

CHAPTER XV

SHILLABEER'S WORLD'S WISDOM EMPORIUM

WHEN Ione and Jane Allen had bidden farewell to the silent but appreciative Peter at the corner of Ely Street, Battersea, they turned sharply to the left. Then skirting a terrace of small houses, each in exact facsimile of the other, they found themselves in Audley Street, at the upper end of which was the house wherein Ione was to lodge. Over the door upon the glass transom were the figures 29. Underneath glittered a brass plate largely engraved with the name Adair. It was a little house rusty-red as to its bricks, with a mere pocket-handkerchief of garden frontage under the window. In the centre of the pocket-handkerchief a few blades of grass were struggling disconsolately upwards, trying to touch each other occasionally for company. Then came a border of "gardener's garter," "lad's love," and "bachelor's button"; while "London pride" smothered all the borders with its dainty floescence, which in that dreary place showed like sea-foam, dusty with the smoke of its own titular city.

"Eh, Jane, but I'm pleased to see ye," cried Mrs. Adair, their landlady, in a broad Doric never reared amid English brick, but which, even after years of exile, still tasted of "doon-the-watter" and those Clydebank towns, in front of which the screws of the latest productions of Fairfield and Dumbarton turn up the spume and driftage of Glasgow on their way to the measured mile.

"Come awa', lassie, I was feared something uncanny

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had happened to ye. I'll pour oot your tea this verra minute. We hae gotten a haddock the nicht, and it's fine and tasty."

"Mrs. Adair, this is my friend Miss March," said Jane Allen, performing the introduction ceremoniously enough. Ione went forward to shake hands with an instinctive flush of pleasure. For her heart was drawn at once to this sonsy, freckle-faced, raw-boned Scotch woman, with her capable hands yet moist from the wash-tub, and her hair escaping in thick grey locks from underneath the white westland "mutch." (This is a linen cap with strings, in which the head is encased in that fashion which is no modern *mode de Paris*, but which, nevertheless, the Scots owe to the Auld Alliance, and which may be seen to this day in the market-places of Loches and Amboise.)

"Ye are welcome, missie," said Mrs. Adair; "I wish it had been the bonny Clydeside that ye were comin' to bide in awa' doon yonder by Inverkip — wi' the lave-rocks singin' blithely in the lift, the linties jinking in the whin bushes, and the bonny steamboats on the Clyde gangin' and comin' like the angels ascendin' an' descendin' Jacob's ladder."

In a short time, when Ione had transported her small belongings from the hotel in the Strand, she was made free of the house in Audley Street, and was to every indweller in it as a sister or a daughter. She learned to respect silent, self-contained, taciturn, rigidly upright Hugh Adair, a six-foot Tipperary Prodestan', who with his quiet ways was the very opposite of the shillaleh-twirling, tread-on-the-tail-of-me-coat Irishman of the stage. She learned also to love his hot-tempered and leal-natured wife, whose generosity was such that if her husband had not looked after the finances, she would have beggared herself to feed every lazy lout of a "gaun

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body," and clothe every barefoot bairn with a Scot's accent that happened to stray into Audley Street.

It is a curious study, this of popular racial head-marks. Doubtless the comic "blandantherin'" Irishman exists, and as certainly so does the close-fisted, bang-went-sax-pence Scot. Yet the genius of both races is quite other. The Irish, a high-strung, close-lipped, punctilious race, who as a nation are breeders of great judges, doctors, commanders-in-chiefs, are doomed to misrepresentation on the British stage by jig-dancers and windy orators. On the other hand, the Scot in whom is the true genius of Knox and Burns and Scott, is apt to be generous, vain without conceit, lavish without extravagance, eager to please, prone alike to the greater sins and the severer virtues, with a hatred of meanness which is as natural as his respect for revealed religion. Tom Adair, son of Hugh of that ilk, and already a foreman of the yard in the great engineering works of Jeffray & Company, possessed the characteristics of both father and mother. Like his father he was slow to speak; like his mother he was quick to act, and that always to a generous intent. Men who dwell amid the ceaseless clatter and unresting rush of machinery seldom talk much, and even at home Tom was a silent bookish lad.

But he was ever anxious to do anything for his mother. It was a sight worth seeing to watch the good son fitting stationary wash-tubs, extending water pipes, or putting up new and improved drying lines across the tiny bricked yard at the back of the house — all with the same fine conscientiousness and attention to detail which at twenty-three had made him foreman of his department, while his father remained still the plain ship's carpenter he had been bred in the city of Belfast forty years before.

Ione counted up her money on the night she went to

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lodge in 29 Audley Street. She had exactly fifty pounds and three shillings, so that she felt secure for some time at her present rate of expenditure. Nevertheless, it was well that she knew how to economise. For discouragement and disappointment waited upon her endeavours, as indeed they mostly do on all new projects, that these may be tried in the furnace as gold is tried. Day by day Ione went out with a string of new addresses, mostly supplied by Jane Allen, who obtained them from the kind and willing Gopher & Arlington girls.

Perhaps it was the season when authors do not send in their copy, when publishers and literary agents do not require "carbons" to secure foreign rights, when merchants write their own letters — and as few of those as possible. At any rate the market was overstocked. Ione must wait.

At last, one day she heard accidentally of Shillabeer's Information Bureau and World's Wisdom Emporium, and in one glowing moment a new hope took possession of her. The name was new, and the thing also. None of the Gopher & Arlington girls knew anything practical of the concern, but all had heard that there were many openings for talent there. It had only been running a few months, and everybody knew the romantic story of its founder. Mr. Shillabeer had been a commercial traveller in hog-bristles and brushes till he struck this great idea. Then, in four strides he had become famous, and, it was presumed, rich also.

Really he had come into a legacy of considerable value, left him by a distant relative, and with this he set about realising his idea and establishing a great knowledge industry. There was nothing in the world which was to be hid from Nathaniel Shillabeer and his specialists. He had often observed with contemptuous wonder the extreme cheapness of the knowledge market. There

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was, he argued, no branch of science so abstruse and recondite that it had not been mastered by some waif of ill success, who would be ready to distribute, for a pound a week, the knowledge which had been of such little value to himself.

Again, it was the era of Universal Stores. Even the brush-and-hog-bristle line had been injured by the competition of great establishments which bought at special rates by the thousand gross, and before whose conquering monopoly his smaller customers went down like ninepins. Well, why should not he, Nathaniel Shillabeer, pool the unrelated and useless brains of a nation? He began instinctively to make out his programme. Though not a literary man himself, the phrases of the perfect prospectus flowed from his fingers. The Wisdom Emporium would compose, copy, translate, publish, or introduce to publishers. It would prepare speeches, report them, extend them, typewrite them, correct proof-sheets, illustrate, criticise, or have criticisms inserted in the literary gossip journals—applausive for the books of moneyed clients, or destructive and envenomed for those who were of the enemy. Speeches new and original on any subject for pulpit or platform, banquet or deliberative assembly, could be supplied at current rates. Shillabeer's would also answer all questions, speak all languages, know all knowledge, and find out all secrets, from those of the stars to those of the private detective agency.

One found Shillabeer's readily — it was easy enough to do that. Across the front of a great building near Ludgate Circus, the name and style of "Shillabeer's Universal World's Wisdom Emporium" were written up in letters which seemed fitted to be read in Mars. A gilt angel stood on the domed roof blowing a trumpet to the praise and glory of Shillabeer, the Great and Only.



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While at night an infernal machine seared the eyes of all the neighbourhood by flashing "the Name" on the fronts of the houses opposite, or occupied itself in inditing "Shillabeer" in letters of alternate green and red, beginning laboriously with the letter S and ending by a flourish, in supposed imitation of the signature of the great Napoleon of Ideas.

"Shillabeer's" was patent and palpable, but it was not so easy to find Shillabeer.

First of all Ione stated her business to a young gentleman, of the top of whose head she had a limited but interesting view through a pigeon-hole. But he was busy, and did not even glance at her.

"Apply Department F," he said sharply; whereupon Ione thanked him and went out obediently to seek Department F.

She attracted little attention anywhere now. For the defaulting tailor-made tweed had been exchanged for a black serge of cheap quality, originally constructed for the universal woman without any relation to the particular individual who might be compelled to wear it. But with deft flitting needle Ione had remade it, Jane sitting by in breathless admiration of her friend's skill.

Externally, Department F seemed like all the other departments of Shillabeer's. It had apparently to do with advertisements, and a stream of customers at many windows bargained for so many "appearances" in different papers, or glanced at sample insertions in variously priced journals and magazines. At the pigeon-hole marked "General Inquiries," Ione stated her case. A morose, dark-skinned man glanced casually at her, demanded her age and qualifications, and from whom she had brought testimonials. To all of which Ione replied with as much of the professional manner as she had been able to pick up from Jane Allen.

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The dark-skinned man grunted, and rising with a tired sigh, he reached down a large book. He consulted an index, turned to a page, and ran his finger down.

"We have," he said, in an impressive tone of voice, "just twelve hundred applications for the same kind of work. You will make 1,201. What is your name? 'Marks,' did you say? — Oh, March. You'll need to learn to speak more clearly, young-lydy. In London we've got no time for making out foreign languages!"

For the first time Ione's heart sank. She went away from the pigeon-hole and the dark man with an ache in her heart. Evidently there was no place for her here. She stood a moment sadly by a window from which she could see the eternal elbowing push of business on the sidewalk beneath her, and hear the rumble and growl of the heavier waggon traffic along the street centre.

"There is no working place in all this London for me," she said. "I must go back. I am not fit for anything but loafing through this world of busy men and women."

Tears rose in Ione's eyes, and she felt instinctively in her pocket for her handkerchief. As she did so, a door opened at the end of a row of pigeon-holes, through which could be seen a glimpse of a luxurious office beyond. The man who stood looking at Ione was of the dark full-blooded variety, with high cheek-bones, smallish eyes, stiff erect eyebrows, and thick lips habitually pursed — an individuality coarse enough in some respects, but not devoid of a certain large animal handsomeness.

He gazed at Ione with a quick, penetrating look. When Mr. Shillabeer (for it was he) first saw the black dress and the evidence of tears, he had intended simply to request the young woman to be good enough to allow her emotion to overcome her elsewhere than in the Department F of the World's Wisdom Emporium.

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Business was business there, if anywhere. Emotions and their *sequelæ* were dealt with in the Private Inquiry Office, Department Z.

But a second look at Ione's profile, and yet another into her darkly glorious eyes, now soft as velvet and deep as the sea, caused the great man abruptly to change his mind.

Putting the handkerchief in her pocket, Ione had moved to the outer door, but she had not yet "kindly pulled" (as the painted notice on the ground-glass instructed her to do), when a deferential young man laid a hand on her cuff, and asked her to be good enough to step this way. In the dark of the passage the youth seemed inclined to keep his hand where he had placed it, but with a gesture more businesslike than haughty, Ione disengaged her arm. Whereat the clerk shrugged his shoulders with a knowing air, as if he desired to inform her that such niceties were not good business for applicants at the World's Emporium to indulge themselves in.

"Will you come this way," he said aloud, somewhat constrainedly; "the head will see you!"

It was a luxurious room into which Ione was ushered. The door shut behind the clerk noiselessly. A fire was burning brightly in the grate, and a warm perfume of Russia leather and rich carpets pervaded the place. A tall, small-eyed, heavy-jowled man stood alone by the mantelpiece. At Ione's approach he threw away the cigarette, which indeed he had lighted only the moment before for that very purpose.

"Will you sit down," he said, placing a chair for Ione where the light of the window would fall full on her face and illuminate her eyes. He himself lounged easily against the cushioned arm of a great chair with a swivelled book-rest, and attentively studied his visitor.

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"You wish for employment," he went on after a moment's silence, "so at least I am informed by my clerk. It is true that we have many applications—far more than we can possibly find places for—wide as our connection is. That is, of course, in our ordinary employment bureau, which is open to every one. But if you will tell me your name, your circumstances, and your qualifications, I will myself see what can be done."

Ione looked at the man gratefully. It was the first encouraging word she had heard in a long round of disappointments. And when the eyes of Ione March looked all their thankfulness and gratitude upon any son of Adam, something was bound to happen. On this occasion they shone forth with such a soft and sudden splendour—such dreamy depths of heavens opened through the dewy mist of their recent tears—that the man before her stood up with a sharp quiver of the eyelids. Something kindled on his face and beacons in his eyes like candles being lighted in a darkened room. He breathed faster, and passed his lips one over the other. This was clearly not a man of the stamp of Mr. Kearney Judd.

Ione continued to smile as she detailed her experiences. Mr. Shillabeer did not ask her the length of her stay at the Gopher & Arlington office. To her secret relief he scarcely glanced at the certificate itself.

"Why did you leave?" was his only question, and he shot it at her from his pursed lips as out of a pop-gun.

"The terms of the engagement did not suit me," said Ione as quickly.

"I hope they will suit you better if I make you my private secretary," said Mr. Nathaniel Shillabeer, with discomposing promptness. "Can you begin work immediately?"

CHAPTER XVI

A UNIVERSAL PRIVATE SECRETARY

SHILLABEER'S Emporium was already a world-famous establishment, and in their several spheres the smallest office-boy and the most gin-sodden female floor-sweeper put on (as the poet singeth) "eternal side," in consequence. But chiefest of the exhibitors of "side" was H. Chadford Eaton, sometime confidential man and business factotum of Nathaniel Shillabeer. When Ione entered the house this young gentleman was still suffering from the result of an accident which had befallen him some weeks before. He had been late at the office (so it appeared), and when going home he had fallen over the bottom part of the wicket-door opening out of the great gate which alone permitted egress upon the street. His nether lip, though now healing, bore the marks of having been badly cut, and his left eye was much bruised and discoloured.

It was he who received Ione, when next morning she arrived professionally equipped with pen, pencil, india-rubber, note-book, and hand-satchel, to begin her first day's work as private secretary to Shillabeer the Magnificent.

In ways which need not be described at present, Mr. Eaton knew of Ione's advent. He carried in his pocket-book a description of her appearance written out in a flowing and clerkly American hand, with wispy floreations and, as it were, "grace-notes." But he received his first official intimation of her proximity from the youth who had laid his hand on Ione's arm at the glass swing door of Department F.

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"There's another on 'em coming this morning."

"Gee!" said H. Chadford; "there's too many fillies in this shop! How many hands does this one stand?"

"She would n't stand mine yesterday, anyway," answered his friend; "proper high-stepper, I tell you! Regular Newmarket action, and no go as you please. So look out!"

H. Chadford Eaton caressed his moustache tenderly and smiled. It was still a trifle painful from the stumble over the wicket. Then he answered, "Porkie's paddock ain't no sweet place for high-steppers. But in a month she'll feel her oats less."

Now it is a curious thing that both of these young men could write a very orthodox and admirable business letter in the Queen's English (commercial dialect), beginning, "Dear Sirs, I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your favour of the 9th," and ending, "Yours truly, Shillabeer & Co., Ltd., pr. H. C. E."

Nevertheless, H. Chadford and the deferential clerk chose to make all their verbal communications of a private nature in a certain cryptic and sham-sporting shorthand, the result of earnest application to the second-rate sporting papers. As we know, Mr. Eaton also studied pugilism; but more of that anon.

Promptly at ten Ione was at the door of the Private Control Department of the World's Wisdom Emporium. There was a proud look in her eyes which proved exceedingly becoming. She knew she would succeed this time. There is no such word as "fail" in the bright lexicon of a young woman engaged as private secretary to Nathaniel Shillabeer the Great — engaged, too, on her own merits, and whose claim possessed no other visible means of support than a certificate from the manager of the Gopher & Arlington chief office.

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To say that Mr. H. Chadford Eaton was astonished when he saw Ione, is so tremendously to understate the case that it is hardly worth writing the word down. There is but one word to express his state of mind, and though the verb is an English one the usage is American.

H. Chadford was paralysed.

"By Jinks" (thus he communed with himself), "s' help me if this ain't the girl I shadowed the other day to Battersea, that would n't be spoke to, and could n't be spoke to! And here she is walking down my throat all sereno. Wonder I never guessed it when that little slippery geezer downstairs was telling me about her!"

Ione had not troubled her head at all about the young man in the tall hat who had followed Jane Allen and herself. She had scarcely glanced at him in the railway carriage, and she was very far indeed from recognising as his the countenance of H. Chadford Eaton altered, and as it were redecored, by the knuckles of Tom Adair.

As usual Ione went straight to the point, having learned from her father that business was sacrosanct and must not be dawdled over. For Governor March, like a great many of his countrymen, was the sort of man who could contentedly lounge a week without doing any work harder than lighting a cigar. But if at any moment something cropped up which could be called "business," the cigar would be thrown away, and he would set himself to the task with his own soldierly quickness, and that national alacrity which outflanks the world.

"Mr. Shillabeer has engaged me as his secretary," Ione said, looking at the confidential clerk with a glance straight as the flight of a rifle-ball, fearless as that of a child that has known no wrong. Still wondering, H.

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Chadford bowed and led the way. He opened a little side door out of the larger inquiry office.

"I had better show you," he said, in his official-letter-paper language, "the private way to Mr. Shillabeer's apartments, so that you may not need to come and go through the office."

Lone found herself once more unexpectedly upon the street amid the rushing traffic and the crying news-boys. Her conductor took her round the corner into a narrow lane, and opening the second door on the left with a key, he showed the way up a staircase, clean and bare, but bearing the marks of infrequent use.

"You can come up this stair yourself," he said; "I will procure you a key for the outer door. But you must wait at this inner door till Mr. Shillabeer opens it. If he tells you to meet him at any particular hour, you can depend upon him to be here before you."

Mr. H. Chadford Eaton stood a long moment with his ear cocked to the crack of the door, listening like a tall ungainly bird. Then he screwed his head round to Lone with a gesture, in which admiration and dislike of the person within were expressed in about equal parts.

"He's in!" whispered H. Chadford, nodding confidentially. Then he knocked, inclining as he did so his head still nearer the keyhole of the door with some appearance of anxiety.

The sound of feet trampling heavily across a carpeted floor was heard. The confidential man retreated a step and stood in an attitude of meditative attention with his head bowed. Lone was still smiling at the quick retrograde movement when the door opened, and Mr. Shillabeer came forward to welcome his new private secretary with suave and deferential courtesy. Simultaneously her guide vanished. He had been, but now he was not. Lone found herself standing alone before

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the great man whose genius had lately founded, whose nod presently controlled the whole vast fabric of the World's Wisdom Emporium.

"I have been expecting you, Miss March, with a considerable amount of impatience," he said, leading the way into an inner office, carefully and not untastefully fitted with the usual furniture of a drawing-room of the period, as that apartment is conceived of in Tottenham Court Road.

In the centre of the room, however, stood a table plainly covered with red leather. It was piled with books and papers, which, though cleared from either end, had gradually accumulated in the centre till they formed a barricade several feet high.

"This is your place," said Mr. Shillabeer to Ione, pointing to the chair at the table. She had, with a quick business alacrity which pleased him, already divested herself of her jacket, gloves, hat, and veil, as rapidly as a man would dispose of his hat and stick.

It was only after watching Ione March for a long time that one found out how swift were all her motions, combining as they did the free grace of a wild animal with the trained deftness and simplicity of the artist's hand sketching in a picture. If the young girl only walked across a room, the eye followed her movements with a vivid pleasure. But it was not till one had accompanied her along a crowded street, that the deft ease and effortless rapidity of her motions became apparent.

The entire morning's mail had been left just as its contents had been roughly opened by the proprietor's forefinger and thrown down in a heap. And now Mr. Shillabeer's small keen-sighted eyes followed Ione as she took her place before the pile of papers, and began deftly to put them into order with well-accustomed hand. Without appearing to do so, he watched her as she

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dropped the torn envelopes into the waste-paper basket, folded the receipts, smoothed out the letters to be answered, and presently passed her employer a trim sheaf of docketed papers for his attention, all within five minutes of her entry. She had often amused and delighted her father with similar business-like swiftness and nicety of method. He used to tell her that he never had had so good a clerk, and that in war time it would have added years to his life to have had her at the head of one of the distributing departments.

Upon her first entrance Mr. Shillabeer had flung himself down into a low chair, over the arm of which he threw a casual leg as he watched his new secretary. He had the credit of being a man of mixed motives, of a dubious but powerful strain of blood, of honest and dishonest intentions, all welded into a strong confederation by his deep and over-bearing selfishness. As he himself was accustomed to say, there was but one member of his firm, and in the World's Wisdom Emporium, Ltd., he was Nathaniel Shillabeer, Unlimited.

When Ione passed about the table with her swift young Dian grace, to give him the papers of the day which she had arranged, her eye rested with a cool scrutiny upon her employer's attitude. There was no overt disapproval in the look, nevertheless Nathaniel Shillabeer took the leg down. He could not have told in the least why he did so, but the fact made an impression upon him. It was Ione's first victory in the house of Shillabeer. Presently he rose and walked to the window, turning up the end of an intensely black and glossy beard and biting at it abstractedly. Meanwhile, Ione had again seated herself expectantly, and sat glancing up at her employer, with her pencil ready upon the paper. Shillabeer stood a while glooming and gazing at his secretary, holding the docketed sheaf of papers in his hand.

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Suddenly he spoke with the sullen and truculent note in his voice which was natural to him when thinking deeply.

"You are not an English girl?" he said.

"I am an American," replied Ione, who though she was not given to waving the stars-and-stripes, knew no reason why she should deny her father's nation and her own.

"But you have no American accent," objected Mr. Shillabeer.

"It is not necessary any more than to have an English one. But I was educated chiefly in Paris," Ione replied, smothering a strong inclination to tell the man that the thickened consonants and mispronounced vowels of his own speech were worse a thousand-fold than the purest Down-Eastern drawl, in which you can hear the Atlantic zephyrs whistle through the noses of Cape Cod.

"Is your father alive?" came the next question.

"Yes," said Ione gravely; "he is at present in America."

She wondered if it were customary for Englishmen employers to catechise all their dependants as stringently.

"You have then, I take it, no relatives or friends on this side of the Atlantic?" continued her interlocutor.

"Not one," said Ione, looking down with a trace of sadness. As she spoke she thought of one to whom, if the Fates had not been cross-grained, she might have given the latter title.

The great man paused a little. Then he went to the fireplace and kicked a piece of coal with his toe in an absent-minded manner. Ione longed to tell him that he was burning the leather of his boot, but, uncertain of his mood, she refrained. Suddenly he turned sharply to-

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wards her, and with an awkward gesture he said, "I hope, Miss March, that ere long you will find friends on this side of the Atlantic also."

He paused near her chair, uncertainly fingering a pen between his thick powerful fingers. The door into the outer office opened cautiously, and the head of Mr. H. Chadford Eaton was quietly protruded within. He smiled when he saw his master's position and attitude. Something seemed to jar on Shillabeer's nerves. He turned round sharply and caught sight of his confidential clerk.

The smile dropped like a curtain. "I thought —" began Mr. Eaton, stammeringly.

"Get out!" cried Shillabeer fiercely, with an astonishing volume of sound. And, as if blown away like a leaf by the mere blast of magisterial displeasure, the head vanished. Shillabeer marched to the door into Department F and turned the key. Then he seated himself nearer Ione, and a little behind, so that he could overlook the girl as she worked, and with a sheaf of letters in his hand he began to dictate. There was no mistake about it. Nathaniel Shillabeer was a great business man. He decided the most important questions with a single-mindedness and forcible precision which, accustomed as she was to her father's dependence upon the judgments of others, won Ione's admiration. He gave his decisions or issued his orders in the fewest words. He was at this time arranging for the establishment of a branch of his World's Wisdom Emporium in the City of New York, and many of the dictated letters had reference to that project. But he carried his grasp of affairs easily over the sea, and dictated as rapidly and confidentially concerning involved questions of site and title on Broadway, as he did of the matters under his own eye.

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Mr. Nathaniel Shillabeer was what is called in America a magnetic man. Vitality beats high in dark-skinned, crisp-haired men of his type. His arteries ran sluices of red blood. In the Southern States the gloss and "kink" of his hair might have cast quite unfounded suspicion on the purity of his blood. But he was definitely a personality, and his very coming into a room was apt to affect nervous people. Fifty years ago he would have been a medium. Five hundred earlier he would have ended on a throne, as the sainted leader of a crusade, or on the flaming pyre of the wizard.

As it was, he had created and now controlled a vast business by the sheer force of his will and the massive strength of his personality.

People were mostly either strongly attracted or strongly repelled by him. On one occasion, when Nathaniel Shillabeer entered a drawing-room in which a nervous pianist was performing a difficult piece, without looking round the lady threw up her hands and cried, —

"I can play no more — truly I cannot. Some one has come in who drives the music from my mind. I am very sorry, but to-day my fingers will not obey me any more!"

Nor could the hostess persuade the great artiste either to try again or to accept her promised fee.

"It is no use," she said; "another time when you are alone or with other people; but now" (she cast her hands abroad, palms upward) "*he* has taken it all away from me."

There could be no doubt that to many people Nathaniel Shillabeer was "bad medicine," and that through no fault of his own. But with as many others, and even with men and women of a social position far above his own, he was very successful. Shillabeer was

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ready, for instance, to lose his money without grumbling so long as this could be done in the society of men and women of whom he approved. He had a limitless store of curious experiences. He told anecdotes of a singularly chequered career with engaging frankness and the quaintest unconviction. So in certain very influential spheres he became the latest attraction, and, had he so desired, might have called himself a gentleman of fashion as well as a man of wealth.

Now, however, in office hours he was more gentle and approachable by Ione, and more careful both of his language and actions in her presence than any one had ever seen him. He occupied himself much in watching the girl and studying her character. He found out easily enough all that could be known about her by means of the deferential clerk and Mr. H. Chadford Eaton. And one day he very much astounded that young man, in whose eyes he had surprised something more than admiration for Ione, with the words, "Remember, sir, you let that girl entirely alone!" Which, being delivered with a certain well-known contraction of the brows, and a low hissing through shut teeth, for some reason or other terrified the reasonable soul out of H. Chadford.

But he made this up to his self-respect (in the absence of his master) by greeting the exits and entrances of Ione with a low whistle meant to reach the ear of the deferential youth, his companion. For which whistle Tom Adair, had he been within hearing, would certainly have beaten his recovered face into a fresher and more complete pulp.

In the days which succeeded, nothing occurred to cause Ione to regret her occupation. Mr. Shillabeer was studiously kind; indeed, at times almost over-considerate. And if Mr. H. Chadford grinned behind her

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back — well, Ione was much too busy to notice him. With quick natural intuition her master had so well read the character of the girl, as to know that he could in no wise acquire a stronger hold over her mind than by allowing her to drink deep of work and responsibility.

Ione was often retained after all the other clerks had gone, in order that she might extend drafts or manifold confidential instructions for Mr. Shillabeer's managers in the provinces, or for his agents on the other side.

All the while Nathaniel Shillabeer sat near her, and took equal share and share in the girl's work. But Ione remained quite unaffected by the strong vitality of her employer. Few women, in a dependent position could have been brought into hourly direct contact with Mr. Nathaniel Shillabeer without being moved either to love or to hatred.

But there was about Ione a clear-eyed straightforwardness, a practicality in which was no trace of sex, a steadiness of purpose added to her national confidence that in any emergency a girl could steer her own course — all which characteristics combined to counteract the effect of Mr. Nathaniel Shillabeer's reputed magnetism.

CHAPTER XVII

MESSRS. EATON AND WEBSTER, CONFIDENTIAL AGENTS

IT was not till the third month of Ione's business engagement at the World's Wisdom Emporium that Mr. Shillabeer realised whither he was tending, though most of his employees had long ago realised it for him — and indeed expressed their opinion in terms more or less picturesque. During that time he had grown by daily companionship to find the presence of Ione necessary to him. He formed the habit of prolonging the hours of business, for the sole purpose of keeping near him that which caused such unwonted stirrings in his soul. In the electric air of congenial work and responsibility Ione was not slow to put on fresh bloom and beauty. Her figure developed with the joy of new purpose. A quick and vivid grace flashed abroad in every movement, in which there might yet be traced something of the hectic and feverish flush of the constitutionally delicate. The work in which she was engaged caused a nervous quick-burning joy to beacon in her eyes. It was her new spring-time—the spring-time of that second and fuller loveliness which comes to most women when they fall deeply and once for all in love, but which Ione owed to finding at once a purpose and a career. She gave no thought to the permanence of her employment. For not only was the concern an important one, but the proprietor, Mr. Nathaniel Shillabeer, was never tired of telling her how indispensable she had become to him.

And in this way there had arisen a sort of comradeship between secretary and principal, which, from its

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very simplicity and directness, was a type of the ideas which were dominating the girl's life. Ione accepted certain unconventional things as the necessary concomitants of independence and the earning of her own living. For instance, she went and came into Mr. Shillabeer's business rooms at any hour. But her mind was entirely set upon the half-dozen cylinders of business communications which it was her duty to "take off" the phonograph. She could think of nothing else till she could lay their contents, perfectly transcribed and typewritten, upon the desk of her chief. With all her soul in her work, she nodded abstractedly to any of the clerks who might be in the outer office, and to many of the regular callers who came to do business with the head of the World's Wisdom Emporium. Glances and covert innuendoes, nods, winks, and wreathed smiles, she heeded no more than the noisy chaff of the streets through which she passed daily on her way from her lodging in Battersea.

And if at times the hand of the master rested longer than was necessary beside her own, it affected her no more than if the speaking tube of the official phonograph had fallen momentarily across her arm. Both were exigences of business, accidents of independence, like the new rapidity of toilet she was learning, and the small peasoup-smelling eating-house where she took her meals when she was unable to return to 29 Audley Street for them.

One Sunday evening Ione sat at her desk, tired with that glad-hearted weariness which comes from congenial work perfectly performed. It was not her habit to work on that day, but a heavy mail received late the night before had caused her to make the offer of working it off, if her master would give her the necessary instructions before leaving. To her surprise Mr. Shillabeer

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said at once that he would meet her at the office at any hour which would be convenient for her. As he spoke, the spark which she had noticed more than once leaped again into his eye. For it did not seem possible that a young woman in the prime of youth and beauty could be so much engrossed in business and the handicraft of clerkship, that of her own accord she would give up her Sunday in order to "extend" letters taken in shorthand, simply that the decks might be clear for another batch on Monday morning.

Meanwhile strange things were stirring in the business-hardened heart of Shillabeer — things of which no member of his huge staff suspected him. Down in the vulgar depths of his being, something not dominated by the multiplication table was swiftly leavening the lump. The love of women, self-sacrifice, comradeship — these had been to Nathaniel Shillabeer mere words invented to put a higher price upon a purchasable article. He understood all about that. It was on his level. In like manner he had no pleasure in a sunset or a sunrise. But he understood that other people had. So he was ready to pay a large price for a picture of a sunset painted by an eminent hand.

And yet at that very moment the flush of sunrise was stealing over his own dark nature. Upon the following morning the deferential clerk was at the offices before him. He was not so clever as H. Chadford Eaton, and hitherto he had not received nearly so much of his master's confidence. But in this matter of his private secretary, and the Sunday work at the office, Nathaniel Shillabeer vaguely felt that he would rather trust the deferential clerk than Mr. Eaton.

So unheralded and gentle as a cloudless dawn, grace springs up in the soul. H. Chadford Eaton was clever, thought Shillabeer. He received (and earned) a con-

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siderable salary. But Ione and he must be kept apart even in thought.

"Good-morning, Miss March," he said as he entered the room. "Do you know, I feel a perfect ogre, depriving you at once of your Sunday's pleasure and of the society of your friends."

Ione smiled calmly and without reserve as she stood up to shake hands. She was still glowing from her walk in the crisp November air from the station of the underground railway by which she had come. The limited Sunday dole of district trains had made her a little late.

"I have no friends in this city," she said. "I went to early service at a little, old, ivy-covered church on the other side of the river; and, for the rest, I am very glad to be at work, Sunday or Saturday. It makes one feel so much less lonely in the midst of all these people."

Mr. Shillabeer did not answer. Words seemed somehow to have flowed away from him. He must get down to something concrete which would grip him and bring him back to himself. He went and sat opposite Ione at the best-lighted end of the great work-table. Here for some hours, with the ease and tireless patience of a true man of business, he proceeded to dictate letters and draft agreements connected with the establishment of a paper, to appear simultaneously in England and America, which was destined to become the official organ of the World's Wisdom Emporium.

In Ione's fingers the swift pencil flew along in curves and dots, while her heart raced gladly after it. She did not much like Mr. Shillabeer, but she was stopping disliking him. She would have preferred certainly to be left alone with the raucous impersonality of the phonograph, to which she could say irreverently, "O shut up, will you!" when it went too fast for the tapping of her

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fingers on the typewriter, accompanying her words with a petulant "click" as she shut off the wheezy giggle of the needle on the cylinder. Then she would have laughed to herself, purely from excess of pleasure in this new and useful career. But, though she would have preferred the phonograph, yet, for the sole sake of being at work, she was willing to spend the day with Mr. Shillabeer rather than walk in Hyde Park with the possibility of one of her father's friends recognising her, or even remain in her lodgings listening to the chatter and answering the questions of Jane Allen.

At half-past four tea was laid on the table between them by the youth bland of countenance, who, so far as Shillabeer's was concerned, answered to the name of Webster. Mr. Shillabeer asked Ione to serve the impromptu little meal. The girl, whose loosely bound and unbusinesslike hair had by this time run into a distressful tangle of love-locks, pushed the most irrepressible and intrusive of these back from her brow, and, with her mind balanced between her letter book and the typewriter, obeyed. She proceeded to pour out tea in an abstracted and impersonal manner.

"Do let us put away our work for a little, Miss March, and talk!" said Mr. Shillabeer, reaching over in his decisive way, and clearing away the *débris* of papers which Ione had made on the corner of her desk.

"Oh, please don't touch them, or I shall never know where to find them again!" cried Ione, laying her hand impulsively upon his wrist. The warm touch of her fingers sent a flush of something altogether unknown through his veins.

Mr. Nathaniel Shillabeer returned to his seat feeling, for the first time in his life, bashful. He became conscious all at once of an overpowering want in his life.

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He looked away from Ione across the dead spaces of the streets. The peculiar empty hush of a city Sunday, the faint hot odour of stables and black-beetles which pervaded everything, seemed to typify his own life.

"What a fool I have been!" thought Shillabeer, as the place on his wrist went on tingling. He looked at it furtively.

"And what a fool you are!" replied the other side of his nature, hard at strife to keep the mastery. "This is your secretary, your paid servant. She is a pretty girl enough, but so are others. Doubtless she wants to catch you, as others have tried. She wants your money. You know you can get anything for money!"

But the dawning soul of Shillabeer would not now be taken in so cheaply. He recognised the arguments as those of (let us say) Mr. Chadford Eaton.

"No," cried the Dawn of Grace, coming nearer to the horizon, "this girl is solely eager for work. She has no designs, no artifice. But there radiates from her clean soul something you want and have not got. Have you a friend in the world? Eaton—Webster—the Honourables who win your money? Tush—friends! You know better, Nathaniel Shillabeer! But this girl—if she loved you, if she would stand shoulder to shoulder with you, life would be a new thing! She understands the poetry of business. Why, she and you would go over the whole earth; you two would animate the world!"

All this (and much more) passed through Shillabeer's mind while Ione was distributing her disturbed papers with a touch, caressing and almost melting.

Yes—"You are forgetting your Miss March!" was all she said.

Ione smiled, and glanced up gratefully.

"It is a little cold," she said; "but that it matters."

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"But it does matter to me," cried Shillabeer. "Let me get you another cup!"

And with prompt and careful hand he was as good as his word. Ione, bent upon her work, took all these attentions as she had been accustomed to take such things, not understanding the revolution which must have come over her master's soul that he should even dream of doing them.

But the deferential Webster understood, or thought he did. For at that moment, opening the door to remove the tray, he saw his master in the act of pouring out Miss March's second cup of tea. He closed the door softly, and went downstairs smiling and muttering to himself. He was not engaged to carry trays for private secretaries, he repeated to himself. But he did not think of saying so much to Mr. Nathaniel Shillabeer, for he knew very certainly the great man's answer to that.

But nevertheless he promised himself some amusement from the business, and in the long run he would take it out of the girl. At that moment Webster, the cunning and deferential, heard a rap at the outer door. It was peculiar and yet unobtrusive.

"Hello, that's Chadford!" he said. "I wonder what's his little game in the City of a Sunday! He ain't ordered to attend on little birds of private secretaries."

He paused and chuckled again.

"Lor', though, how he'll laugh when I tell him — pouring out her tea, he was!"

Webster opened the door, and as he had anticipated, there stood Mr. H. Chadford Eaton, rigged out in his Sunday best, a new tall hat, and the trousers which had not been split by his recent accident.

"Hush!" whispered Webster, expressing the word mostly by a motion of his lips.

"What's up?" signalled Mr. Eaton as cautiously.

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"They're upstairs!" Movement of left thumb.

"How many?" Fingers of right hand opened and shut rapidly.

"Two! Himself and the secretary!"

Webster played an imaginary typewriter to indicate Ione, and blew out his cheeks and narrowed his eyes for the Chief of the World's Wisdom Emporium.

"Come outside a moment; I want to speak to you," signalled Mr. Eaton, with his chin.

"Can't! He may want me any moment," replied, with ridged brows, the deferential Webster.

"Then I'll come in," said H. Chadford, by doing it.

"Well, on your own head be it if he catches you!" replied Webster's eyebrows.

It says something for their respect of Nathaniel Shillaber that the hearts of both young men beat with great distinctness as they tiptoed their way into a retreat on the basement floor known to themselves, to which it was most unlikely that their master would follow them. Having arrived here, they began to talk more freely and conventionally. The cell-like pantry was occupied at one end by the cooking-stove, on which Webster had heated the water for tea. A vague smell of bad gas pervaded everything. H. Chadford Eaton carefully dusted a chair for himself, and seated himself gingerly on the verge.

"Well?" he said, turning to his friend.

"Lord, he's a on'er!" Webster burst out; "I tell you he's pouring out her tea like as if she was a queen!"

"Who's pouring out who's tea?" queried Eaton.

"Why, Porky and the pretty secretary, of course! I say, it is a game! 'Sunday afternoon in the City'! Ha, ha! It's like a turnover in the *Globe*. Won't the staff bust itself laughin' to-morrow? Oh, no!"

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"It might, but it won't," said Mr. Eaton, biting the imitation ivory head of his walking-cane.

Webster stared.

"What's that?" he said quickly, "not know? Why, I'll tell them. I would n't keep it to myself for a thousand pounds!"

"It may be worth less — perhaps more; anyway, you'll keep it."

Again Webster gazed open-mouthed at his mentor, who sat caressing his moustache with the front angles of the (imitation) ivory handle. As he did not speak, Webster suddenly lost his temper.

"What is this rot, anyway?" he said fiercely. "Don't sit grinning there like a monkey with a hare-lip! Put a name on your little game. What is it?"

"He is pouring out her tea, you said?"

"I told you so," retorted Webster.

"Don't get shirty," said H. Chadford Eaton calmly.

"Quit your handle-sucking, and speak out, if you've got anything to say!" Webster said "*anything*."

"What else was there?" said Mr. Eaton, leaning his chin on the cane handle and looking up.

"She had her hand on his wrist. I saw her!"

Mr. H. Chadford Eaton whistled a long, low, mellow whistle.

"Stash that, for God's sake! You'll have 'im down!"

"He's too busy," said Mr. Eaton calmly. "Well, Porky shows his usual good judgment, I will say that for him; though, as he don't know who the lady is, it's bound to be instinct."

"Who the lady is?" said Webster slowly. Then his eye lighted up. "Why, is she such a bad 'un? Is she wanted? Has she done 'time'?"

"Done 'time,' you fool!" chuckled H. Chadford.

Ione March

"Some day you'll do 'time' for being such an eternal soft. Miss March is a beauty, I tell you, and is worth about three millions sterling at the present rate of exchange."

He leaned back and contemplated at his ease the effect of his announcement upon Webster. Unbelief, doubt, uncertainty, calculation, self-interest, vanity, hope, chased each other across that ordinarily inexpressive countenance. For net result, Mr. Webster stepped to a tiny glass fixed between three nails on the sweating wall, and refolded his cravat so as to show the cleanest side.

"You don't mean it!" he said; but the cock of his head as he regarded the cravat showed that he thought otherwise himself.

Mr. Chadford Eaton smiled and nodded.

"Don't be giving yourself taffy, Webby," he said, with intense cryptic meaning. "This is n't your little show—it is n't even mine. There's better in it for us than that!"

"Well?" said Webster, with a grip upon his safety-valve. He recognised the difficulty of hurrying his companion, and waited for him to go on.

"Miss March is the daughter of an American governor—sort of Viceroy or upper Lord-Lieutenant, I judge. He has no end of money, and Miss March will get it all, every cent. But I did n't I nearly fetch up on a big rock when I shadowed her out of Battersea that night? Luck, he did n't know me again!"

"And what is she doing here in Ludgate Hill as Porky's secretary, then, if she's a millionairess, I should like to know?" said Webster, with an attempt at a sneer.

"You won't know," retorted H. Chadford Eaton, with sudden truculence, "unless you keep your silly mouth shut—tight shut, from this out, do you hear?"

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Mr. Webster preserved entire silence.

"Now listen," continued Mr. Eaton, after a long belligerent pause. "I'll only tell you once. Miss March was engaged to a bloke her pa wanted her to marry. He was up to some games (he did n't say what) that she did n't cotton to. The usual thing, I suppose. Well, she kicked over the traces, and came off to earn her own living. Now do you understand?"

"And what has all that got to do with us?" said Webster acrimoniously. He was in the Intelligence Department, and resented Mr. Chadford Eaton's tone.

"Nothing to do with you, my friend, nor with any chump like you!" retorted Chadford coolly; "not unless I take you in with me — which I would n't do except that I need a pal to work this thing properly. There are two people to be made squeal — maybe three, and it spreads it too much for one man."

Webster said nothing, but waited for his principal to continue.

"Now," said Mr. Eaton, "an heiress does n't get lost without having people looking after her. So her father is on the trail, also the young man she threw over. He's taken it jolly hard, poor bloke! They're both as rich as the Bank of England, too. *And — I know 'em both!*"

"You know them both?" gasped Webster. "How did you come to knock up against a plant like that?"

Mr. Chadford Eaton took off his glossy hat deliberately, blew some dust from the brim with scrupulous care, tried if he could see his face in the top by turning it at different angles, and spoke, —

"It all comes of keeping good society, dear boy. I am a member of a quiet little sporting club, where various things are done that would n't interest you. There I meet, we shall say, Mr. Jones from America.

Ione March

I find out who he is — I get chummy with him. He hears I am 'confidential' at Shillabeer's, and he asks me if I will help him in a little private matter in which he does not want to appear publicly. I say that I shall be happy, if my X's are O.K. 'Right!' says he, and right it is."

"And what *is* his little game?" inquired Webster.

"Why, to marry the girl, of course. No, not altogether because she's an heiress, I think. He don't need that, with all that's coming to him. But — well, she's his fancy. She handsones pretty well, has got a spark in her eye, and — he wants her! That's about it. Now, we must help him to get her — for benefits receivable, of course."

"But how?"

"I am coming to that. In the meantime over and above there's the old man. He is writing and cabling all over the place to find his daughter. He has written to Shillabeer's, even. Now, *that's* your biz. You must work that particular golden egg, while I'll attend to love's young dream. Do you catch on?"

Webster nodded somewhat uncertainly.

"What's my share?" he said. "I must be in on the ground floor, mind! No kiddin' with me!"

"My remarkably fresh friend," murmured Eaton, leaning a little nearer him, "you will come in just where and when I let you, if it's in the garret or up on the roof. You can't afford to quarrel with me. So listen. You'll have your fair half of whatever you can get out of the anxious parent, and ten per cent. on all I raise out of skittish beauty and the hymeneal altar! You can have that — or nothing."

Mr. Webster smiled a little sourly, but appeared to prefer "that" to nothing.

"Well," said Mr. Eaton, rising and shaking the legs

Messrs. Eaton and Webster

of his trousers to settle the folds straight down the front, "remember this is only the first act. Porky is playing his own game for all it is worth. By-and-by he'll give himself away. He simply can't help it. You know Porky as well as I do! Then the lady will be 'insulted,' and fling up her job in a huff. She will be friendless, alone — Beauty in distress at the Adelphi, with the snow coming down as big as half-crowns, and her eyes like willow-pattern saucers. When that happens (as it will) you and I must be on hand. We will bring up the lover — if we can in time to rescue, in any case to console. We can work it so that she will be mighty glad to see Mr. — Jones, let us call him. After that, why, what's the matter with St. George's, Hanover Square — plus a leetle American cheque to come the way of 'yours obediently, H. Chadford Eaton'?"

"That's all very well for you, Chadford; and from the way things are going up there, you had better have your man on the spot, to be ready for the noble-hero business. But where do I come in? And what's the old man got to do with it?"

"Oh, the anxious parent is an understudy," said Eaton carelessly. "But it's the same old part, revised to date for parents and guardians. He wants her back, don't he? He's our second string. He will pay for private information of her whereabouts. Now, information of that quality is an expensive article. We must set up a little office of our own — 'Eaton & Webster, confidential agents' — letters to be addressed to my 'digs.' You will keep track of him if he writes to Department Z; collar his letters as they come in. If necessary, you must go over to America and see him."

"Won't the other fellow give you away? The father wanted them married, did n't he?"

"Yes; but the noble hero won't split. He knows a

Ione March

game worth two of that. He is going to work the 'Live your own life, but give me the right to defend you' racket. So as soon as ever Porky—— Hello! What's that?"

"It's him!" whispered Webster, with suddenly whitened face. "He's coming. What shall we do? He'll kill us!"

"Go out and meet him," whispered Chadford, pushing his friend to the door. "Keep him from coming in here!"

Deferral Webster, white and scared, hurried out.

"Why did you not come when I called?" demanded Shillabeer fiercely, from the middle of the stairs.

"I did not hear you, sir. I was up all night with toothache, and may have fallen asleep!"

"Go to Cooledge's, and order dinner for two, to be sent in immediately. Serve it yourself when it comes."

And the chief of Shillabeer's trampled away upstairs again.

Webster returned to his friend, trembling from head to foot.

"Narrow call that time, Webby!" said Mr. Chadford Eaton, to show that he was not afraid. But his companion did not answer. He looked about for a cap, and went hastily out without speaking.

As soon as he was gone, Mr. Eaton laid his glossy hat carefully on a chair, took off his patent leather boots, and stole upstairs on his stocking soles.

It was an extreme step to take, even in the interests of business, but he was abundantly rewarded. For this is what he heard.

At the great table in the office Ione March was still sitting. She had pushed away the piles of correspondence, finished and unfinished, and now sat looking up at Nathaniel Shillabeer with the frank and unembarrassed.

Messrs. Eaton and Webster

gaze of an interested companion. The great man paced to and fro, restless as a caged tiger, and declaimed vividly. His subject was the future glories of Shillabeer's, and as he spoke his voice trembled, and a shiny top-dressing of perspiration began to appear in beads upon his forehead.

"Miss March, up to this point I have worked it all alone, unaided," he said, gesticulating with his hands as he talked. "No human being has ever suggested, helped, encouraged me in anything. But, though you may not believe it, Miss Ione, I am a man who needs friendship — who above all others would appreciate help, love, sympathy."

"These things are not so necessary as you suppose," said Ione. "I came out into the world because I had too much of them."

Shillabeer hardly seemed to notice her words. Like most one-ideaed men, he was not easily turned aside from the metals which he had laid down to carry his purposes. He paused before Ione's chair, and gazed fixedly at her.

"I am glad you consented to wait dinner with me. I have something to say to you — something important."

("It is coming now — lucky I've got my man over there in waiting," chuckled H. Chadford Eaton, on his knees on the mat outside, and his ear glued to the key-hole.)

"Of course I am glad to wait," said Ione. "I think we might finish these specifications to-night, if you don't mind. And besides, I am afraid that I was so happy at the idea of working here all day, that I forgot to order any supper at my lodgings."

("Ah!" murmured Mr. Eaton, wishing that keyholes had been larger, and his ear and eye so arranged that he could have used both at the same time.)

"Miss March," he heard his master say next, "what

Ione March

I have to say may seem extraordinary to you, but I am a man who has found it best to be direct and plain. I have never believed much in 'love,' in the sentimental sense of the word. But you have made me think other things——”

“That's good enough! It is coming. Sharp's the word now — I'll bring my man over,” murmured Mr. Eaton, rising from his knees; “besides, I hear that fool Webby clattering dishes down there. He'll be up here in a minute with the soup tureen if I don't stop him.” And so saying, he stole down to the cockroach-haunted cell where he had left his hat and boots.

It was nearly an hour after this when the deferential Webster, coming with two cups of coffee towards the door of the inner office in which dinner had been served, almost stumbled over two young men. He checked the exclamation which rose involuntarily to his lips. Then the listeners heard the voice of Ione March, a little moved as if by some crisis of feeling, but presently steadying itself in the act of speech.

“No, Mr. Shillabeer,” she said, “I cannot consent to remain in your employment after what has taken place.”

“Let me beseech of you,” the man's voice came hoarse and tremulous; “this need make no difference between us. I will never refer to it again. I tell you I need companionship, help——”

“It cannot be,” said Ione.

“It shall be — it must be! I cannot permit you to go thus. You shall not!”

“Let me go, Mr. Shillabeer!”

Outside on the landing Mr. Eaton signed to the man behind him that the hour was come. He opened the door and stepped back. This is what the three spies saw. Ione stood by the mantelpiece, her gloves on her

Messrs. Eaton and Webster

hands and her satchel over her arm. Papers, and plans were scattered in confusion about the floor. In front of her, and barring her way to the door, stood the powerful figure of Nathaniel Shillabeer, his face drawn and whitened with intense feeling, his hand outstretched to take the girl by the shoulder.

Kearney Judd felt that his chance had come. He was certainly in no wise destitute of courage, for he rushed forward instantly and caught Shillabeer by the arm, twisting him round out of Ione's way.

"Miss March, I am here to save you," he cried; "in my presence you have nothing to fear."

Ione and Shillabeer gazed at Kearney in absolute astonishment. Then it struck the girl that her cruelty must have driven the young man mad, and a remorseful wave swept over her that she had so completely forgotten him.

"And pray who may you be?" said Shillabeer, recovering himself, and staring at the intruder.

"I am the representative of Miss March's family," Kearney said valiantly, "and I give you notice that in my presence Miss March is safe from your insults! I am armed, sir!"

And from his tail-pockets he produced a revolver in a manner somewhat undramatic, owing to the fact that he could not locate the pocket-hole till the third attempt.

"Insults?—My insults to Miss March!" said Shillabeer, his eyes widening. He bit his lip, a frown darkened his brow, and his fists began to clench themselves.

"Yes," cried Kearney, encouraged by his own display of armament; "I give you notice that if you do not freely allow Miss March to leave your establishment at once under my protection, I will not hesitate to shoot you like a dog—like a dog, sir!"

Ione March

Nathaniel Shillabeer turned to Ione with a certain large natural dignity in his carriage, which did away with his equally natural awkwardness.

"Miss March, this young man must certainly be mad," he said; "but in case he has any claims upon you, would you be good enough to inform him what has passed between us?"

"Mr. Shillabeer has done me the favour to ask me to be his wife," said Ione frankly; "an honour which I was forced to decline. Mr. Shillabeer then urged me to remain in his employment notwithstanding what had passed. That was all. Have you anything to object, Mr. Judd?"

Kearney flushed crimson. He felt he had been duped.

"I thought ——" he stammered, turning from one to the other. "I wished —— Your clerk informed me ——"

He could get no further, but looked about for Mr. Chadford Eaton, who cowered out of sight. Ione regarded him a moment calmly and dispassionately. "Mr. Shillabeer," she said, "will you accompany me for a moment? I can with confidence leave these gentlemen to your care."

Nathaniel Shillabeer offered Ione his arm with instant alacrity, though with a gloomy countenance. And as the girl and he passed down the stair, they caught a glimpse of Mr. Eaton shrinking back against the locked door of Department Z.

"Do not move, gentlemen, till I return," said Shillabeer sternly. "I have something to say to each of you." He did not speak again till he had opened the street door, and Ione held out her hand. A lamp-lighter was lighting the nearest lamp on the pavement. Its beams fell suddenly yellow through the grey gloom on the tense face of Shillabeer.

Messrs. Eaton and Webster

"Will you not alter your mind?" he said, with a pleading quiver in his voice, strange in so rough a man. Ione shook her head.

"I cannot," she said; "things could never be as before between us. But all the same I shall never forget your kindness to me."

She held out both her hands impulsively, pulling off her gloves to give them to him. He caught her fingers, and crushed them in a strong man's fierce nervous grasp.

"You will not forget," he said, "if you ever need a friend, where you can assuredly find one?"

"I will not forget!" she said; tears coming into her eyes, and a sense of compression hardening to constriction about her throat; "you have been very good to me. I almost wish I could!"

"Don't trouble about it," he said gently; "it will come all right!"

And with an awkward gesture he dropped one of the girl's hands, and lifted the other to his lips for an instant. Then he vanished within, locking the door after him.

Ione was left on the step under the pale gas-lights with a sudden sense of loneliness. She drew on her gloves slowly. There was a warm place on her right hand, where the rough, strong man had kissed it, and a warm place also in her heart when she remembered Nathaniel Shillabeer. She smiled a little sadly.

"I could n't, of course," she murmured; "but I shall not forget him — ever. He loved me for myself alone."

"Get you 'ansom, Miss!" cried a smart boy, who saw her hesitation. "Show you the way to St. Paul's, Miss — hevenin' service just on!"

"Thank you, I will take a 'bus," said Ione, glancing up for the last time at the beplacarded front of the

Ione March

World's Wisdom Emporium. "I wonder," she added to herself, "if ever I shall be so happy again."

But within other things were happening, which need not be expressed in detail. Sufficient that within half an hour after Ione had caught her Albert Bridge 'bus, three battered and dishevelled young men had reached the payement — in detachments of one at a time. The first arrival, Mr. Kearney Judd, ensconced himself promptly in a hansom, and was driven to the back entrance of his hotel.

"And what do you think of your precious plan now, Mr. Napoleon, Junior," sneered Webster, "and what are you going to do about getting me into a new crib?"

The reply of Mr. Chadford Eaton need not be chronicled.

CHAPTER XVIII

TWO WAIFS OF THE CITY

IN this cataclysmic fashion Ione found herself once more at a loose end. The World's Wisdom Emporium had climaxed like a blown soap-bubble. While it lasted Shillabeer's had indeed afforded her a liberal salary, much more than sufficient for her moderate needs. And of that, together with the money she had brought from Switzerland, there remained just forty pounds, which seemed quite enough to live upon till she should find something else to do. Her little fortune she determined to bank at an American Exchange for safe keeping, and to draw enough for her weekly expenses as occasion demanded.

She mentioned her trouble to Jane Allen, though without telling her the whole of the interview with her late principal.

"No," coincided Jane, somewhat wistfully. "I suppose you could n't marry him. But it's a pity all the same. Up till now I've always been sorry I'm not as pretty as you: but then on the other hand, people don't fall in love with me, so that I've got to give up a good place to keep out of their way. But what are you going to do, Ione? Secretarying is hard to get, and, besides, you have very likely had enough of it. Have you ever acted?"

"Well, yes ——" confessed Ione; "that is, I've often played with amateurs. Many of the big hotels abroad have quite nice theatres."

"What have you acted in?"

Ione March

"Let me see, only the usual things for amateurs — Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, Rosalind, and — well, charades."

Jane Allen cried out with sudden laughter.

"I am afraid the Shakespeare women are no good," she said, when she had recovered, "but the charades might help a little. Anyway, you would look all right on the stage. You are too tall for a soubrette though, but you would do famously for a weeper or a leading juvenile."

"But I have had no training, and —"

"Oh, I'll find out all about that to-day for you — I know a girl who acts at the 'Sobriety.' I don't believe she had as much training as you've had, and I know she drops her 'aitches'!"

"Who? — Madge Tremont?" queried Ione.

"Well, not quite. My friend is n't exactly the star yet," smiled Jane Allen. "Indeed, she don't often have anything to say; but once she had to cough and knock down a book when she was a waiting maid, so that Madge Tremont would know that she was there, and not be going on too much with her young man."

"Your friend must be getting on in her profession," said Ione.

"Susie La Vallière, yes — I should just say so. Why, she can whistle better than any girl I ever heard — the treble on one side of her mouth, and the bass at the other, as natural as life. And as soon as there's a whistling part at the 'Sobriety,' they're just bound to give it to her. Then she'll knock the star all to fits. Madge Tremont won't be in it!"

"What is a whistling part, Jane?"

"Oh, sort of song and dance, you know! Dandy nigger boy from Ole Virginia, Alabama Coon with a big hat and trousers made of the stars and stripes. Niggers are rather off just now, but they're sure to come on

Two Waifs of the City

again before long. I'll run across and talk to Susie today."

Ione had no great faith in the ability of Miss Susie La Vallière to whistle her into a good place at the "Sobriety." Besides which she felt herself quite unable to compete with a gifted lady who could whistle the treble with one side of her mouth, even without taking into account the bass upon the other. Nevertheless she thanked Jane, and intimated her intention of accompanying her into town. Ione was not the girl to sit down and wait (as her father used to say of a lazy man) "for a million a month job at doing nothing to come along."

That afternoon the two girls started together for the American Exchange, to open the wonderful bank account. At the corner of the common it came on to rain, and they boarded a tramcar into which many nurses and children, who had been enjoying a breath of comparatively fresh air, were crowding. Amongst others who made their way in was a strong, dark-browed, country-looking woman, pushing a little girl before her. The child was in the rudest of health. Her face shone round as the full moon — either apple-cheek deeply stained with red. Her eyes, small, beaded, and black as sloes, were fixed on a basket of cherries, from which she was eating steadily with the most absolute confidence in her powers of digestion.

Just opposite, upon the knee of a young widow in deep mourning, was perched a child of another mould and world. Slight, pale, dainty, and refined, she sat watching with a certain vague wistfulness the operations of the exuberant gourmand.

Once or twice she whispered something to her mother, but the widow shook her head with querulous impatience at the interruption, and continued to stare abstractedly

Ione March

out of the window through the transparent advertisements of soap-extracts and cut tobaccos.

But presently the mother of the cherry-eater, who was jovially talkative and interested in all her neighbours, caught sight of the little girl seated on her mother's knee.

She stooped down and said something to her own daughter, who however only frowned and went on eating.

"Offer some of your cherries to the little lady," she repeated audibly, delivering the sentence as if it had been an actual box on the side of the head instead of only a forewarning of one.

With the sulkiest and most unwilling of airs, the little girl turned over the contents of her basket. With care and deliberation she selected the very smallest and most ripe of her cherries, which she offered to her dainty neighbour seated opposite.

She was thanked with the most charming of smiles, and an inclination of the head which would have done credit to a court. Then the pale face was turned up to the mother for permission to eat the cherry.

"Thank you very much," she said, when this had been safely accomplished. "It is very good, indeed!"

But from the donor there came no response. Her anguish of mind was extreme. In trembling haste lest her mother should insist on further generosity, she began to cram the remaining cherries into her mouth literally by handfuls, till even Jane Allen grew alarmed.

"That child will for a certainty choke herself on the stones, if she is allowed to go on shovelling the cherries into her mouth like that!" she whispered to Ione.

"Perhaps like your whistling friend, she keeps one side of her mouth for the cherry, and the other for the stone," returned Ione.

"Oh, will you just look?" murmured Jane Allen,

Two Waifs of the City

in an awed whisper, catching her companion by the wrist. "Ione, it is quite true. She is dropping the stones into her lap as she eats — three or four at a time — what a perfect little pig!"

Just then the epicure reached the bottom of her basket, and it was with an absolute sigh of relief that the last cherry disappeared down her throat. Not one more could possibly be torn from her. And now with all anxieties past she sat eyeing the interloper, as if mentally hoping that the one ravished cherry might disagree with her.

The widow and the little girl made ready to get out at the end of the tramway line. Jane and Ione followed them. As they did so a gentleman came forward and lifted his hat to the widow. It was Keith Harford. A vivid blush rose to Ione's face and she turned sharply round, hoping to escape unnoticed by the other side of the car. But she was too late, Keith Harford had spied her; and with the slightest elevation of eyebrow, he lifted his hat to her also.

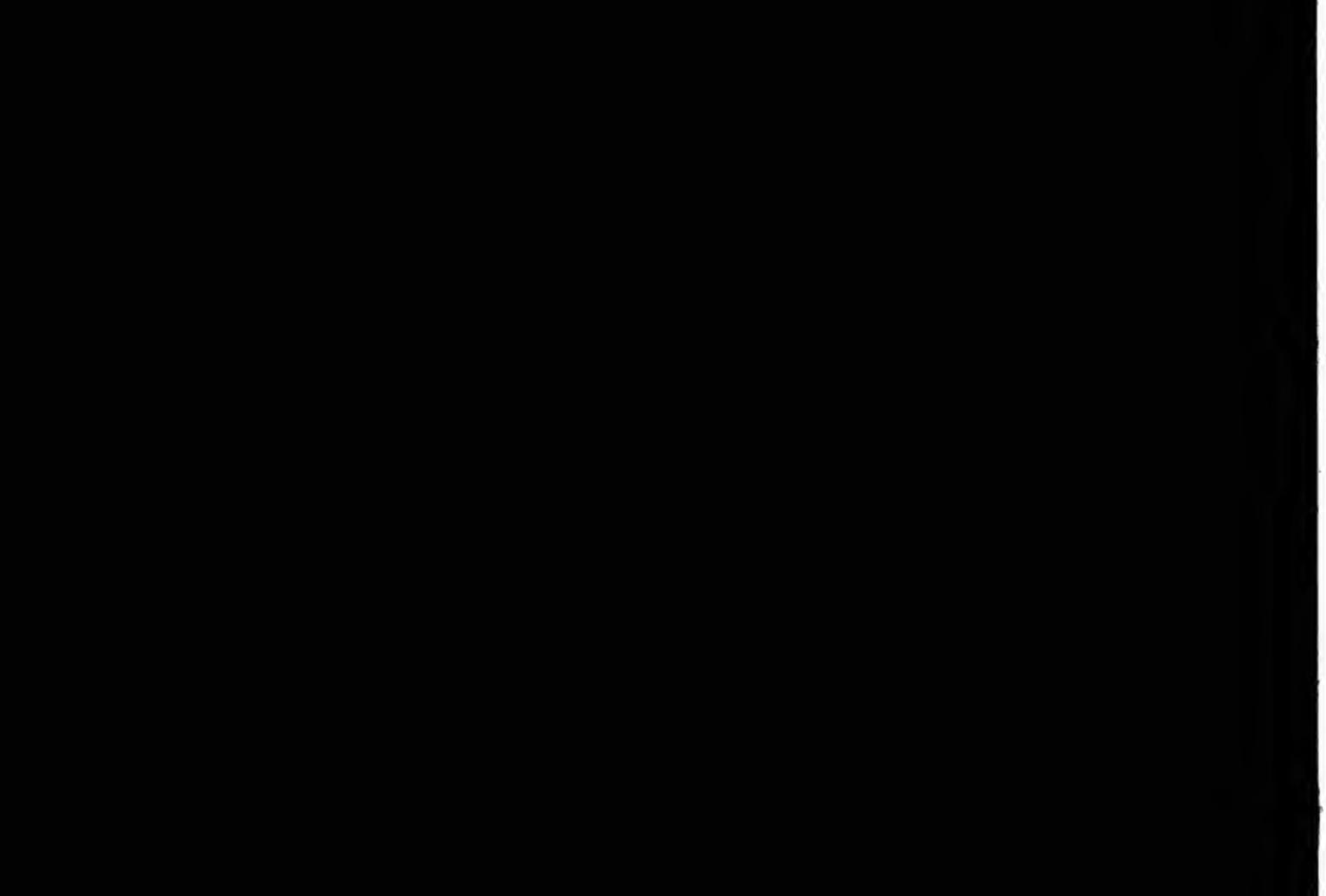
"Miss March," he cried, after he had shaken hands with the young widow; "you are not going to run off without speaking to me. I am surprised to see you in this part of London. I did not even know that you were in England."

Ione nodded with some vexation, knowing that the colour was rising to her neck, and would before long be beaconing agitation from her cheeks.

"I came over some months ago," she answered curtly enough.

"Will you allow me to introduce my sister-in-law, Mrs. Vincent Harford," he said, "and also my pet sweetheart, Angel?"

"I like you," cried the pale little girl impulsively, running up and taking hold of Ione's hand. "I loved you







in Marcus.

His wife rumbled his hair down over his brow, till his blue eyes looked ruefully forth from the tangle like an owl out of an ivy bush.

"It's nice, Ione; just try it! Curls like that over the forehead tickle your hand so cunningly when you stroke them. She won't, horrid thing! Ne-eyv-er

Ione March

and holding to the tree, I saw the light move and darken below, and then flicker and brighten in the windows above. And then — and then — after a while I saw it put out. It rained out there by the tree, and the big broad drops fell on my face. But I did not care, for I fell down and lay all night in the wet like one dead.

"And next day I was taken to the hospital, for it was brain fever I had. And it was eight months and many things had happened before I came out again, the shadow of the girl that walked along that road from the little station, all to see Joseph Broome's wife standing at the door. But when I came home I sent him all the sheets that were not marked and the other things I had got ready. And he took them. But you see these were marked, and so I could not send them. For I heard that her name was Alice."

And all the time Jane Allen knelt by Ione's bedside, holding the linen in her thin fingers, smoothing it and touching it gently as if it had been a dead child, turning the name this way and that as she looked at the pretty neat black lettering. The water was running steadily down her cheeks now, and with the beginning of that the dry sob had ceased. Suddenly, however, the girl threw her face forward, and with her brow sunk on Ione's shoulders, she cried out in pain.

"Oh, I think I would n't have minded if he had n't stroked her just like he used to do me on the cheek. I

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"Imitation — all iron girders and cockroaches!" put in Marcus.

His wife rumbled his hair down over his brow, till his blue eyes looked ruefully forth from the tangle like an owl out of an ivy bush.

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in a strange land. I shan't cry. No, sir! I shall just say, 'Good-bye, Mr. Man — pleased to have met you. You're welcome to the other girl, if you can get her.' Only I don't believe she'd look at you — though some women are such flirts, it's perfectly horrid!"

And so on.

Jane Allen's Tragedy

"Jane," she said, "get into bed at once!"

"I must put these back," she said, checking her sobs quickly and rising to her feet.

"You will catch cold — I will do that," returned Ione.

So Ione took the linen sheets, and leaving Jane Allen in her warm place, she went into her friend's room. The little bureau was open. On the bed lay a folded dress, of white nun's veiling, with lace and a blue rosette of ribbons upon it at the shoulder — a poor, tawdry, home-made thing. But the same hard woman's sob came into Ione's throat as she gazed, for she knew that she was looking at the wedding-dress of her that should have been Jane Broome. So swiftly and reverently she returned the linen to its place, and nestled the faded white dress tenderly on top. As she pulled it off the bed, a picture lay half revealed underneath the pillow. Ione could not help looking at it by the light of the candle. It represented a very smug-looking young man with short muttonchop whiskers, his abundant hair dressed in a sleek cock's-comb. He was leaning in a self-contented and provincial manner against a pillar which stood alone in a classical landscape. Beside him, and upon a chair, sat the dimpling radiant image of the girl whose pale shadow was to-day Jane Allen. The young man's hand was half raised from her shoulder, as if only the moment before he had stroked her cheek and murmured



Ione March

in the car, and I'm so glad you are a friend of Uncle Keith's. I like your friend, too!" she added, with instinctive courtesy, anxious not to leave any one out.

She looked after the retreating figure of Jane Allen, who was walking on with infinite dignity in the stiffness of her figure.

"Jane," said Ione, "do come here!"

Very unwillingly Jane stopped, turned, and came slowly back. Ione introduced her, but she suffered rather than responded to the ceremony. A princess in her own right could not have bowed with more of protest in her manner, if in private life she had been introduced to her grocer. Ione was much vexed. She even said to herself that she could have cuffed Jane Allen.

"My friend and I are about to take the train here, for Victoria Station, and I fear we must bid you good-bye!" said Ione.

"My sister also is going to Victoria," said Keith Harford, smiling pleasantly; "perhaps we might all go together!"

Then Ione could have bitten her tongue out for having spoken so hastily. She could so easily have parted from them at the entrance to the station, and taken a 'bus into the City. Now, however, it was too late, especially as Mrs. Vincent, with an expression on her face not too friendly, was compelled to echo her brother's hope.

Keith Harford asked where they were going, that he might take tickets for them.

"I am very poor these days," he added, smiling, "so they will be third class."

Ione laughed with more pleasure than she had yet shown.

"We are all poor, and the tickets would have been third in any case."

Two Waifs of the City

"I can quite well pay for my own ticket, thank you!" said Jane Allen aggressively, at the same time bending down to the wired wicket. "Single to the Temple, please!"

"No, Jane," said Ione, "you know you have to go to Victoria first."

Keith Harford smiled calmly down upon Jane Allen.

"Certainly you can pay me," he said, "but you might at least let me get the ticket for you."

Finally Jane consented to alter her destination to Victoria, but as they passed down the steps, and while Keith was showing the tickets to the gate-keeper, she leaned towards Ione.

"You are making it up with him," she hissed; "and after what you promised, too. I'll never speak to you again as long as I live!"

Ione stared, bewildered. What could the girl mean, and why did she hold herself as stiff as if she had fastened in Mrs. Adair's kitchen poker along with her stays?

But she had no time for questioning or argument. For till Victoria was reached, it took all her powers of fence to answer satisfactorily the innocent questions of Keith Harford and his sister-in-law. Little Angel, who had taken a child's sudden fancy for Ione, sat stroking her glove and looking fondly up into her face.

As they came out of the station, Keith Harford signalled a hansom and leaned forward to open it for his sister. A little spasm of discontent and dislike passed across her face.

"Come away, Angel!" she said pointedly. "Uncle Keith wishes to get rid of us; we won't keep him from his friends!"

The cab drove off before any one had time to say a word, and Ione turned about to take Jane Allen's arm

Ione March

and coax her into a better frame of mind. Keith was by her side, but Jane Allen had vanished.

"Did you see anything of my friend?" she asked of Harford a little breathlessly.

"She certainly was here a moment ago. Can she have gone into a shop?" said Keith, looking about him however with no great eagerness or alacrity. But neither in shop nor yet on street did they see any more of Jane Allen that day.

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CHAPTER XIX

VAULTING AMBITION

KEITH HARFORD and Ione were left alone, and after the first plunge both took the matter rather calmly. Without thinking much of their surroundings, they walked contentedly together down the wide and busy street, the passers-by seeming somehow no more than idle phantom-shapes about them. Instead of the gloomy trivialities of Buckingham Palace Road they beheld the mural front of the Eiger, with the toothed Wetterhorn and the silver Jungfrau setting their snowy horns over the sullen cowed Monk.

"Hansom, sir!" called a crawler from the pavement edge.

"Thank you, I have engaged my guides!" replied Keith. Ione laughed a little helplessly, as one might in church.

"How strange!" she said. "I too was thinking about the main street of Grindelwald at that very moment. Why, how pale you are, Mr. Harford!"

"I was about to say the same of you, Miss March! I fear we have both lost our mountain tan!"

They were silent for about a hundred yards, threading their way past a spate of passers-by, till to avoid them they turned almost mechanically into a quieter side street.

"I think that I had better tell you," said Ione at last, controlling her voice, "that I have left my father, and am making my own living — not very successfully as yet, it is true. I am 'out of employment' at present. Isn't that the English phrase?"

Ione March

There was pain as well as mirth in the little laugh which accompanied her words.

"I too am as poor as any one needs to be," said Keith Harford, looking down thoughtfully. "I fear I am a careless, improvident fellow at best. When I have money I spend it, or give it away — at any rate it takes to itself wings and does just as the Scriptures say. And then sometimes I can't make any more all in a minute. People print what I write readily enough, but somehow they don't always remember to pay me for it as quickly!"

"Do you ever ask them to pay?" queried practical Ione, swiftly.

"Ask them? No, of course not! How could I ask them?"

There was a look of wonder on Keith's dark and thoughtful face, worn keen and thin during months of disappointment and loneliness.

"People never ask you for money, I suppose?" mused Ione, darting a swift sharp glance at him under her eyelashes.

"Oh, they do — they do," he admitted mournfully; "and sometimes it is very painful when I have got none to give them. But these are mostly trades-people and not —"

"Not university men!" There was the least grain of hard irony in Ione's tone. "What a silly child!" she was saying to herself. "How the man does need to be looked after!"

And her brow grew more and more thoughtful as they walked on.

"But you — did I understand you to say that you needed work, Miss March?"

Keith Harford had not yet taken in the situation.

"Why, yes; that is just what I did say. — I've been in two places, one after the other, and I did n't suit one,

Vaulting Ambition

and the other did n't suit me. So I am thinking of trying the stage. It is, I know, the last refuge of the incompetent — or the last but one, the parapet of Westminster Bridge being the ultimate, I believe."

Happily Keith had heard her first words only.

"The stage," he said; "that is strange. I have just been appointed Lecturer on Shakespeare and the Classic Drama to an International College of Dramatic Art. The salary indeed is a mere pittance, but it may lead somewhere — and besides, beggars cannot be choosers."

A wonderful sense of coincidence came over Ione. This, if not precisely providential, was surely something very like it.

"Let me come with you," she said simply; "that is just the very place I am seeking for."

An eager answering light shone on the face of her companion. He seemed about to say something, then he checked himself and was silent for a moment.

"Better wait," he said, "till I see what the place is like. Could I not call upon you to-morrow, and talk it over?"

But Ione had been accustomed all her life to "rush" things, as she herself would have said.

"Oh no," she pleaded, "do let me come along with you now!"

He would have called a hansom, but Ione with a new pity and comradeship in her heart to see him so pale and discouraged, said, "Unless you are pressed for time, Mr. Harford, why don't we both walk? It will do us good."

Then, as they threaded their way citywards, Keith Harford told how he and Marcus Hardy had parted at the end of the month in Switzerland — Hardy to go to Paris with the Juds, Keith Harford to return to London alone.

Ione March

"And you," queried Ione, "why did not you also accompany the Judds?"

"Oh, I — well, I had only ten pounds left after paying my guides for the season and —"

"Did your friend know that?" asked Ione with sudden sharpness.

"Hardy? Oh no, certainly not! He knows nothing of my affairs. He has had plenty of money all his life, and so, very naturally, he thinks nothing about it."

Ione was silent a long time. She was walking unevenly, superstitiously avoiding the cracks in the flagstones in a way she had when thinking deeply.

"And yet you have told *me*?" she said softly.

"That is different," her companion interposed eagerly.

"By necessity or choice you are as poor as I. Besides, though I have not known you long, I thought from the very first time I saw you that I should like to call you my friend. May I?"

They were at a street-crossing. Ione was about to trip across in her quick impulsive way, but a huge overloaded omnibus came thundering down upon them like a toppling car of Juggernaut. Perhaps by instinct, perhaps a little by intention, Keith laid his hand with a light restraint over Ione's gloved fingers as they bent themselves round the top of her umbrella. Ione did not resent the action. Keith and she seemed somehow comrades in one regiment, derelict fragments of the same forlorn hope, both poor and both castaway in the mighty whirl of this London. Presently the crossing cleared and they were at the other side. Ere she knew it, Ione found herself detaching her hand from Keith's arm, which she had involuntarily clutched as a second earthquake on four wheels charged down upon them. These are simple things, in themselves insignificant, yet really as significant of approaching danger, like the

Vaulting Ambition

tunnels driven by water rats through the sea dykes of Holland.

"The International College of Dramatic Art ought to be somewhere about here," Keith said, as they turned out of the eternal eddy of Trafalgar Square and the double flood tide of the Strand, into one of the quiet streets which make a left-handed bend north-westwards in the direction of Leicester Square.

Ione was distinctly disappointed with Kersymere Street, in which the college was situated. No magnificent frontage greeted the eye—only the usual submerged tenth of unkempt and grimy domiciles, the same frowzy and greasy shop fronts, the same flourishing public-houses as elsewhere in the district. There must, she thought, surely be some mistake.

They stood before Number 120. It proved to be entered by a lowish and inconceivably dirty doorway, which had had recently painted over it the legend "International College of Dramatic Art" in black capitals which permitted of no further argument.

"It does not look particularly promising," said Keith, "but then these places often do not make a show, and after all the instruction is the thing."

"Certainly," chimed in the hopeful Ione; "and if the principal has had the sense to engage you as a lecturer on Shakespeare, he will doubtless have equally good people to give instruction on other subjects."

"Let's see—I ought to have a prospectus about me somewhere," said Keith, and forthwith pulled a magnificent document out of his breast-pocket. It was printed on vellum-like paper, which of itself suggested respectability and a diploma with seals at the end of the curriculum.

Ione's hand trembled as she unfolded the prospectus. Rosy visions filled her mind. A gateway into a new fairyland seemed to swing suddenly open before her.

Ione March

She thought of the applause of the hotel audiences which had endured seeing her act *Rosalind* and *Lady Macbeth* on alternate nights for a whole week in the dead of winter. She had been conscious that some slight training was all she needed, and now it seemed that good fortune and Keith Harford had led her straight to the right place. The staid "long primer" and the abundant "Old English" of the advertisement seemed to dance before her eyes. Crowded and enthusiastic play-houses appeared to rise at her in the very dots of the i's, and every capital T was a signpost pointing the way to fame and fortune with both arms.

When the turmoil in her heart stilled itself a little and Ione could calmly grasp the meaning of what was before her, she began to read the composition aloud. The two stood together in the grimy doorway of the College like a couple of children. Keith was looking over Ione's shoulder as she read, in a comradeship which knew no future and no past, but which somehow seemed to be right, and the only possible relationship between them.

At last, through the discomposing clouds of agitation and excitement, the following facts disentangled themselves from the shaking paper, upon the edge of which Keith had considerably put his hand that he might steady it sufficiently for Ione to read.

It appeared that, for the sum of £30 in sterling unclipped coin, one could obtain a session's instruction from the greatest artists in the metropolitan dramatic profession. For three months Ione could enjoy the advantages of a regularly equipped theatre. There was also a hall for instruction in dancing of the most severely classical sort, skirt-dancing being an extra and serpentine gyration, a speciality to be contracted for privately. Elocution, voice production, singing, Shakespeare and the classical drama were all represented in this most

Vaulting Ambition

comprehensive curriculum. Ione felt it made her an actress only to read the prospectus over.

Her finger ran along the line where Keith's name ought to have stood. It terminated with that of a distinguished literary critic, the infallibility of whose judgment upon all subjects had never been warped by writing anything original upon even one.

"And you are Mr. Wobbleigh Cavendish's successor?" she said, looking with reverence at her companion. Keith bowed a little ironical bow of acknowledgement, looking down at her meantime over her shoulder.

"I have that privilege," he said; "but I am sorry for the great man if I also succeed to his honorarium."

"Oh, I should love to come to your class," Ione went on plaintively; "but I suppose it will be a long time before I am so far advanced as to be permitted."

"Well," said Keith as wistfully, "I don't know. If you will notice, Shakespeare and the Classic Drama are bracketed with the art of Fence as a supernumerary subject at the end. That is perhaps why the pay is only a pound a week."

"A pound a week," cried Ione; "surely you are to get more than that — why, the fees are thirty pounds for a course of three months. Surely they must pay their professors more than a pound a week."

"There are the buildings to keep up and the acting director to provide for, I suppose," said Keith. "I've not seen him yet, but he writes a very good letter. I have one in my pocket, and it is quite poetical. Let us go up. After you have seen the inside of the College, you can decide whether you care to join."

Presently they entered an outer office, which they found in the sole occupation of a grimy and wizened boy. This prematurely aged youth was relaxing himself by vaulting over two chairs placed back to back,

Ione March

propelling himself by means of a large and very ancient floor-brush. He took the two cards with fingers which instantly hall-marked the paste-boards on either side. Then, after he had glanced at these rather doubtfully, he grinned compassionately and forthwith vanished into an inner room.

Keith and Ione looked about them. Certainly the reception-room of the College did not, any more than its exterior, live up to the magnificent prospectus. The floor-brush had not been used for its legitimate purpose during at least a generation. The walls, however, were covered with photographs of professional ladies in all manner of impossible poses and irrelevant costumes. One or two flaring bills of local theatres had been tacked up here and there as a suitable mural adornment.

"Severely classical!" said Keith Harford, looking about him with a smile.

"Shockingly dirty!" snorted Ione, with a disgusted feminine dilation of the nostrils. "If I stay here a single day, I'll snatch that broom from the boy, and get some tea-leaves to sprinkle over all this!"

"The director will see you," said the grimy boy at this moment, appearing again at the inner door, and looking round for the broom in order to resume his interrupted studies. He watched the door close upon them, and then added in a meditative undertone, "O Lor', cabbage for two!"

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CHAPTER XX

MR. ACTING DIRECTOR SWEEL

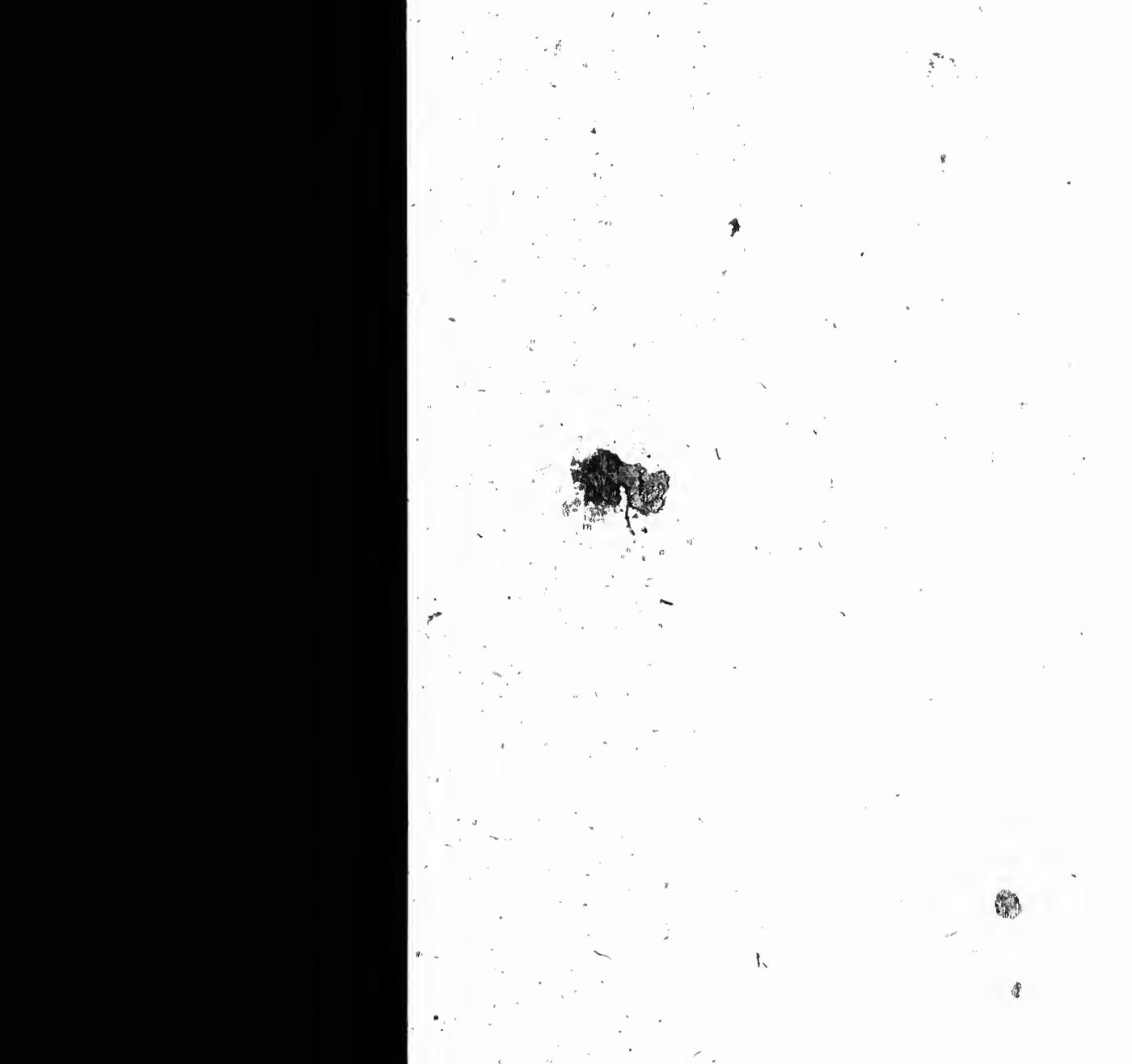
IN a moment they found themselves, as it were, in the presence of the arbiter of their fates. Ione the independent put it thus to herself, for Keith seemed to her already almost like a brother. She felt in her heart that she could trust him to the outer edge of Time — and beyond. Was he not somehow different from every one else?

The chief director of the International College of Dramatic Art proved to be a tall, thin, scholarly-looking man, with eyes which might have been fine if they had not been concealed by glasses of an aggressively round shape, dark green in colour. As he turned his face towards Ione, his aquiline nose protruded between the circles like a cow-catcher, between the twin side-lights of her native locomotive. In another moment, however, she had grown conscious of a particularly cool and keen regard, which pierced her through and through as if to discover whether the sacred fire was alight in her bosom, and exactly in which spot it burned brightest.

"You are an emotional, Miss March!" announced the director, as the result of this prolonged inspection. They were the first words he had spoken after the formalities of introduction.

"I — I beg your pardon," said Ione. "I don't think I quite understand. I came here with Mr. Keith Harford. I merely thought of joining the college as a pupil."

The director turned the circles of his green dead-lights upon Keith inquiringly. His expression became



Ione March

distinctly less agreeable. He seemed to write off thirty guineas from some mental ledger.

"I think, sir," said Keith, "that you and I have had some correspondence. You engaged me to succeed Mr. Wobbleigh Cavendish in lecturing upon Shakespeare and the classical —"

"My dear Professor Harford — so I did! I have been looking out eagerly for you all the morning. Your class is waiting for you. Pray come this way."

And the director opened a door on the left, through which strange irregular noises had been proceeding. A range of hacked wooden benches was revealed surrounding a kind of circular well, in the midst of which two young gentlemen were having a tremendous combat with wooden broad-swords, while several others were seated on the backs of the benches, or leaned over them as from the gallery of a theatre. These last were mostly smoking cigarettes and encouraging the combatants with shouts of "Well played, Macduff! Wipe the floor with him, Macbeth!"

"The professor of Fence having temporarily resigned," said the director, as soon as he could obtain a hearing, "the pupils were practising till your arrival. I will now deliver them into your capable charge."

"But it was the Shakespeare class which I undertook to teach," said Keith, much puzzled.

The director seemed saddened and disappointed, and passed his hand wearily over his brow, as if the vagaries of professors at a pound a week were really too much for him. But he did not give up.

"It is the same thing," he said suavely, "or, at least, may be considered almost identical. This is, if I mistake not, a Shakespearean combat. It represents a well-known scene from — ah! the celebrated play of *Macbeth*. From your Christian name or prænomen, I presume you

Mr. Acting Director Sweel

are a Scotchman. You will therefore be peculiarly fitted for demonstrating that true inwardness of the passage to your class. Gentlemen, let me introduce to you Professor Harford, your new instructor!"

And with that he bowed and got out as quickly as possible, leaving Keith alone with this somewhat casual and exceedingly unceremonious band of "students."

"My dear young lady," said the director, breathing a sigh of relief as soon as he had disposed of Keith, "you wish to join the college. You are, as I said before, an emotional, though you may not be conscious of your *métier*. And permit me to say that you could not have come to a better place to develop and prune — yes, prune is the word — the luxuriance of your talent. Without doubt, when you have the rough edges a little rubbed down, when the diamond of your genius is polished and set, if you will permit me so to speak, it will be ready to shine resplendently in its own proper sphere."

He bowed again, and Ione was quite grateful for the momentary relief. It took the full-orbed glare of the green "caution" lights off her for a moment, and turned them blightingly on the carpet — which, moreover, seemed to have suffered severely from them in former times, to judge by its present mangy and threadbare condition.

"And now, my dear young lady," he continued, fixing her again as the glasses came to the "present," "I do not wish to take your money till you thoroughly understand our position.

"Our staff of instructors is at present most unfortunately somewhat incomplete. But the professors who have left are really of no importance, being only those of a second-class order. Besides, as you know from the recent appointment of your friend, we are as

Ione March

rapidly as possible filling up the vacancies. Still, I tell you this now in order to prevent future disappointment."

Mr. Augustus Clarence Sweel (his name was printed plainly both over the door of the sanctum and in large letters on the prospectus) next handed Ione a paper to fill up, in which she was asked to agree to all manner of rules and restrictions. These she passed over with a glance. If she were going through with the thing at all, she was prepared to put herself under discipline. But a paragraph towards the foot of the paper, printed in strong black Clarendon type to attract attention, caught her eye, and she gazed at it with horror. Thus it stood like a five-barred gate across her path to distinction.

"Regulation 17. Every student of the College must, before acceptance and enrolment, be strongly recommended by two prominent citizens, or by one Member of Parliament."

"Some such course," said Mr. Augustus Sweel gravely, "we find most necessary, as the very limited space at our disposal in the college compels us severely to restrict the number of our entrants."

Involuntarily a little sigh escaped Ione.

"Then," she said, "I am afraid it will not be possible for me to become a student with you, because I am a stranger in London, and certainly do not know two prominent citizens, nor yet so much as one Member of Parliament."

Mr. Augustus Sweel looked infinitely distressed.

"It does seem a pity," he mused; "and one so young and talented! But let me see; let me see. Perhaps, if we kept the matter very quiet, it might be managed."

Mr. Acting Director Sweel

Ione gave him a grateful look, which was stopped point-blank by the green dead-lights. As the College of Dramatic Art seemed shutting its doors upon her, the girl realised how high were the hopes which she had been building upon it.

"At any rate," continued Mr. Sweel, "I will consult our lady superintendent, and see if we cannot arrange the matter without publicity. For I see clearly that if you had a chance, you would do credit both to yourself and to us."

Ione fairly blushed with pleasure, marvelling at Mr. Sweel's insight into character.

When he left the room she felt that she had already made a great stride towards success in her future profession. But, after five minutes of sobering solitude, she began to wish that she had had the courage to ask Mr. Sweel what were the branches of study which had been closed to her by the premature departure of the instructors.

On her way to the college she had resolved to be so exceedingly business-like, to make such strict inquiries as to the exact course of study to be followed, and the percentage of good and lucrative engagements obtained by graduates at the close of the college term. And lo! here she was, without a single question asked, fairly hanging upon the verdict of Mr. Sweel and upon that of an unknown and probably hostile lady superintendent, while the precious thirty pounds — three-fourths of her whole available resources — were literally burning holes in her pocket.

In ten minutes Mr. Sweel returned and said that he was most happy to inform Miss March that his committee had resolved, upon his initiative — and, he might say, guarantee, to waive the recommendation clause in her favour; but she must on no account allow the fact to leak out in the college or elsewhere, as others less

Ione March

fortunate might consider that an injustice had been done to them by her irregular admission.

With an eager beating heart Ione agreed to everything without a word of question, and in a moment more she had signed half a dozen necessary papers. Her purse was in her hands, out of which she told one by one the thirty golden sovereigns, receiving in return a matriculation card, with the arms of the college printed in gold at the top, and, in addition, a proud internal consciousness that she was already well up the ladder of fame.

"Now," said Mr. Sweel, somewhat moderating his tone of suave flattery as soon as the chinking pieces had changed hands, "we will, if you please, proceed at once to the theatre, and there you may join the class of practical training which is at present going on under Professor Claudius Roscoe. To-morrow I will arrange what course of study it will benefit you most to pursue, and what line of dramatic art you ought to take up."

They passed into a larger room, the upper end of which consisted of a raised platform, on which a couple of youths and two or three girls were countermarching and gesticulating. The girls were dressed with a show of cheap finery. Their hair was so much banged and befrizzled that what remained of it looked as parched and wiry as the bushy parts of a poodle. The young men generally presented a loose-jointed, out-at-elbows appearance, and Ione could not help vaguely wondering whether it was because of the burning of the sacred lamp of genius, or because they could not afford the luxury of a barber, that they wore their hair so particularly long, lank, and turned outward at the ends.

In the middle of the platform a stout little man, of a distinctly Jewish cast of features, was standing brandishing a chair and looking wildly excited.

The entrance of Mr. Sweel with Ione prevented the

Mr. Acting Director Sweel

continuance of whatever remarks the little man was about to punctuate with the chair, to the evident relief of the group on the platform.

"Miss March — Professor Roscoe," said the director with a bland smile. "Ladies and gentlemen, Miss March, your latest fellow-student, in whose bosom the sacred —"

But at this moment Mr. Sweel was interrupted by a tremendous burst of applause from the room into which Keith Harford had disappeared. The conclusion of the director's peroration, which, however, was obviously well known to the students, is therefore lost to humanity.

"I leave Miss March in your hands," he went on, as with an obvious lack of ease he edged himself towards the door, "and I am sure one of the ladies will be good enough to take charge of our new friend after the lesson is finished. I have not yet decided what precise direction Miss March's studies are to take."

After Mr. Sweel had vanished, Ione stood looking on, and feeling distinctly forlorn and friendless. But at least it was a comfort to think that Keith Harford was in the next room. Professor Roscoe's interrupted lesson proceeded, and in a little while Ione grew interested and amused to hear the frenzied accents in which one of the towsy-headed girls implored a certain extremely stolid hero to "forgive her," while that Spartan youth leaned in a severely classical and reposeful manner upon a painted mantelpiece. From this his elbow continually slipped as he became every moment more and more nobly unapproachable and unresponsively dignified. On the whole it struck Ione how much more thoroughly the girls were able to forget themselves and throw themselves into their parts than the men, who, without exception, walked and spoke as if operated by hidden clockwork. Yet it was not without a secret thrill of anxiety that she

Ione March

thought how, perhaps in a few minutes, she herself might be called upon to face the critical eyes of her fellow-students.

But for the present she was spared this ordeal. The lesson was, in fact, almost over, and at its close the girls came over to Ione in a body, and with the heartiest good-will in the world, offered to "see her through."

Meanwhile Mr. Roscoe was addressing some final scathing remarks to the young men before departing. These seemed to be to the effect that every man-jack of them might just as well have been blocked out of wood and finished with a face of putty, for all the use he could make of either limbs or features in order to express emotion.

"If there's an ounce of brains divided among this whole class, I'll—I'll eat my hat!" was his final summing up, as the fiery little professor slammed the door.

"And a very greasy meal you'd have of it," said one of the girls. "No, it's a shame; I won't say a word against him. Little Roscoe's the only decent man about the place. There's a new man here to-day, though—dark, and awfully handsome; but Sweel has turned him on to the Fencing and Shakespeare, instead of old Wobleigh Cavendish. He may be no end of a swell at explaining the illustrious William, but I doubt if he knows the inside of a theatre when he sees one."

As the girls came forward to talk to Ione, the youths one by one somewhat reluctantly left the room, casting envious glances across at the graceful figure of the new pupil, which certainly contrasted pleasantly with the frowsy commonplace blonde good looks of her seniors in college standing.

"Now, if you like, I'll take you round and expound the wiles and deceits of old Green Deadlights," said a

Mr. Acting Director Sweel

dark heavily-built girl, who was addressed as Snowdrop Rogers by her companions, but whose imperious carriage and piercing black eyes were certainly far from suggesting that modest blossom of spring.

"Don't you go with her, Miss March. Oh, what is your first name? We can't be 'Miss'-ing each other all day in this abode of the dead. We've got too much to put up with in other ways. 'Ione'? What a pretty name! Is it a given name or a stage name? Really! Well, don't you get yourself taken round by Snowdrop Rogers. All she wants is to sneak you into a quiet corner and spout Lady Macbeth at you!"

"Oh, but," said Ione cheerfully, "I can do that too, as well as the next man. I would just spout Lady Macbeth back again till she dropped, if she tried that on a stranger. Now, I warn you, Snowdrop Rogers. On your life be it!"

"But you don't look the part, my dear, and I do," objected Snowdrop; "you're much too slim, and your nose——"

"Now then, out of the way, Sairey Siddons!" cried a bright, merry-voiced little girl. "Don't you go gorying and knifing people all over the place! 'Out, hanged spot,' or I'll fetch some Sunlight Soap to you! How glad I am that I have n't got to weep all over the stage! I'm going to be a soubrette—yes, indeed, every time, deary! And I'm nothing wonderful of a genius, either. There's Lavinia Starr, though—she is one, if you like. Why, she can say the alphabet fit to make a stone cry, yes—or even an actor-manager! Come on—do it for us now, Lavinia!"

"Oh do!" cried Ione, somewhat excited by her strange environments. "I can't a bit think what you mean."

Whereupon Miss Starr, being "boosted" up on to

Ione March

the deserted platform by the willing arms of her sister aspirants, proceeded to address the tables and chairs in soul-moving and harrowing accents. Yet, though she used only the letters of the alphabet in their proper order, Ione began to see a whole domestic tragedy growing out of the idiotic nonsense, and ere she had reached the letter Z for the third time, Lavinia Starr had hushed the noisy group of girls into a kind of wondering silence.

"There is n't another girl in the school can do that," whispered Snowdrop. "But Mr. Sweel does n't like Lavinia, and always casts her for low comedy servants, and the stupidest character parts, where she looks a fright. Sweel does n't know enough to come in when it rains, anyway—though he has had the cleverness to rope us all in and get our good money just for nothing. I say, though, what in the world possessed you to join right at the fag end of the term—when there's hardly a decent teacher left, and about all the good you'll ever get is the liberty of tramping this rickety old stage here?"

"But," faltered Ione, a little buzzing trouble coming into her ears, "the prospectus said—and Mr. Harford——"

"I don't know Mr. Harford," broke in Lavinia Starr sharply; "but the old prospectus is all lies, anyway. It promises a lot, I know—more than you and I will ever see. We've all been pretty well done, that's a fact; but we can't help it, and kicking does n't do any good. So we just make the best of it, and help each other all we can by working out scenes together."

By this time Ione's heart was in her boots; but she remembered the section about the emulous managers who, at the close of the college session, were positively falling over each other in their anxiety to offer distin-

Mr. Acting Director Sweet

guished positions to the graduates of the International College.

Timidly she hazarded a leading question on the subject. The girls unanimously laughed the short, bitter laugh of scorn.

"Well," said one, "you take my word for it, Ione March, when you go on the hunt for an engagement, the more profoundly in the gloom of the background you keep the International College of Dramatic Art, the more likely you are to sign papers. Isn't that so, girls?"

CHAPTER XXI

THE INTELLECTUAL MOB

KEITH HARFORD was waiting for Ione when she came down the grimy stairs from the International College. He seemed suddenly to grow exceedingly thoughtful when he heard that she had entered herself as a pupil of Mr. Sweet's, and had paid down thirty pounds in hard cash.

"If anything could make me regret having met you, it is this," he said.

"But are you not one of the professors yourself?" she said, as they walked slowly across the wide Square, where Landseer's lions were basking in misty sunshine, and the spray of the fountain was blowing sideways over the hot pavement.

Keith Harford nodded, but seemed somewhat reticent concerning his own experiences of the afternoon.

"How did your Shakespeare lecture go, and how did the class — I suppose it must have been an advanced class — strike you?"

"To tell the truth, I rather think it was I who struck the class," said Keith, smiling; "and we scarcely could be said to have got the length of Shakespeare, strictly so called. I found that I was turned out upon the fencing-class under contract to teach them the whole mystery of the art in three lessons. So I had, first of all, to prove my authority by engaging the College champion. He retired somewhat battered. The next subject was an unpremeditated lesson in the noble art of self-defence. It had not previously occurred to these

The Intellectual Mob

agreeable young gentlemen that it was necessary to treat any of their instructors with deference. I suspect I have led several to think differently."

"Then what was the great cheering we heard in the lecture-room?" smiled Ione, delighted to hear of the excellent lesson which her friend had been teaching the male aspirants of the International College.

"Oh, that!" said Keith carelessly; "I suspect that must have been when three of them tried a sort of surprise storming-party."

"How did that happen? Tell me!" asked Ione eagerly.

"Well," said the ex-mountaineer quietly, "as each came on to 'rush' me, something met his eye!"

"And are you going on with your work at the College after such treatment?" Ione continued, while Keith finically satisfied himself that his rather worn tan gloves fitted his small hands without a wrinkle.

"Certainly," he said easily; "I begin to-morrow to lecture on Shakespeare. I do not suppose that I shall have any further trouble with these young gentlemen."

Thus the day which had begun so brightly, ended, so far as her new career was concerned, in a sick feeling of disappointment. Yet somehow, in spite of the loss of her money, Ione's heart was glad. She had found a friend—one, too, who was different from all others; a man of her own class, yet careless of wealth or position; one who cared not a jot whether her father owned one dollar or ten millions of them. It seemed worth all her past disappointments only to have learned to estimate aright the worth of a good man's friendship.

Ione attended the College of International Art with zeal and regularity. She found that the long list of teachers on the prospectus had been reduced to three. These were Mr. Roscoe, an enthusiastically honest little

Ione March

Jew who gave instruction in acting and stage-craft in general; Miss Winnison, who taught elocution and voice production, and taught them very well; and now Keith Harford, who, with immense acceptance and suddenly towering popularity, essayed the other nine or ten subjects; doing his best as each came up, with a grave impartiality and nonchalance which made him the adored of the girls and the envy of the young men.

As for Mr. Sweel, he did nothing but lie in wait for flies in his grimy parlour, and expend in some mysterious manner the guineas so recklessly entrusted to him. Well, that is unfair. He did one thing. He found his pupils a theatrical engagement — temporary in its nature, truly, but still an engagement.

Ione had been about three weeks at the International Collège, when one morning Mr. Sweel came into Mr. Roscoe's class while the students were working out a scene representing in vivid detail the sorrows of Esther and George D'Alroy. He motioned the enthusiastic little man aside, and, with a dignified wave of his hand, announced that Mr. Joseph Johnson, the eminent tragedian, was to play for a week at the Paragon Theatre, and that, in his forthcoming production of *Julius Cæsar*, he had (as Mr. Sweel put it) arranged with the authorities of the International College of Dramatic Art for the services of "an intellectual mob."

Any of the students of Professor Roscoe's class, therefore, who wished for an engagement with Mr. Johnson, were to present themselves at the Paragon Theatre on the following morning.

No salary for the present would be attached to the position, but it was at least a beginning and would accustom the pupils to tread those larger boards on which, he thought, so many of them would one day shine as luminaries, and do honour to their Alma Mater.

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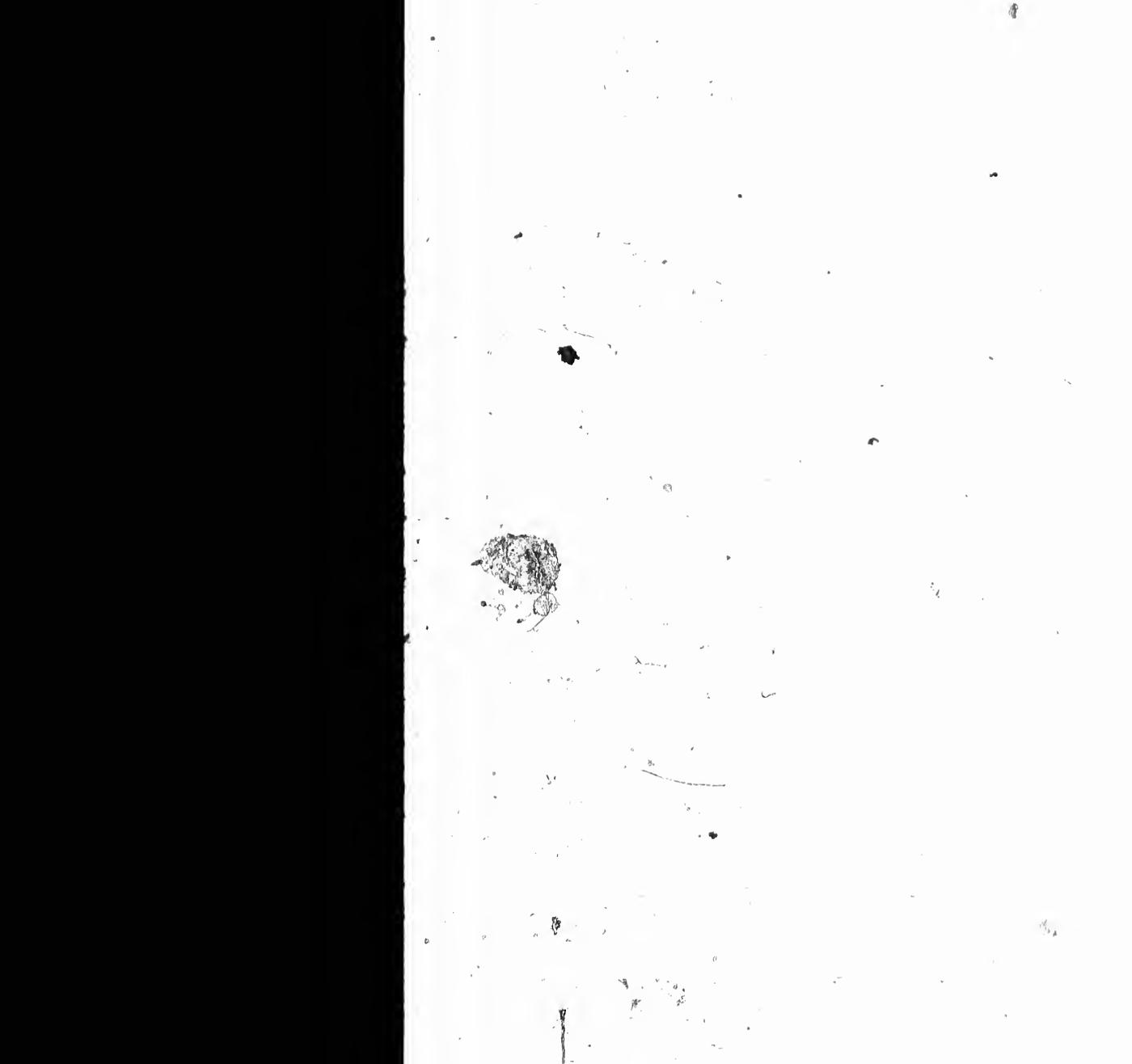
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The Intellectual Mob

Feeling that for once he had created a genuine sensation, the Director bowed and retired amid general electric tension.

The following day Ione and Lavinia Starr, between whom a strong friendship had sprung up, were at the stage door of the Paragon promptly at ten o'clock. It was Ione's first introduction to the fascinating world of stageland, but its marvels did not look appetising in the dull grey of the morning, with the clammy river fog and the sour smell of an unventilated building combining to kill the most dauntless enthusiasm.

The lights of the Temple of Art were represented by a flaring gas-pipe in the middle of the footlights, shaped like a capital T, an arrangement which only rendered more murky the shadows lurking in the shrouded auditorium, and more despicably commonplace the heterogeneous mass of properties piled at the back of the stage.

Here, for instance, was the couch on which the fair Desdemona had last week yielded up her life. On top of it, where her head had lain pale and pathetic in death, there now reposed the steps of the Roman Forum to be used that day at rehearsal. Sets of furniture of half a dozen periods, rocks, waterfalls, and all manner of odds and ends cumbered the wings. To which was presently added the living *débris* of the International College and other similar institutions, every youth and maid of them enthusiastically eager for that first chance "to show what they could do"—as the formula of immediate success is written in the bright lexicon of youth.

Ione found herself cast for a vestal virgin, and on a rather rickety temple platform she was set to tend a sacred fire, which gave off a decidedly strong odour of paraffin oil.

The distinguished tragedian had his work cut out for him to make himself heard amid the enthusiastic plaudits

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of the "populus." While as for poor Mark Antony, he never got even the ghost of a chance over the body of "imperious Cæsar" — dead, and turned into an excuse for the miscellaneous howlings of an "intellectual mob."

"What," asked Mr. Claud Jenkins — who, in virtue of wearing the longest hair, was looked upon as the most promising student of the College — "is the fun of being a super if you don't get a chance to show that you can act?"

On the first night, so enthusiastic was the mob, that an eye-witness declared that Mark Antony might just as well have been in Hades along with his friend, for all that the audience heard of his oration.

"But then," said Mr. Jenkins, upon being remonstrated with, "of course an intellectual Roman mob would be certain to express its feelings. Men with names like Caius Agrippa and Tarquinius Superbus would never have stood round cooling their heels and taking no interest in the proceedings."

Poor Mark Antony, however, could hardly be expected to view the affair in this light, and, as a matter of fact, he came off the stage in a state bordering upon frenzy. He declared that he would have the life of Mr. Sweel. It was all his fault that these idiotic young asses had killed his best scene. And he stated in superfluous detail what he would be, and where he was prepared to see everybody else, before he would play the part again, unless this most intellectual of mobs was shown with one accord to the door.

But the International College was peaceful and happy that night. Its students could have embraced Mr. Sweel. But, alas! this triumph was a swan-song. Next morning, when Ione and Lavinia Starr went down

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The Intellectual Mob

to the street off Leicester Square, they found the International College of Dramatic Art in the hands of the sheriff's officers. Mr. Sweel was not to be found, though a warrant was out for his arrest; and on the street below they discovered Keith Harford pensively regarding the scene of his labours from the outside.

"And has it come to this," he said, with mock tragedy, when he had shaken hands with them, "after all our exertions we are turned without warning to the door? And, in my own case, without even ten days' salary to comfort me. I suppose I must go now and write something which no one will print, and which, if it is accepted, won't be paid for till Doomsday!"

"Well, never mind," said Lone, speaking as she might to a partner with equal rights; "I have nearly seventeen pounds left, and a good deal of water will run under the bridges before we see the end of that!"

Keith Harford said nothing in reply, but his face lost its expression of bantering irony and became exceedingly grave.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DEAD-BEAT

SINCE Ione left her old life behind her, she had heard with regularity from her father, but during the last month or so there had been a break. After the "cuckoo" fiasco at the offices of the Gopher & Arlington Typewriter, she had only given Governor March the address of the American Exchange. But there she was pretty sure to find a letter from him between the ninth or tenth of every month. On this occasion, however, the date had twice gone by without the arrival of any letter upon the smooth, water-lined American note paper which her father always used. Ione sadly counted her diminishing stores of money.

"I wish," she said to herself, "that I had all the money I want right now, so that I could run over and see what has got hold of the dear old fellow."

One day, soon after the closing of the International College of Dramatic Art, Ione had again failed to receive any letter from her father. She was sitting looking through the advertisements in an American paper, and reading the description of the brilliant successes of somebody's Cuticura, for the sake of the "homey" feeling it gave her. She did not like to confess, even to herself, that her struggle for independence had turned out to be a less pleasant thing than she had imagined. She was startled out of her day-dream by a bright eager voice at her shoulder, and raising her eyes from a particularly appalling woodcut (a "cut rightly called wooden"), she found to her surprise a tall man bowing to her with the gladdest and kindest of expressions in his eyes. His face was

The Dead-Beat

typically American, clean-lined, finely contoured, worn prematurely into delicate crow's-feet about the eyes, and his hair was already taking on a slightly frosty gray at the temples. She recognised the man as having been introduced to her by a chance hotel acquaintance, whom she had met on the street near the Langham Hotel as she was returning from "working the town" on one of her unsuccessful quests for employment. At the time Ione had been annoyed at this, and very earnestly desired to carry the acquaintance no further. Her old life had long been dead to her, and now, when want of success had come to her, she found herself with less desire than ever to resurrect it.

But a certain wholesome reverberation in the cheerful voice — something frank, friendly, and irresistibly boyish — disarmed her, and she rose with a smile and stretched out her hand. She remembered his name — Mr. Seth Livingston, was n't it?

"Now that's downright good of you!" said the American enthusiastically. "It is as refreshing as a breath of real Atlantic air off the lighthouse at Marblehead just to speak to somebody from home — some one who is n't either a tourist or a drummer; not that I'm anything else myself but a mixture of both, goodness knows."

Ione smiled at the man's eagerness, and something in the tones of his voice won upon her in spite of herself.

"I'm afraid," she said, "that I'm a poor imitation of the genuine national article. You see, I've lived almost all my life abroad."

Seth Livingston shook his head.

"You're all right, I guess — nothing foreign about you. Scrape the French polish, and you'll come mighty sudden on the Stars and Stripes! Why, I knew a mile off the other day, up at the Langham, that you were an

Ione March

American. Only an American girl comes along the street looking as fresh as a new chromo, and as chipper as if she owned the town and had just fixed up a Standard Oil trust out of all the business in it!"

Almost involuntarily Ione drew herself up a little stiffly. Was it to be the old story — a repetition of the old silly compliments she had grown so tired of? Mr. Seth Livingston noted the movement.

"Now look here," he said, "you're going to shake me, and it won't be fair if you do. For I want to be friends with you for the sake of a little girl way off in Salem, that is looking out just now for a letter all stuck over with those washed-out English postage stamps — just as you keep eyeing that letter-rack of pigeon holes up there for a five cent picture of President Garfield with your name underneath; all marked in plain figures and no deception!"

Ione hardly knew what to reply. Though the words were bantering, the man's tone was so friendly and genuine that she could not quite reject the kindness of the intention. Yet neither did she desire to be drawn into any acquaintance which might bring her into contact with her former life. So she remained silent. Seth Livingston went on with easily renewed confidence.

"Now I don't know your folks, and my friend who got off your name so slick the other day could not remember where he had met you. But for all that, I knew by the first flutter of your neck frill that I had met some one almighty like you before, and that I owed that girl something like my life. Now I'd like to do a little paying right now if I could — not that the article is high-priced even yet, but it's all I've got to put on the market."

Ione stared at the tall man as if he had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

The Dead-Beat

"You owe me your life!" she said slowly. "Why, I never set eyes on you till I met you the other day near the Langham with Julius Randolph!"

The American nodded and smiled.

"That's all right," he said. "You think so. Well, perhaps it's so. At any rate, I owe it to somebody about your size in frocks, and with her head set on her shoulders just like that. And if it was n't you, why, then, I'd as lief begin paying you as anybody else. You won't mind my saying that I've been watching you for the last hour, and I've got an idea that you are down on your luck. Now, I've been there myself, you see, and I know. Something's gone wrong with the switch. Somebody has failed to connect, maybe, and I'd like to help fix things if I could. I was considerably lower down the grade when that little girl gave me a hand up —"

"I am sure you are mistaken," said Ione. "But tell me what you mean!"

"Well" — Seth Livingston dropped into the quaint, slow-sounding speech which Ione loved to hear, it was so like her father when he talked reminiscences with his comrades of the war-time — "you've been to 'Frisco — more than two years ago, is n't it? Thought there could n't be two profiles like that, nor yet two heads screwed on identical! And that, you know, was about all I saw of you. I had been a pretty low-down rolling-stone for a year or two before that. In fact, I had rolled ever since I cut loose from an office stool in Bridgeport, Conn., keeping square enough all the time, but playing in the hardest kind of luck, with never a let-up from start to finish. Just before I met the little girl with the profile, I'd been shovelling coal for two dollars a day in a wretched one-horse town, that had got becalmed and silted up in a back-water near a rushing district out

Ione March

West — and pretty far west at that. Now coal-shovelling is no free lunch with cocktails to follow, I can tell you. So I wanted — I didn't know exactly what I wanted — but to get somewhere else than the place I was in, at any rate."

"Two dollars seem very fair pay for a day's work," said the practical Ione, judging by her recent experiences. "I wish I could get half that just now. You should have saved something out of eight shillings a day — that is, if you took nothing but ice water to the crackers."

Seth Livingston laughed and shook his head.

"I tell you two dollars don't go far in a place where a chunk of bread costs fifty cents, and where they charge you a dollar for only smiling at the blankets in your bunk at Mike Brannigan's boarding-house. Well, I'd got about as much discouraged and disheartened as a man could, without fairly electing to pass in his checks altogether. There was a mining camp booming up on the Divide, but the rates were so high on the railroad that it would have taken me a year to raise even the meanest kind of scalped ticket. All the same, I wanted the worst way to go mining, and I knew that, if I tramped, it would keep me hoofing it till past the middle of winter, I am so inf—, I mean, so dreadfully slow on the pad. Well, at last, when I had thought it out, and got things down to a fine point, I saw that there was nothing for it but to sneak a ride on the cars as a dead-beat."

Ione moved a little restlessly, really because a memory had begun to stir within her. Her colour rose, and she breathed a little faster. Her companion feared lest he had offended her.

"I know," he said sympathetically, "it does not sound very high-toned. But as form of recreation 'ride-

The Dead-Beat

sneaking' takes rather more sand than a pitched battle with trumpets and guns and things, and a fellow must be pretty desperate before he tries it. You see, the railroad men in the West have orders to chuck a dead-beat off whenever caught, and if a mean cuss lights on you when the train is making up time on a down-grade — well, some coroner draws the dollars from his county treasurer, sure! And you've about done bucking against fate and faro in this wicked world. Well, it was eleven at night, and I'd been waiting since sundown among a pile of clapboards for the train going up the grade to pull out of the water-station. At last, after about a million years, she came along fussing, sneezing, coughing, and pushing a whole Newfoundland fog-bank before her. I tell you, I jumped for the first car like a cat at a birdcage, and crouched down on the dark step of a Pullman. Great Scott, I might just as well have boarded a rattlesnake convention on a sunny ledge! There were about a dozen people on the step already; passengers come out to cool off, I guess. For when these cars get heated, with a full-bred buck nigger doing the stoking to suit himself, I tell you, it just makes the marrow bubble in your bones. Well, anyway, there they were sitting pretty quiet, and a young fellow was telling a story. It was a good story too, so they took no notice of me; indeed, nobody got on to my curves at all except one pretty girl sitting on the top step with her chin on her hand, and her elbows on her knees. She looked down at me. I tell you, I was n't any nice-looking spectacle these days. There was n't much first family about me that night — not to look at, there was n't. No, sir! I wanted to be introduced all over again to such a thing as a bath, and my clothes were not quite the cut of Ward Mac. But the girl on the top landing did n't hitch away any, nor yet pull in her skirts

Ione March

to make me feel worse. I knew she was the nicest kind of girl as soon as ever I set eyes on her. Well, in a minute or two she spoke to a man who was sitting beside her, and he glanced once down my way and says loud out, 'A tramp sneaking a ride, I guess. Better call the conductor, and have him put off.'

"Well, I thought that was the end of me. For the train was swinging along down-grade under a rousing head of steam. But just as I was thinking where I'd light, and how many ribs I'd bust, I saw the girl lean over and say something to the man who wanted to have me chucked (I tell you, I could have twisted his neck like a spring chicken's, just then). Well, he listened with his head a little to one side, as if in half a mind to say 'No.' But at last, he shrugged his shoulders and says, 'All right; have it as you like!'

"For in our country men don't often say 'No' when a pretty girl says 'Yes.' And this girl was pretty just all the time, and don't you forget it!

"Then she moved a little along, and pulled her dress so as to make a place between her and the end rail of the car. After that she looked down at me and smiled — well, I'd not been used to smiles like that for some centuries, and it did me good, quick as a long drink on a cold night! Yes, sir! 'You can come up here and sit beside me, if you like,' she whispered; 'perhaps then that conductor will think you belong to us, and won't touch you.'

"'Belong to her!' Fancy a poor devil getting a chance to cool off a couple of hours among them angels! And the one with the nicest halo saying, 'Lie low when the boss comes along, and he'll think you belong to us!' It looked just about as like it as that. But all the same, you'd better believe I up and did it.

"And there I sat and never slipped a word. But

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The Dead-Beat

what did me the most good was the touch of that girl's gown and the scent of her dress and hair. Now, I don't want to be irreverent and I ain't a scrap, as mother will tell you. But—well, it was just all they talk about religion and new life to me. I tell you that little girl converted me, as good as an entire camp-meeting and summer picnic convention rolled into one. And as often as the conductor come along, she'd start them off on a chorus, and then he'd think it was the same old gang jollyng him, and give them the off track and the go-by. For she set the young fellows to monkeyng with that conductor, so that he'd rather 'see' four aces with a bobtailed flush than come near. And she kept them at it for more than a couple of hours, till I had made nigh on a hundred miles up into the mountains, and was thinking of dropping off at the next stopping-place. But the day broke early, and we shipped a conductor with eyes like a mountain-cat and the shoulders of a buffalo. This Sullivan-Corbett fellow got the drop on me and chucked me right there, in spite of the remonstrances of my little girl, and her threats that she'd spend her last cent in having him tried for murder if anything happened to me. Off I had to get at a run! But that girl was a perfect Mascot. For just when the chucker bounced me, the train was climbing and *chay-chaying* up a 1.25 grade, and the pine trees were just a-crawling past like a funeral procession when they're changing the pall-bearers and the band are dripping the top-note out of their trombones. So I lit good and soft within twenty yards of a quartz mill. Yes, sir! And that mill was wanting a man about my size, who could hold his tot of forty-rod without spilling, and knew how to tend an engine.

“In fact, I struck it rich right from the word ‘Go.’ And in a year and a half I was able to pull up stakes

Ione March

and come East with four oughts of dollars, and the knowledge of where to get more if I wanted them. So as hotel-keeping seemed to be the thing I knew least about in this world, naturally I got to running a whole syndicate of them, and showing these fool English how to keep boarding-houses where people will want to stay more than a night at a time. There are a lot of rich men about this little island who are willing to put up the chips for any smart American to play with. I guess they are right enough this time, for I'm getting this business down to a fine point. I'm only sharpening the pencil as yet, but when I get all fixed for 'Full speed ahead, and clear the track,' I mean to let these Londoners see a hotel which they will know again when once they see it. But though the thing's good, and there's dollars in it, and I've no end of a good time in getting there, I catch such home-sick spells that I can't rest till I've got to run in here and see what a good rousing double-leaded scare-line looks like. Then their headachy Underground railroad makes me tired. You never seem to be swinging into Miss Robinson's bedroom or Mr. Jones' dining-room, as you do when you are on a short curve of the 'L,' and the cars are coming round good.

"Now, Miss March, I'm not going to ask you if you know anything about that girl on the upper step of the Pullman; for you may n't want to give her away, and it ain't my business, anyway. But if you can, tell me for her sake how I can help you. And if I can, I'm going to start right in and do it, both for the sake of that Pullman-car girl, and on account of that other little girl who is keeping the books in a Salem boot-factory, just because she hates doing nothing except buggy-riding and sitting in windows watching the other side of the street!"

The Dead-Beat

Something of the man's heart in the last words, or perhaps the remembrance of her former self on the San Francisco train, suddenly moved Ione, and before she knew what she was doing she found herself telling all her troubles and anxieties to this friendly American, whose handsome, kindly face grew grave and thoughtful as she proceeded.

"Ah," he said, "you should have tried America for your complaint. Girls have ten times more show there. And though, God knows, there are rascals everywhere, there are also heaps of good men over there steady and aching to do the horse-whipping. You would find heaps in every city, who would be proud to give you a hand for the sake of their own women folk; yes, and think themselves precious lucky to be thanked with a smile. But over here the place fairly swarms with sharks like Sweel, and never a man's finger itches upon the trigger pull."

"Perhaps over here they have n't all got little girls keeping books in Salem!" suggested Ione mischievously.

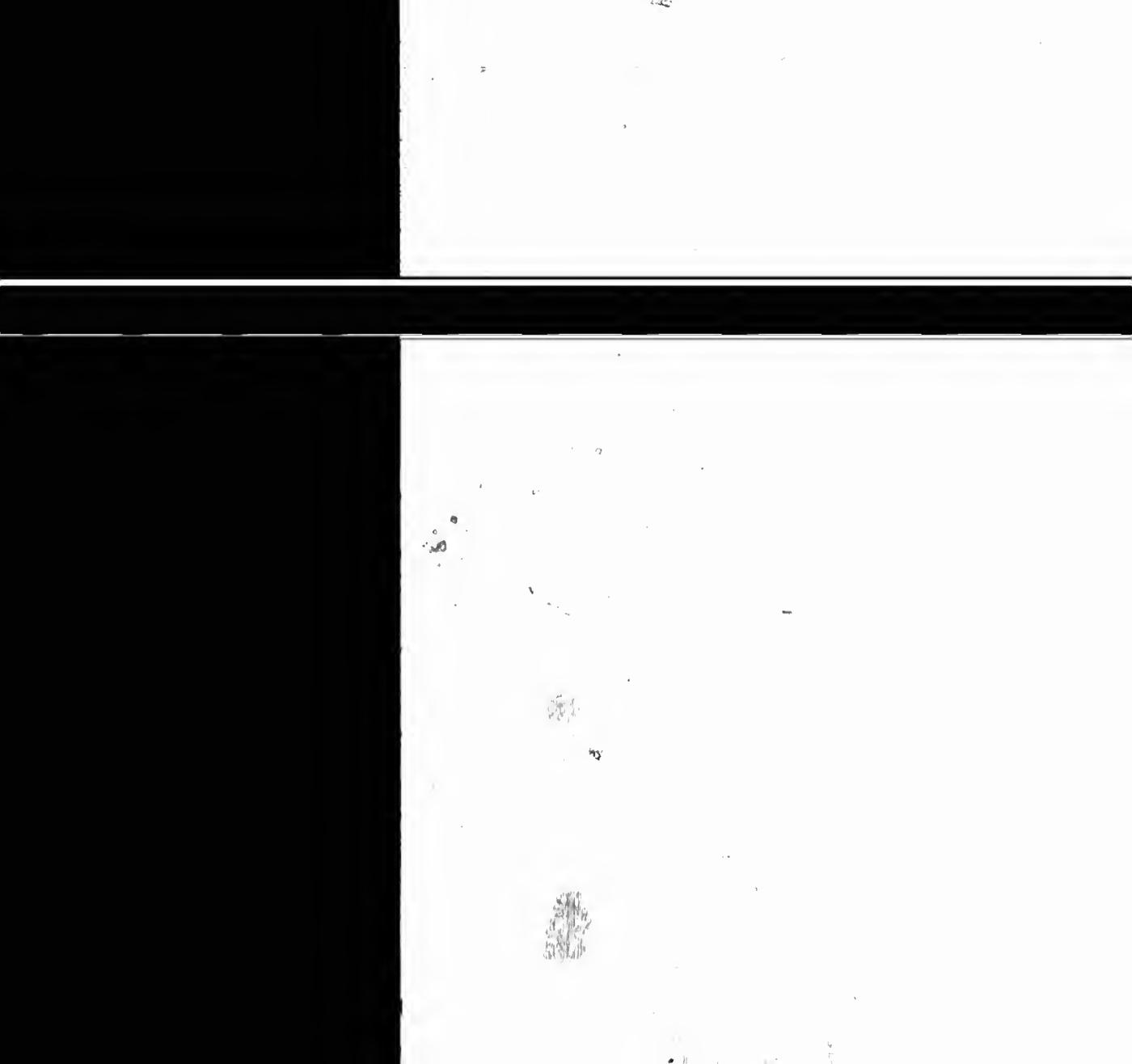
Seth Livingston looked up quickly. There was a blush on his cheek, but a sort of proud straight look in his eye.

"Now you're laughing at me," he said, smiling himself; "but I don't care. I'm only sorry for all the other fellows who have n't been to Salem!"

Ione broke into a gay laugh.

"Well," she said, "there's one lucky girl dotting it's in that boot factory. I wonder if there are not two berths over there."

"Now, look here, Miss March," said Seth Livingston, "I hope you won't be offended; but seriously, if you do want a job, I think I can put you into one right away, before this old mud-heap of a city is much older. But first I want you to know my mother. See,



Ione March

she's right over there. I guess she's at that very window now, the second to the right, looking out and laying low for me with a respirator and a bottle of Culpepper's Cough Emulsion, because I went out without my overcoat. That is one of our Syndicate Hotels, and I left her in charge of a sitting-room on the ground floor, with orders to hold on if the sheriff levied for taxes, while I ran over here to wave the star-spangled, and meet the girl who went to 'Frisco two years ago. And I just bet you mother will do it, too. Why, if the sheriff came to attach, she'd offer him pork and beans with brown bread, as they do in Boston on Saturday nights, or do something desperate like that. Will you come over and get to know mother right now? She'll be just so like your own mother, you'll never know the difference."

A quick shade of sadness on Ione's face caught Seth Livingston's eye, and the infallible instinct, the incommunicable respect of the world's gentleman for the feelings of others, told him that the girl had been unmothered from her birth.

"Ah," he said softly, "I am sorry. But come, you will see my mother first, and then — why, I just feel it in my bones that you can arrange flowers, by the way you wear those long-stalked roses on your gown. You've got to adorn the tables over at our Syndicate Hotels at half a guinea a performance. Oh, don't thank me," he added, getting up hastily and looking for his hat; "it all comes out of the pockets of these bloated English shareholders — which is hardly less religious than for the chosen people to spoil the Egyptians."

It seemed to Ione that such generous and unselfish confidence demanded more frankness than she had yet shown.

"Before I am introduced to your mother," she said,

The Dead-Beat

"I should like to tell you that I am the only daughter of Governor March of Callibraska!"

In an instant the bright smile was stricken from Seth Livingston's face. He gasped and turned away, suddenly pale to the lips — quite unseen, however, by Ione, who was collecting her feminine impedimenta of small parcels, and looking about for her umbrella.

"Of Governor March of Callibraska!" Seth stammered in an altered tone. Ione looked at him curiously.

"Did you know him?" she said. "Most people do over there. There is no one quite like him, they say."

"No, Miss March, I do not know Governor March; but I seem to have heard about him ever since I was born!" he said, lamely enough.

Ione moved swiftly and lightly to the door. Seth Livingston went to the rack where the cablegrams were displayed, as if to look for his own umbrella.

Then he glanced around him to see that the officials were occupied with other matters. All heads were bent down, so with a quick movement he detached a fluttering telegraph "fimsy" from its toothed catch, and thrust it deep into his pocket.

"You will like my mother," he said, as they descended the wide stone stair.

"I am quite prepared to like her," returned Ione. "I like her son very much already — for the sake of the little girl in Salem!"

Now this was what was written on the "fimsy" which Seth Livingston had in his pocket as he went down the stairs by the side of Ione March:

"Millionaire Ex-Governor March is dead. His affairs are in total confusion, and it is said that he has been smashed by the Judd-Peters combination. He was war Governor of Callibraska."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FLOWER GIRL

THE room in which Ione found herself was not a large one, but it wore an aspect somewhat unfamiliar within a few hundred feet of the murky Tamesis. On the walls were framed engravings — Washington crossing the Delaware occupying the place of honour above the mantelpiece. The Declaration of Independence was being signed on the wall over against the window. Prints of Faneuil Hall and the Old South Meeting-House occupied niches near the fireplace. In one corner there was a sort of shrine composed of American flags, framed and glazed, the Stars glittering on top, and the Stripes descending perpendicularly to the bottom of the frame. Opposite was another glass-case, in which hung an old blue coat with shoulder-straps of rusty gold, together with an officer's sword suspended by a waist-belt.

A thin-faced old lady, with a sedately placid expression and the whitest hair in the world, was knitting by the window, her fingers never resting for a moment as the nimble thread wove out and in. She pulled at the wool ball in her large apron-pocket every minute or two with that automatic hitch which tells of a lifetime of practice.

"Miss March, this is my mother," said Seth Livingston; "she is quite the latest and most satisfactory thing in mothers, too, and always comes home to tea. Mother, this is Miss March, with whom I am permitted to make you acquainted, and she is the daughter of Governor March of Callibraska."

The Flower Girl

"My dear!" said the old lady, rising and holding out one hand, while she conserved her knitting with the other. "Why, I've heard of your father as much as a million times! Indeed, he got all my spring chickens for two whole years to melt into bullets to help end the dreadful war — and — and I gave him two of my sons as well."

She cast a look at the blue coat which hung limply opposite the trophy of flags.

"Mother," said Seth, "do give Miss March some tea, before you get talking about the War. There's nothing so thirsty as talking about the War. It's as bad as lunching with three brigadier-generals at the Union Club."

"Don't you mind Seth, Miss March," said the gracious old lady, smiling placidly at her guest; "when you've lived as long as I have with joking men, you'll know that more than half the time they are the only ones to see their own fun."

"Say it, mother!" said her son provokingly.

"Well, I will, Seth." She nodded a little defiantly at him. "He wants me to say that I would n't be as funny as he is for a farm. He says that that makes him feel as if he were right down by Boston Harbour. It seems curious they don't say a simple thing like that over here."

"Yes, mother," he answered; "whenever you get to saying that, I can smell the South Bay and hear the N. Y. express sail through to Matapan just a-whooping!"

By this time the tea was poured out, and the old lady produced from a wall-press sundry cakes and mysterious condiments, which she set on the table with great complacency.

"Do you know, I just can't take to these stiff Eng-

Ione March

ish afternoon teas. They are no better than the departed spirits of square meals," said Mrs. Livingston vigorously; "and so every morning I go and buy in all the nice American-tasting things I can find, and then Seth and I have them in the afternoon."

"She is a real moral old lady, my mother!" mused Seth, to the electric-light fittings — "teaching me to swindle my own hotel, and bribing me by offering to share the proceeds of the crime. Did you ever happen to read that notice, mother?" He pointed to a card tacked on the wall.

**No Meals to be Partaken of
in the Apartments
Without Special Arrangement
with the Direction
of the Syndicate Hotels.**

"Well, sonny," said his mother, "are n't you the 'Direction of the Hotels'?' At any rate, you've been telling me nothing else ever since I came over in the *Circassia*. I would n't be as ——"

"No, mother, not again quite so soon. Do give Miss March a rest!" said Seth, putting his hands dejectedly into the pockets of his coat. What he felt there made his lip suddenly quiver. He had forgotten the crushing sorrow which was waiting for this girl at the end of their light talk. At any rate, he would get her launched upon her work before she heard the news, and the necessities of her new position might perhaps help her not to break down under the blow which, sooner or later, must fall upon her.

"Mother," he said, "this young lady knows all about Mamie in Salem ——"

"I guess you've been telling her yourself, then,"

The Flower Girl

cried Mrs. Livingston; "you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Seth. Miss March, he can't keep from telling every one he meets about little Mamie Grove. He generally gets there within ten minutes. How long was he with you? You look so sweet and sympathetic, that I should n't blame him if he got to Salem within a minute and a half."

"Mother, you are really the most unscrupulous person. And yet they say that the great American lie is going out! They should just hear my mother abusing and slandering her only son! But the truth is, that with Miss March alongside, most men would forget to mention Salem at all!"

"Well, Seth, if you could be sensible for five minutes, perhaps you would tell us how you propose to attach Miss March to the service of your Hotels?"

"Why, mother, Miss March is already engaged to arrange flowers on the dining-tables at half a guinea for each set-out; and as we have many special dinners, I think she may count on at least three or four in an evening. And of course, as the thing has to be done quickly, we will stand cab fares between the hotels."

"Dear me!" said Lone, smiling gladly; "you are quite a fairy prince with a magic wand. Why, I shall be a millionairess, and have money to burn! But perhaps, after they see me start in to do one table, the Direction will shut down on me, and say, 'Flowers is off; please help lay the cloths — it is all you are good for!'"

"And a very nice thing too," said Mrs. Livingston; "I just ache to show these lazy good-for-nothing German waiters how cloths are laid in New England!"

"I think there is not the least doubt that Miss March will succeed," said Seth. "I'll take her round right now, and introduce her to our Manager. Don't tell him that you have n't had fifty years' experience! Go to

Ione March

the stalls in the court-yard and get what flowers you want. They all belong to the Syndicate. The Manager does n't know beans about decoration anyway, and the head waiters don't go beyond sticking a score of roses in a glass pail, like so many cigarette spills. So you have *carte-blanche* and my blessing. You can get your money every night from the cashier, or have your cash made up each Saturday, if that suits you better."

"I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Livingston; I don't know what I can do——" Ione began, a little hard knot coming suddenly in her throat. After all, it was a great thing that this young American was doing for her so lightly.

"You can give my mother a kiss, if you like," laughed Seth; "I know she would like it, and she's just particular nice to kiss. And as for me, why, you can get that car-girl to make room for me beside her again, next time I am down on my luck and riding on the bottom step of a Pullman."

With characteristic readiness to adapt herself to the business in hand, Ione instantly pulled off her gloves and ran out to the nearest ladies' shop to buy a white linen "Squire" collar, such as school-boys and nurses wear, and a pair of white turned-back cuffs to match. These she fitted over her black dress with the old lady's assistance, and in ten minutes she had extemporised a completely suitable costume. In a quarter of an hour Seth Livingston was informed that his new recruit was ready to begin work.

His mother had accompanied the transformation with approving and patriotic murmurs.

"American? Well, I should say so! They don't breed your kind over here, my dear. It comes of generations of huskings and quiltings, and of doing one full

The Flower Girl

share of man's work and taking two shares of man's responsibility."

She paused a little, contemplating the completion of Ione's swift arrangements. "What State did your father come from?" she asked.

"Well, as you know," answered Ione, looking up, "he was Governor of Callibraska during the War, but by birth he was an Ohio man ——"

"The step-mother of Presidents," commented Seth from the sitting-room; "she smacked them for their good all the time they were little, and stood around with her hands in her pockets taking the credit of them after they got big!"

His mother looked through the doorway at him as he lounged against the mantelpiece with his hands in his pockets.

"I would n't be ——"

"Yes, mother, I know; but really, really — that's the third time! But about Ohio, it's the frozen truth, any way."

"Good-bye, my dear," said the white-haired old lady. "I don't know what he means; nor does he, half the time. But run in here and see me often, and tell me how you are getting on. I don't know anything about dressing up tables with flowers, but if I could come and hold the string and the wire fixings for you ——"

"Well, mother, you just can't — else you'd be sitting up half the night with your cough. So take your bonnet and go out and see if you can't buy better buckwheat than the second-hand sawdust you got last time in that shop in Regent Street. I can't have two such tearing beauties going about the tables in the restaurant and into the private dining-rooms, disorganising the waiters and reducing the call-boys to more than their ordinary level of drivelling idiocy."

Ione March

Ione had many a time decorated dinner-tables for her father. It had been one of his greatest pleasures to watch her nimble fingers moving among the rich blooms of the Mediterranean sea-board. But she had no conventions, and her creations were by no means in accordance with the traditions. Her manner, however, was quiet and assured; and even on this first night she achieved some quite remarkable successes.

Her experience, from the point of view of a diner, had informed her that, before all things, people desire to be able to see each other without gazing through a tangled tropical forest of ferns and sprays, or playing bo-peep round the butt of a palm. She found also that most of the stands and epergnes were too stiff for the smaller tables; but with yards of trailing smilax and delicately wreathed lilac-blossomed wistaria, she toned down the harshness of their outlines.

Ione endeavoured to treat each table as a distinct picture, making of one an arrangement in rich red tones, culminating in the splendid crimson of the Bolivian sage and the scarlet of that imperial martagon lily to which even King Solomon in all his glory was not like.

"Was the young man who ordered this table dark or fair?" she asked suddenly of the chief steward of the restaurant. That Parisian elegant looked somewhat astonished, but answered, smiling and twirling his moustache, "Mees, he was blonde."

"And the table is ordered for three," mused Ione, with her finger to her cheek; "one will be the gooseberry, the other will be *her*. And if he is fair, it is about four to one that she will be dark. We will give them the red table."

And so indeed it proved; and with *her* diamond-lit crown of blue-black hair, Ione's flamboyant royal colour harmonised as never table decorations had done before.

The Flower Girl

When Ione came back the next night, she found that so far as that hotel was concerned, her reputation was made. *She* had smiled graciously as the dinner-giver anxiously adjusted her opera-cloak, and whispered something in his ear. Then the lover had turned about to say to the deferential manager, "The young lady desires to congratulate you on your table-decorator!"

It was with joy in her heart that Ione returned to the little house, where Jane Allen was sitting up anxiously awaiting her return.

"Wherever have you been, Ione?" she cried, as soon as she had flown into the narrow passage to clutch her friend round the neck. Mrs. Adair came bustling out, her face red from the oven in which she had been preparing a beefsteak-pie to be carried by Tom Adair and his father to the works on the morrow.

Ione told all her tale of Seth Livingston's kindness, and not the least of her joy was the sight of the unselfish rejoicing of these honest hearts.

"So in a week or two I shall be quite rich, and be able to give you all a treat to the Crystal Palace, or even, if you are very good, to Hampton Court on Sunday. Besides" — she turned and put her hand affectionately on the plump matronly shoulder of Mrs. Adair — "it is high time that I paid my debts. I have been expecting, any time these two weeks, that you would be putting me to the door."

Tom Adair coughed as if he had been about to speak, while his father moved his feet off the kitchen fender noisily and upset the tongs.

"Eh, lassie!" said Mrs. Adair, holding up her hands in protest; "how can ye speak like that? Ye are just like yin o' oorsels, an' were I ever to speak o' siller to ye, ony yin o' thae twa men sittin' about the fire wad gie me my head in my hand and my lugs to play wi'!"

Ione March

It was with moist eyes and trembling lips, to find herself among such simple loving souls, that Ione moved upstairs to her little bedroom. As she did so, Mrs. Adair called after her.

"Miss March," she said, "there was a gentleman here this afternoon. He would not give any message, nor sae muckle as leave his name; but he gied me a letter for you. You will find it on your bedroom table."

"What was the gentleman like?" asked Ione.

"Deed, I didna tak' muckle notice o' him, for the girdle was on, and the scones readying fine; and wi' thae wig-ma-leeries o' useless English fire-places, that hae nocht but a bit patlid for the lowe to keek up through, ye need to keep your mind on your scones when they are on. But he was a lang lad, gye white and shilpit, and lookin' as if he had clean forgotten what day o' the week it was."

The description of Keith Harford was too clear to be mistaken. Ione ran up to her bedroom with an eagerness which she did not own even to herself.

On the table lay a plain business envelope sealed with a red seal. With fingers that trembled she tore it open, and half a dozen crisp Bank of England notes fluttered out. A scrap of paper accompanied them, with a few words written upon it.

"Dear Miss March, I cannot allow you to suffer through my fault. Pardon this, and do not be angry."

"K. H."

Tears sprang to Ione's eyes, and she patted her shoe on the scrap of carpet which lay in front of the little looking-glass.

"Oh, he ought not to have done this — I cannot take it! I shall go to-morrow and give it back to him."

The Flower Girl

Then she remembered that she did not know Keith Harford's address. At this moment Jane Allen came in with eager eyes of inquiry. She pounced at once upon the traces of the tears which Ione had hastily endeavoured to wipe away.

"What did I tell you?" she said reproachfully. "I knew how it would be! You should never have let him speak to you again. Men are all vipers, and whenever you give them an inch they will take an ell!"

"But, Jane," said Ione, smiling in rather April fashion, "this is not the man I was once engaged to. I never saw Mr. Harford till I was in Switzerland a year ago."

Jane Allen's eyes danced with a sudden joyous light.

"Why did n't you tell me so before?" she said.

"Here I have been just horrid to you for weeks, all because I thought you were taking him on again — and I knew too well what that meant. But, tell me, is he nice? Do you love him?"

"No," said Ione doubtfully; "I do not love him. How should I, after seeing him only half a dozen times? But I am sorry for him. He is ill and poor, and does not know how to look after himself any more than a baby."

Jane Allen did not say a single word, but rose from the side of the bed whereon she had been sitting. She came swiftly and impulsively over to Ione and kissed her. Then, still without a word, she went into her own room.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CROESUS CLUB

MR. KEARNEY JUDD was giving a dinner at the Hotel Universal. The primogenital reversion of a hundred millions of money was trysted to be at the table. This consisted generally of rabbit-mouthed, small-moustached young men with prominent owlsh eyes. For the worship of Mammon and the life-long pursuit of the elusive gods of script and share do not, somehow or other, conduce to the production of beauty in the second generation.

With these there were young men of the English style of the cult, heavier of body and broader of base, with prominent noses set in the pallid pastiness of their features. There were also several journalists, for the most part correspondents of distinguished financial papers, a stray diplomatist of the more impecunious sort, not perhaps altogether above doing a little diplomacy on his own account when he had the opportunity. In fact, it was a dinner given to the brothers of the celebrated Croesus Club by their distinguished Prior, Mr. Kearney Judd.

The celebration was to take place in two of the handsomest rooms of the Hotel Universal. The guests assembled in the Salon de la Commune, and the dinner was laid in the Salle de Robespierre. The decorations were of the choicest kind throughout, and no expense was to be spared to make the distinguished gathering worthy both of the host and of that famous hotel-restaurant, which was just then establishing the world-

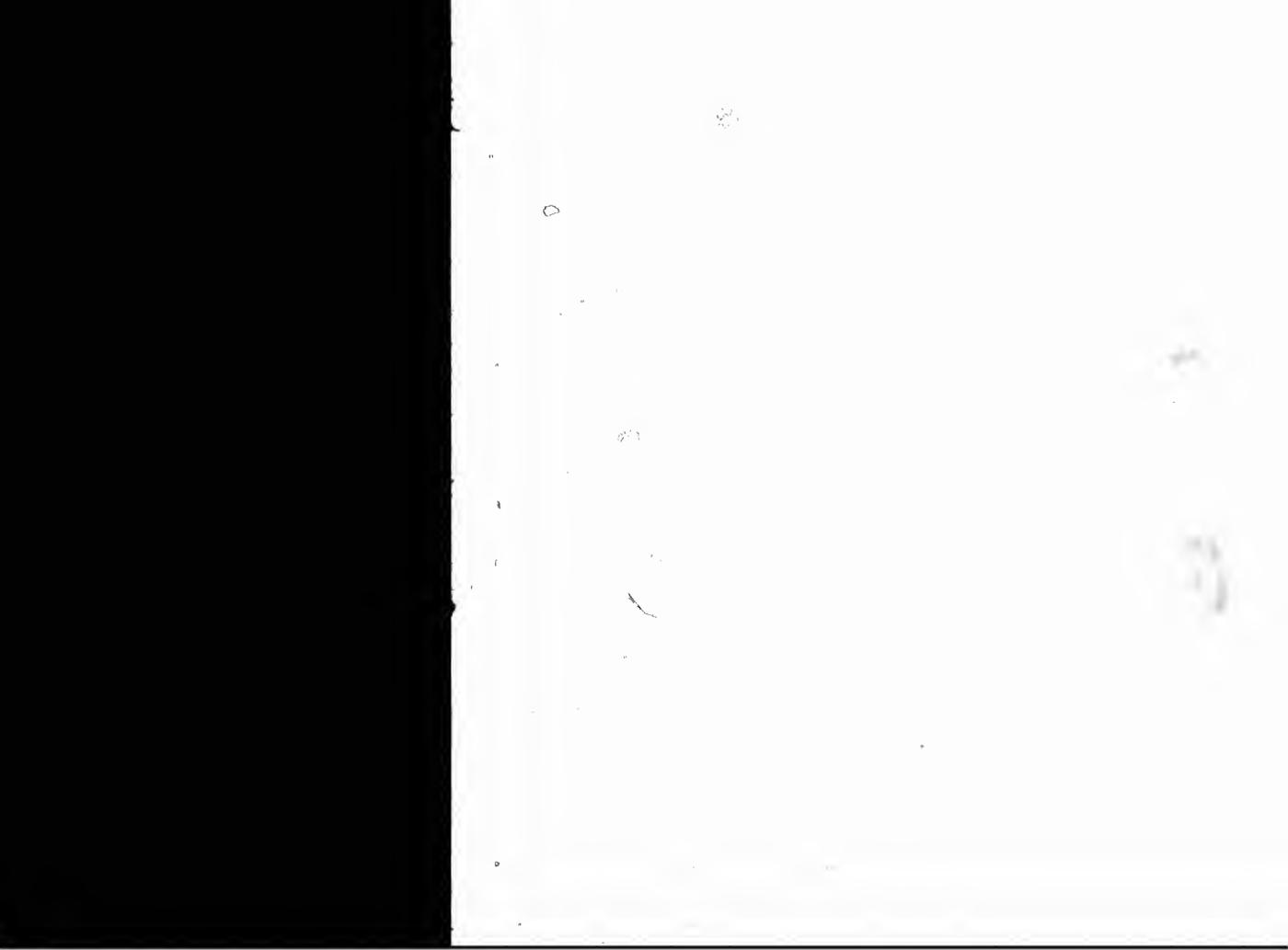
The Cræsus Club

wide reputation — details of which may be seen from the advertisements of any illustrated journal.

As Mr. Kearney Judd was distinguishing the Universal Hotel by making it the place of his residence while in London, it was natural that he should be in the salon of reception in time to receive his guests. Also as the hour of dinner had been fixed early in order to facilitate an adjournment to the "Elysium" Music Hall in time for the principal item on the programme, the smallish purse-mouthed brethren of St. Cræsus, with their buffalo-horn moustaches, arrived with equal alacrity, and were warmly received by their distinguished Prior.

But the control of the Universal Hotel did not look with the same enthusiasm upon the unusually early dinner hour. The *chef* was in a thumb-biting, shoulder-shrugging state of revolt in the magnificent kitchens at the top of the house. The lady decorator had been disappointed by the late arrival of her flowers. The foreign supplies had not come on in time. And so it chanced that even while the guests were assembling in the Salon de la Commune, in the adjoining Salle desf hands were throwing here and there across the great table sprays of Persian lilac, bleached by rapid forcing in the dark, and subduing to a half light the sparkle of the electric lamps underneath, glowing loops which beamed through the mist of blue and white with suggestions of azure heavens and angelic purity exceedingly appropriate to the Cræsus Club.

Banks of moss were overlaid with the deep unutterable tones of the trumpet gentian, rising from the still rarer sapphire of the smaller Alpine flower. Above shone masses of blue cornflower, snowy ageratum, and noble Swan River daisies. Swiftly and in silence white fingers were showering among these sprays of long-leaved speedwell and creamy spiræa alternating with



Ione March

smilax and the stiffer stems of innocent forget-me-not, in token of the eternal devotion of the members of the Cræsus Club to each other — so long, that is, as they did not lose their money and their several fathers kept out of the Gazette.

The rooms were only separated from each other by the thinnest of folding doors. In fact, little more than a screen of veneer hung upon a framework of ash divided the Salon de la Commune from that of the Salle de Robespierre. In the momentary lulls and silences of their fast-running talk, the guests could hear the clink of silver on glass, and even see at times the flash of black and white as nimble servitors passed in and out.

Prior Kearney Judd stood by the doorway receiving his guests. It was not a large dinner party, but every one there was somebody — or at least the son of somebody, which is of course the same thing. Furthermore, with the exception of a shy journalist who bore a poet's name, and one or two slim diplomats, there was not a man in the room who willingly referred to his grandfather.

The Prior of the Most Noble Order of the Sons of Cræsus was in high spirits. He had received intelligence that night which warmed the cockles of his heart. He felt that in honour he could not keep the matter long from the company.

"Boys," he cried, "I've something to tell you — you are all interested in the Combination. Or if not, you are all going to be. There's one more of the enemy gone under — and we pocket the loot — one the less to stand in the victorious way of Judd-Peters. 'One more unfortunate weary of breath, rashly un-something-ate, gone to his thingummy.'"

The "boys" hushed to learn Kearney's news, for the Prior seldom spoke articulately without having received

The Cræsus Club

abundant "pointers" from the Great-and-Only. Therefore his words were as gold and worth noting. Indeed, most of the members of the Cræsus Club, after a night with their Prior, secretly consulted their shirt cuffs of the evening, and (not always to their advantage) arranged the finances and speculations of the following morning by the light of these words of weighty wisdom.

"He is n't a very big fish; indeed, only a jerky and troublesome one. My old man has been fooling him and playing him for some time — Governor Henry Quincy March, you know!"

"Oh, yes," said the Man-with-a-Grandfather, "I've heard of him — Governor of Callibraska in war time, wasn't he — raised the shekels for the freedom of the nigger — that kind of thing? Enlisted afterwards as a private in the army; very noble; went to Andersonville, 'cause he would n't bow the knee' — no end of a fellow."

"As you say," nodded Kearney dily, "no end of a fellow. Only — there is an end of him now. But there is more to his record than that, and I know it. He started out in business with the cash he sneaked from the Liberation Bureau. He throve on plunder and carpet-bagging all through the late sixties. This March fellow has been in our way a long time. He's been playing the patriot even more than usual lately, only rather over-doing the part — million dollars to this and that hospital, ten millions to Taskora University, to found a scientific chair for the study of the other side of the moon. All very well when you've got the boodle and want more — no better ad. in the world than astronomy for a philanthropic fraud like March. But when you have n't got the ready, and don't deserve to have it, it gets to be about time for some one to shut down on the fool. So my old man did the shutting, and now —"

"I've seen him," interrupted one of the diplomats,

Ione March

pulling his moustache. "By Jove, I say, had n't he a daughter of sorts — handsome girl, too? Saw her at Naples or Sorrento!"

"Say, were n't you rather sweet in that quarter, Kearney? Gave you the mitten once, did n't she? Well, I bet she is deuced sorry now!"

These were the cries which greeted Kearney's news.

"I think old March had a daughter," said the Prior, stroking his moustache, also twirling his own particular buffalo-horn; "don't know where she is now. She'll have to turn out and do something for her living, which will be good for her soul!"

The folding doors slid noiselessly open. Instinctively, with a relieved apprehension of the announcement of dinner, the whole Cræsus Club turned towards the Salle de Robespierre. And there, set against a background of darkest blue, and backed by a faint shiny mist of electric light from a hundred half-hidden fairy lamps, stood a slender figure in a plain black gown, relieved only by a wide collar of white about her throat. The girl's face was pale as death. Her eyes were hollow and brilliant. Her lips were parted, and showed full geranium scarlet against the ivory whiteness of her skin. Ione's whole attitude expressed such a world of anger and contempt, that the Brothers of Cræsus nearest the folding doors shrank back as if they feared that the girl was about to strike them on the face.

"Yes," she said, her words sounding out clearly and distinctly amid the hush of expectant silence, "Governor March has a daughter. I am that daughter. And I am earning my own living. I have turned out honestly to win my bread. You say that my father has failed in business — that he has been disgraced. Gentlemen, my father cannot be disgraced. His record is written. Before one of you was born he had done his work, and

The Cræsus Club

America is to-day what she is because of such men as my father."

There was a murmur and an astonished recoil among the guests. Behind her the waiters clustered and whispered. "Run for the manager!" said one. "Bring Mr. Livingston — the girl's gone mad!" whispered another.

But Ione had more to say before any one could stop her.

"As for that thing there," she pointed an indignant finger at Kearney, who after recovering from his first surprise, stood now valantly smiling and stroking his moustache, "it is my life's disgrace that for a few days I wore his ring on my finger, till I learned to know the wretched coward, the despicable liar he is. But to-morrow I will write to Governor March, and as sure as that reptile crawls upon the earth, he shall be punished. My father will require the justification of his words from him to his face, and if he dare not meet him man to man — well, with such as he, there is at least some satisfaction to be got out of a horse-whip."

As Ione spoke out her indignation a stony silence fell upon the company, broken only by an agonised whisper from the diplomat.

"My God — the girl does n't know!"

Ione March ran her eye over the company — a slow withering glance of infinite disdain.

"You are men, you are gentlemen — most of you are Americans — you would not stand and listen to your own fathers and sisters being belied and insulted behind their backs. Gentlemen, I put it to you, has Governor March deserved ill of his country? He has no son to stand up and vindicate him here — only one feeble girl. I ask you, gentlemen, is there no one who will have the manliness to defend the absent, and to say to that liar and cad the words which I cannot say."

"Yes, by Jove, there just is! I'll take up that

Ione March

contract!" said Seth Livingston, quietly stepping out of the blue dusk of the Salle de Robespierre into the full glare of the Salon de la Commune, and taking up his stand beside the slender pathetic figure in black. "My father knew Governor March, I know his daughter, and no man insults either in my presence, or yet in the Hotel Universal."

"And who might you be?" sneered Kearney Judd, giving a still more pronounced upward turn to his thin moustache.

"I am a man and an American — you are no more and no better. Let that be answer enough for you!" retorted Seth Livingston.

"You may perhaps hear of this to-morrow through your directors," said Kearney Judd, who meantime had recognised the European agent of the Universal Hotel Syndicate.

His opponent nodded grimly.

"That's all right," he said. "You'll find Seth Livingston on hand when the music plays."

But the journalist, touched by the beauty and the pitifulness of the girl, had a word to say.

"I am sure that we all sympathise with Miss March in her bereavement," he began lamely enough. Then the chorus broke indignantly about him.

"Shut up —!" "Hold your tongue, man! Hush — don't you see —?"

But the heart of the journalist was stirred within him. He merely raised his voice above the turmoil, and held on his way.

"We are men," he said, squaring himself for a deliverance; "we have spoken too freely. *De mortuis*, you know. Let us all apologise very humbly, as I do to the young lady. Governor March's death clears all back scores!"

The Græsus Club

There was a confused murmur as if to drown his final words; but it came too late. Ione March had heard.

"Governor March's death ——" she gasped; "you say his 'death.' My father dead, and I not told of it — I not with him!"

She stood a moment longer, swaying like a lily in the wind, looking dully from one to the other, as if not understanding why they were all gathered there.

"Is this true, Seth Livingston? Ah, you are silent; you know it. You knew it this afternoon, and you did not tell me! I thank you, sir — I thank you, gentlemen. I ask your pardon. I must go — I must go to find my father. I think — I think he is needing me!"

And she fell back into Seth Livingston's arms.

"Gentlemen," said her champion, "you see that it is impossible after this that you can dine here to-night. Be good enough to adjourn elsewhere."

"Very pretty — exceedingly neatly acted," sneered Kearney. "Let's leave the hotel drummer with the girl. Come on, boys; this has been better than any show we are likely to see to-night."

Seth Livingston shifted the unconscious girl into the arms of a sympathetic waiter.

"This may be hanged poor business as business," he muttered; "but I guess I'm going to see it through."

And the next moment something swift as the first upward rush of a rocket struck Kearney Judd between the eyes, and he found himself upon the floor of the Salon de la Commune.

"Take him to his room!" said Seth Livingston. And went to his own to send in his resignation.

Meanwhile Mrs. Livingston was caring for the un-

Ione March

conscious girl, and bending over Ione, murmuring little motherly tendernesses.

Ten minutes later Seth came in after knocking gently.

His mother whispered to him, —

“She will do nicely — she is coming to. You did quite right, Seth boy!”

“Thank you, mother,” said her son, who knew he had not erred when his mother used his pet name. “I guess you and I will have to go back to Salem now. I can get a berth at three dollars a day in the boot factory, and Mamie must hang on a spell longer at the book-keeping till I break out in a new place.”

“And in Salem I will get something fit to eat!” said his mother.

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CHAPTER XXV

MRS. MARCUS HARDY

BUT Seth Livingston did not lose his post. As he said himself, he stood the "racket." He managed to convince his directors that if he had been wrong-headed and unbusiness-like, at least his action had done no great harm — so long, that is, as the knowledge of it was confined to a dozen or so who had the best of reasons for keeping the matter private.

"And thank goodness, there's no Judd-Peters' dollars in this show, or I'd have been done up sure!" said Seth, after he had got outside of the board-room, where, as he admitted, it had taken him "ten blessedly sultry minutes to see the other fellow's bluff, and raise him to the limit."

Ione March remained with his mother all night, and the white-haired old lady alternately nursed and petted her with whispered tendernesses and the healing sympathy of silence. Seth himself took a hansom over to Audley Street in the morning, and relieved the anxious minds of Jane Allen and Mrs. Adair. Thence he returned city-ward again accompanying Jane Allen on the top of a 'bus, and talking about Ione "ten-to-the-dozen" the whole time, as Jane afterwards somewhat cryptically affirmed.

In a week or two Ione was able to be out, and even to go back to her work at the tables, but the shock of the night of the Cræsus dinner had told upon her greatly. The old elastic lightness seemed permanently gone from her step. The willowy sway, lissom as the stem of a

Ione March

harebell and yet tense as a steel spring, was missing from her carriage. She moved listlessly, she looked delicate, and when she did her work it was with a grave, pale conscientiousness quite unlike the enthusiasm of her first attempt as an artist in flowers.

Ione received the first authentic accounts of her father's death from an unexpected source. She was sitting one winter's evening in the early lamplight of the little parlour in Audley Street. She had pulled the shade low, and let her hands fall listlessly on her lap. Ione had obtained a professional substitute for her less important work of the night—a girl whom Seth had found for her, and she was now sitting down to enjoy the luxury of a long rest. Somehow she did not seem to get stronger quickly, and she certainly was much more readily fatigued than of old.

The knocker on the outer door hammered a second loud and insistent reminder, and Ione was wondering indolently how it was that the postman had come so early, and why she had not heard him approaching. For usually Audley Street was so quiet, and the one-brick-thick-standing-on-end Building Society houses were so thin as to their walls, that the postman's double-knock could be heard for at least twenty doors on either side, and over an indefinite area across on the opposite side of the way.

But it was not the postman's quick-step retreat from the small outer port of badly varnished pine-wood which took Ione's ear. There came a murmur of voices—one, a gruff man's voice which propounded an inaudible query; then, breaking through this, a girlish voice, clear, high, and rapid, which made a dozen explanations and asked a dozen questions all in the space of a minute. Ione heard with surprise her own name frequently mentioned. Ensued thereafter the rapid rustle of silken

Mrs. Marcus Hardy

skirts along the narrow passage. Delicate drapery brushed against the unsympathetic folds of Hugh Adair's shiny black mackintosh which he wore on stormy days to the yard. The door opened, or, more strictly, was burst open in a highly revolutionary manner, and there rushed in — who but Idalia Judd, her hair more distracting of tangle than ever, her cheeks all cream and rose, her eyes sparkling a thousand scintillations per minute, her perilous dimples coming and going incalculably about the corners of her mouth.

"Oh, Ione," she cried, "don't be angry with me. I wanted so to come to you. I am so sorry. I came right away as soon as I had arrived and we could find out where you were."

She threw her arms lovingly about Ione's neck and began to sob on her shoulder, in the quick, helpless way she had when she was moved.

"It was so sad for you, dear, to be so far away. It came so suddenly, and I know you loved him very much. But I went and stopped with him, and tried to do just what you would have done. And oh — Astoria was so angry, and would not speak to me. But mother behaved like a little brick, and said I could go if I wanted to. And he lay so peacefully at the last, saying all the time how he loved you, and that you would have everything you needed, and stroked my hand thinking it was yours, dear. Then he said, 'God bless you, Ione,' and talked all the time about your mother. I never saw any one die before, and at first I was dreadfully frightened. But now I shan't be afraid about death any more. And I did it just because I wanted to, and so that I could tell you — that you might n't think he was sad or lonely. He never missed you really — after the stroke, you know. He thought you were there all the time until the end. It was n't sad a bit, dear. It was n't, indeed."

Ione March

Ione had never cried since the news struck her down the night of the dinner. Mrs. Livingston had tried to move her, but in vain. The girl was like stone — her face set and pale, her eyelids unnaturally white and swollen, and the strain showing in every movement and line of her face.

But now at Idalia's words she melted suddenly; her lower lids brimmed, pearled, and overflowed. Then the water ran down her cheeks in a steady flood, as if the fountains of a great deep had been broken up.

Idalia talked on while Ione sobbed, her voice now thrilling with tears, now tremulous on the verge of hysterical laughter — but keeping up a steady, healing stream of talk all the time, while her little, plump, daintily-gloved hands were clasped tightly about her friend's neck.

“Yes, Ione, and they were so horrid to me at home — all except only mother. And I have quarrelled with them all, so now you must help me. I've been counting on that such a lot. Oh, and we will be so poor, and I don't really think I could scrub floors or make puddings. But Marcus says that he does n't like puddings much any way —”

Ione could not believe her ears.

“Marcus — ?” she said, raising her head, and the welling tears stilling themselves automatically with the surprise.

Idalia nodded her head so vehemently that the bird of paradise feathers on her hat almost broke off short.

“Yes, indeed! I knew you would say so [though Ione had not said anything]. Well, it is true — though you won't believe it [she spread abroad her hands tragically]. We ran away and got married, and now we are paupers! — Yes, paupers; but I love him — oh, so much. He is the silliest old dear; but he thinks I'll make a lovely pauper! Don't you think so, too?”

Mrs. Marcus Hardy

"You — have — married — Marcus Hardy?" said Ione, in little checks of speech, as her voice gradually recovered command of itself.

"Yes, I have — at least I think so. We were stood up before the sweetest old clergyman, with the silveriest hair, in the loveliest village in all New Hampshire. And he had such a nice voice, though he did take snuff, and he kissed me and patted me on the cheek. All among the mountains it was, you know — and he is outside now."

"Who, the silvery-haired clergyman?" said Ione, still more astonished.

"No — silly! Marcus, I mean; but of course you could n't think. How can you care about these things yet? But he is a dear, and I rumple his hair every day. Marcus!" she cried, suddenly raising her voice, "where have you got to? Come in, great lummoX! I call him that because he does n't know what 'lummoX' means, and he is as big as a house! Ione, tell me, if you love me — is there any pretty girl in this house? It really is not safe, you know, to let him out of one's sight. He flirts, do you know — well, you would n't believe how he flirts. We stayed at the sweetest little nunnery in Germany, away up in the Sigmaringenwald, on our honeymoon, and Marcus made eyes at the nuns all the time, and specially at such a pretty one, Sister Theresa. She had the loveliest lashes. . . . Yes, you did, you know you did, Marcus Hardy. Oh, think shame!"

His wife paused just long enough to frown severely at Marcus as he appeared in the doorway.

"Now then, do come in! Don't be bashful. Yes, you may kiss Ione — just this once though, and not in corners or behind the door, and never when I'm not there. Oh, I know you, my little man!"

Marcus Hardy entered slowly and bashfully, as if in-

Ione March

sinuating himself sideways through an aperture that was not big enough for him. He seemed to fill the entire sitting-room. Ione rose to welcome him, and held out her hand. Marcus took it, blushing to the roots of his hair.

"Now do it," cried his wife; "I know you are dying to. Kiss your new sister — brace up like a man! 'England expects!' There — that is n't really so bad for a first time, but mind — no dress rehearsals behind my back. Bless you, my children!"

Marcus had bent over and imprinted a chaste kiss on Ione's pale cheek.

"You know, Ione dear, you would n't believe what a bad boy he is. Oh, I've been finding out such a lot of things since I was married. Do you know, he 'fesses to having made love to ever so many other girls before he met me, and one he even asked to marry him! Now he says he did n't mean it. But was n't it horrid of him? Just fancy if the wretch had said 'Yes'! I don't know how men can do such things, and then have the face to make up to a little innocent thing like me; do you, Ione?"

She looked sternly at Marcus, who listened with a broad tolerant smile.

"Yes, I thought you would agree with me! Now don't say a word, Marcus! I declare I can't hear myself speaking for you. Do you know, he has grown such a chatterbox? I simply can't get beginning to talk to Ione. Oh, just wait till I tell you about our marriage. I had to come down by the hen-house ladder out of our boarding-house window, such a rickety construction — and Marcus could not hold it either, because he was listening at Astoria's window to make sure that she kept on snoring — Astoria snores. Yes, indeed, I will tell now if I like. I don't care. At any rate, Marcus, you can't say that I —"

Mrs. Marcus Hardy

"Idalia!" cried Ione warningly.

"Well, no more he can! And any way, I can say what I like before him, and so can you. For I am an old married woman, and I can charize you all now. Oh, won't that be fun? [Idalia clasped her hands joyously.] When you fall in love, I'll take you up the river, and you and he can punt, and read poetry, and look into each other's eyes, and say over all the nice old spoony things you want to!"

"And what will you do, Idalia?" said Ione, smiling more brightly than she had done for weeks, and with the colour beginning to steal back into her pale lips.

"Ione March, what *will* I do? Oh, I know! I shall sit on the bank with my back to you, out of hearing, you know, and knit stockings for Marcus — such big ones they will have to be, and the heels so difficult to turn. Astoria can knit socks and read Kant both at once! She just loves it — I never could. You should have married Astoria, Marcus, only she'd never have looked at you — no, sir! And then I just could not have done without you, you great big, dear thing!"

And with a sudden bird-like swoop she had perched on the extreme point of the bashful giant's knees, and was rumpling his abundant hair.

"Look at him," she continued, leaning back with a good grip on his forelock, and calling upon Ione for admiration; "is n't he a picnic? Is n't he a transformation scene, a White City all by himself? Don't you wish you had a brother, Marcus, for Ione to fall in love with?"

"I don't want a brother — young cub!" growled the blushing bridegroom, uncomfortably moving about on his chair.

"And do you know, we shall be so poor! Church-mice are bloated what-do-you-call-'ems to us. Why,



Ione March

all I shall have (till I get papa by himself, when Astoria is safe out of the way) is only ten thousand dollars a year, and about twelve hundred that Marcus has from his estate and things!"

"That is n't dollars, though," said Marcus, beginning to cheer up and look about him.

"And we are going to have such sweet times in the dearest little cottage, Marcus and I. Of course we can't afford a proper house, or carriages, or servants. O dear, we are to have only one little Biddy-of-all-work! And I'm to do rice puddings, and there'll be a little boy in nice, shiny buttons to clean the boots and keep it cheerful for the hired help. No, I think we won't wear boots that need to be blacked at all — brown leather is so much nicer anyway, and cheaper too, especially the sloppy kind with canvas tops. They're only half-a-crown a pair at the Stores, if you smile nicely at the clerk who attends to you!"

"We shan't be so poor as all that," ventured Marcus the giant. But his wife swooped down upon him, and snapped him up.

"O yes, we will, nice thing. (Is n't he nice, Ione? It's only the Green-eyed One that makes you not answer.) Of course we shall be poor, and have just nothing a year to live on. I think it is a shame, his mother has a beautiful feudal castle about as big as Windsor all to herself."

"Imitation — all iron girders and cockroaches!" put in Marcus.

His wife rumped his hair down over his brow, till his blue eyes looked ruefully forth from the tangle like an owl out of an ivy bush.

"It's nice, Ione; just try it! Curls like that over the forehead tickle your hand so cunningly when you stroke them. She won't, horrid thing! Ne-cvvv-er

Mrs. Marcus Hardy

mind, then, it's ownest own will do it for it — all it wants, so it shall then!"

"O shame — shame!" said Marcus, blushing more redly than ever out of the overhanging wisp of hair Idalia had been stirring. Then he picked up his wife as easily as a kitten and set her down on a chair.

Idalia rose to her feet, and stamped on the thin carpet.

"O you great, strong, horrid brute — I hate you — abusing your poor little wife! Don't speak to me — you see how I am not allowed to say a single word in my own defence, Ione. All is over between us! Besides, you are looking at Ione twice as often as you look at me, and you said that at Grindelwald you liked her better than you liked me. Yes, you did — you know you did! Now don't argue, Marcus Hardy. You know very well that you have not a single word to say for yourself, and I'm not going to listen to it anyway, if you had. Thank goodness, I've got something else to do!"

Marcus looked over to Ione for sympathy. She smiled such a smile as had not been on her lips since she listened last to the bright irresponsibility of Idalia, that sweetest of featherheads and loyalest of friends.

"There you are at it again," she cried, "you are both doing it now. Marcus Hardy, I won't have you flirting with Ione before my very face, if I am an orphan in a strange land. I shan't cry. No, sir! I shall just say, 'Good-bye, Mr. Man — pleased to have met you. You're welcome to the other girl, if you can get her.' Only I don't believe she'd look at you — though some women are such flirts, it's perfectly horrid!"

And so on.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE OPPRESSOR OF THE WIDOW

BEFORE Idalia and Marcus left Audley Street that night they had persuaded Ione to accompany them on their first visit to Rayleigh Abbey, the incubating centre of Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy's bi-monthly new religions.

But before she left London Ione was determined to find Keith Harford, and return him the thirty pounds which she knew he could so ill afford. She did not know Keith's address, but on one occasion at his request she had noted down that of his sister-in-law, Mrs. Vincent Harford, with the indefinite intention of calling upon her at some future date. It was a small house in a quiet lane, not far from Audley Street. Ione found it one of a narrow, double row of similar buildings, constructed of the peculiar mealy red brick of South London, and the tenements, though one degree more pretentious than those in Audley Street, were at least ten degrees less comfortable.

Dingy yellow curtains drooping within the small oriel window, marked out the house of Mrs. Vincent Harford from that of her neighbours. Waxen fruitage of brilliant dyspeptic hues inclosed in an oval glass case, was visible where the yellow curtains separated a little the one from the other.

Little Angel, looking infinitely pathetic in a loose faded dress of pale blue, opened the door, and as soon as she recognised the visitor, she flew with a glad cry into Ione's arms.

The Oppressor of the Widow

"I am so glad you've come," she said. "I am all alone in the house, and it is so empty and big. At least, when mother is in bed, and the charwoman won't be back till to-morrow. So I was playing at being the Queen, and cutting off people's heads. Now you can be the Queen, turn and turn about."

"That must be a nice play," said Ione. "But I hope your mother is not seriously ill?"

"Who? Mother? Oh, no, only she always goes to bed when there is nothing else to do. But I'll tell her, and she'll be so glad you've come."

And with a skip and a wave of a hand daintily elfish, the quaint neglected child disappeared up the narrow stairs which led to the bedrooms of the little brick house.

A few minutes afterwards, through the thin partitions of the jerry-built house, a querulous voice could be heard asking a question. The low-toned answer was received with the words, "I wonder what has brought her here?"

Presently little Angel came flying back with news.

"Mother's getting up as fast as she can. And I'm to talk to you till she's ready. And oh, I hope it will be such a long time."

So with another shrill cry of joy she caught her friend round the neck.

"You are so pretty, do you know?" she went on, "and ever so much nicer than most pretty people. You don't mind my musing your things, do you, a bit? When I grow up, I'm going to be very pretty, and have lovely silk dresses. One is to be of sky-blue silk — oh, so thin — and it is to be trimmed with Garibaldi red and to have a broad belt of crimson silk round my waist. Yes, and when I go out people will all say, 'Who is that lovely *crea-chure*?' Do they say that

Ione March

when you go out? I'm sure they do say it to themselves, for all you have only on an old black frock. I say, though, are you really poor like us, or rich like Uncle Keith? Mamma says that he is ever so rich, and that he ought to let us live in a far nicer place than this."

There was a light, uncertain tread on the ill-built stairs, which, even when Angel flew up them, creaked as under a heavy weight. The little, warped, thin-pannelled parlour door opened, and the widow came in. As soon as the child heard her mother coming down the stairs, she sprang down from Ione's knee, passed her fingers through her hair, and tripped over to another chair, on the edge of which she sat with her fingers folded in her lap, and her mouth pursed and prim, looking the very ghost of the child who a moment before had wanted and chattered in Ione's lap.

"Ah, Miss March," said Mrs. Harford, handing Ione one or two unresponsive fingers, much as if she had been passing her a bunch of bananas. "I remember you. My brother — well, he is n't my brother, thank goodness — my late dear husband's brother, I mean, went away with you after putting me and this poor child into a cab. Of course, he only did that to get rid of us. Keith Harford never has any consideration for any one's feelings but his own."

"Oh, mamma!" said little Angel; "Uncle Keith is very kind, I'm sure. For when he has money he brings me bon-bons; and you know he gave me my own dear dolly."

"When he has money!" cried the widow, with an unpleasant little laugh. "Well, Miss March, I dare say you are a friend of my brother-in-law's, and will go straight and tell him what I say. But I don't care; he knows it already, or ought to. A thousand times I've

The Oppressor of the Widow

told him that if he would get a paper to edit, or go on the Stock Exchange, he might easily make enough money to take us all out of this hole. Ah, Lyall Harford, my own dear husband, was so different. You would never have suspected that Keith and he were brothers. It is true that Lyall was most unfortunate, and lost all his money. But then, so long as he had any, or could get any, he spent it like a gentleman — yes, like a gentleman, and not —”

“But,” cried Angel anxiously, “Uncle Keith is poor too!”

“Silence, child! What do you know about it? Poor indeed — with his clubs and fine chambers. He keeps us here in this rat-hole, and all the time he is rolling in the lap of luxury himself. Besides which, if he would only ask his friend Hardy for money, he could get all he wanted in a minute. And they say Hardy's mother is just wild to marry him, and he won't. Keith always was so terribly selfish.”

Ione could scarcely help smiling during the progress of this diatribe. But she felt that the sooner she got out of the house the more happy she would be.

“I should be glad if you could tell me where to find Mr. Harford,” she said at last. “I have some money of his to return to him. He has been very kind to me indeed.”

“Oh, I daresay!” cried the widow, tossing her head, and her fingers rap-rapping angrily on the paper before her. “He is just the very man to be angelic to everybody but those he is in duty bound to help — his poor dead brother's wife and child. He'd call up the first crossing-sweeper, and stuff his pockets with money. But to me and my child he scarcely allows as much as will keep body and soul together!”

“When I saw Mr. Keith Harford last,” said Ione

Ione March

softly, "he certainly was very poor. Don't you think that may be the reason?"

"Poor!" cried Mrs. Vincent Harford; "of course he is poor, and he deserves to be poor, if he is too proud to ask help from the friends he has. And how can he have a spark of consideration for us, and yet refuse to marry a great and good woman like Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy, the advocate of a noble movement.—all because, forsooth, she happens to be a little older than himself, and because he pretends that he has not the requisite affection to give her in return. How paltry!"

Ione was glad indeed to get away from the little parlour behind the dingy yellow curtains with Keith Harford's address in her pocket. The palatial apartments to which his sister-in-law so frequently referred turned out to be in a narrow and dingy street leading southward off Fleet Street, and when Ione reached the place the area of the house suggested that the entire fabric had been reared upon a solid substratum of blackbeetles. Nor was there anything really millionairish about the grimy maid-of-all-work who, after a long interval, answered the bell.

"Mr. Harford, mum? Why, Mr. Harford is ill abed! See him? Well, mum, Mr. Harford has only a bedroom at the top of the house. But, if you like, I'll go and tell him you are here. Shall I say his sister 'as called?"

At the sound of voices a hard-featured woman came out of some back premises and stood looking down upon Ione with an air of reproach.

"Who is the person, Sarah?" she grated, with the noise of a rotary knife-cleaner when the brushes get a little out of order.

"Friend of Muster Harford's," said Sarah, throwing her voice casually over her shoulder.

The Oppressor of the Widow

"Mr. Harford is in bed, and is not able to see any stranger," said the severe-featured woman; "but I will take care of any message for him, or any letter or package, miss."

She glanced at the envelope in Ione's hand.

"Thank you," said Ione, who had instantly conceived a great dislike for Keith's landlady; "I will not trouble you."

And so walked away. She was resolved not to trust her precious thirty pounds to the care of so evident a harpy. She would either get Marcus Hardy to go with it, or else put her faith in the registration system of H. M. Post Office. As she went slowly away she crossed over to the opposite side of the street, and, casting a glance aloft, she endeavoured to decide which of the small, dirty windows could be that of Keith Harford's room. On the fourth storey one was open nearly half its extent, and the grimy curtain within moved a little as if a breeze were stirring gently up above, though there was not a breath of air in the narrow street where she stood.

CHAPTER XXVII

JANE ALLEN'S TRAGEDY

ALL that night Ione lay awake thinking of Keith Harford alone in the grimy house in Tarvit Street, at the mercy of the hard-featured woman. It weighed on her heart like an oppression, that somehow she had heard his voice call her from behind the dirty curtain of the fourth-storey room. Towards morning she fell into an uneasy slumber, from which she was awakened by Jane Allen bending over her and touching her gently on the shoulder.

"Tell me what is the matter," said the girl. "I can't bear to hear you lying moaning like that!"

"There is nothing the matter at all," said Ione; "I must have been dreaming."

"Was it about *him*?" queried Jane almost in a whisper.

Ione was silent, for truly her heart was sick and sore within her.

"Let me come in beside you, Ione," said Jane Allen, "and just tell me anything you want to."

After all, there is nothing in the world like human sympathy. By it alone the heart of man, running for even a little way in double harness, is eased of the straining load which sags and lurches behind him over life's uneasy causeway.

Ione did not know that she was in love — certainly at this time she would most vehemently have denied it, even to Jane Allen; but Jane had infinitely more tact than to ask the question point-blank. She only lay quietly, with

Jane Allen's Tragedy

her hand round her friend's shoulder. And because the hearts of all women are the same, and their comprehension of each other's good and ill greater than that which is granted to man and woman, Ione March was at once soothed and aided by the gentle hand and silent sympathy of the little type-writing girl. At last Ione spoke, very softly and evenly.

"I have a friend," she said, "one who was kind to me — to whom I wish to be kind. He is very ill. I went to see him to-day, but I could not. The landlady was horrid, and would not let me go up. Yet I seemed to hear his voice calling me to come and help him —"

"Ione March," said Jane Allen firmly, giving her a fierce little shake, "now you've got to stop this straight away. You and I will go the first thing in the morning, and if there is any frowsy old rent-grabber in London that can keep me from seeing — him as my heart is set on — well I'll enjoy meeting her, that's all!"

So the two girls lay awake in each other's arms till the grey of the morning reddened to the smoky copper sunrise of Battersea, while the milk-carts, driving Chelsea-wards towards the spidery tackling of the Albert Bridge, rattled into hearing, grew louder, clattered, passed, and ceased. Then came the hoarse, coughing cry of the early sweep; after him the man with the unknown proclamation, whose voice in these regions can be heard afar in all weathers — a mysterious calling in the dawn which Ione declared sounded like that of Jonah: "Nineveh the Great shall be destroyed — destroyed in three days!" These all went by their appointed hours, regular as the circling hands of a watch. For the floral clock of the fields — the wakening daisies, the early-closing "Go-to-bed-John," the turning of the sun-flower upon its stem, are not more regular than the daily calendar of happenings in the streets of a great city — when one

Ione March

stays in the same spot all day and night, and many days one after the other.

And all through the shifting hours Ione told Jane Allen of her friendship for Keith Harford — of her engagement to Kearney Judd, of the meeting in Switzerland at the hotel of Johann Jossi, and her hot brief anger at Meiringen. Then she went on to tell of the meeting in London after many days, of the glances left in her heart, meaningless at the time, which, however, had grown great and important during absence and without the utterance of a word. And all the while Jane Allen murmured question, understanding, sympathy. At last in her turn she began to speak to Ione in the same low and even voice — the voice in which women tell each other the secret things of the heart.

"Yes, Ione dear," she said, "that is the beginning — the beginning of true love. No, don't speak any more; just listen! For such a man you would do much, but not yet all. I have done all — all. But I will only tell you part. For when the heart is bitter it is easy to speak, but not easy to speak wisely.

"Ione, five years ago there was a man who swore he loved me. And I loved him! God help me — I love him still. We went to one chapel. We sang in one choir. He was poor and I was poor, but we worked hard for that which would give us a little home together. Three years — that is a long time out of a girl's life! They said I was pretty then — others than he said so; but I never thought of, and never so much as looked at any other. I believed in him, and trusted him in all things. He was to me as God. He travelled in wool and underclothing for Remington & Carter — I mean that was his business; and we had begun to gather little things for the house. See here, Ione!"

And in the growing light of the dawn Jane Allen

Jane Allen's Tragedy

leaped from the bed and vanished through the door. In a moment she was back again with what looked like a heavy bundle of white fabric. She had been dry-eyed before, and had kept up throughout her narrative that curiously low and even tone. But now, as she looked down at the linen in her hand, strange quick quivers — a woman's premonition of emotional storm — shook her, and there came a slow recurring sob in her throat. Her voice broke, and whistled like the wind among river reeds.

"See, Ione — read what is written there!"

"*Jane Dwyer, High Peak, No. 12,*" she read on the corner of the sheet. The marking-ink was black and dense, as if the iron had only just passed over it for the first time.

"Yes; it had gone as far as that. We lived up Derby way then, and he wrote me every post, year out and year in, till there came a time (it is three years ago this spring) I felt his letters grow cold. There was no meaning behind the loving words. *May you never know the dreadfulness of seeing such words written and knowing that!* Then the letters began to come every other day, then once a week, and soon only one or two in the month. But at first I just told myself how busy he was, and so I kept my heart up, for I loved him. Then, like you, I began to fear that he was ill. So I got a gold sovereign out of the purse I had saved for the little home, and took the train to the station in the country we had so often talked of going to. I got out there and walked along miry roads to his master's works, asking where he lived of all the people I met. And some looked strange at me, and some laughed, but most did not know who it was I meant. However, bit by bit I found he was living in a new cottage near the Matlock Road. His letters had always been sent to the Works

Ione March

—I had sent one there only the day before! He got them quicker that way, he said. And it was about sun-down when I came to the house. It was bright and new-appearing, with a shining brass handle to the door, and in the little garden in front there were Canterbury bells and ‘None-so-pretty,’ all in blossom. These were his favourite flowers. And as I stood and wondered, there came a tall dark girl out of the cottage door, and looked down the road with her hand above her brows. I had never seen her before, but something told me who she was, and I grew all cold as a stone. Some folk might have thought her pretty. I only thought I should die. But I did not faint. I did not cry. I was not even angry. Only I stood farther off behind some bushes by the wayside, hiding like a thief in a little nook where they had once broken stones — broken them with a hammer — as women’s hearts are broken!

“And by-and-by round the turn of the white empty road I saw him come. He had a bundle of papers in his hand, and he waved them when he caught sight of the tall girl. I had seen him do that. And then — and then — she gave a little skip upon one foot as if she were glad, and looked over her shoulder to see that no one was watching. Then catching up her skirt in one hand, she ran to him like a three-year-old child. Ah! she loved him, and she was good — but then so did I. If she deserved happiness more than I, well — that was not my fault. I had loved him first, and longest, and most. But I grew ever colder, and my heart ever stiller. It seemed to be turning to stone within me. But I made no sign, and he and she came slowly past the bushes behind which I stood, and they were looking together at the magazines and books he had brought back. His arm was about her; I knew just how firm the clasp was, just where it began and where it ended.

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Jane Allen's Tragedy

There was a proud look in her eyes, too, that came — as I knew also — from a glad heart. As he came past he slipped his hand up over her shoulder and stroked her further cheek. They were too far off for me to hear what he said, when he did it. But I needed no telling.

“‘Little Sweetheart!’ — that was what he said to her. *And it was then that my heart broke.* But I waited quite quietly, though I had to catch at the tree to keep from falling. It was a book with bright pictures, all about flowers and greenhouses and seeds and prices that they were looking at together. We had often talked about that. And when they got near the little door with the brass knocker, she laughed out suddenly, and leaned her head back. He bent down to kiss her, at which she pretended to be angry, and ran in quickly just like a kitten. He followed, smiling, and the door was shut upon them.

“Then a man came by, and I heard a voice saying, not a bit like mine, ‘Whose house might that be? It is a pretty house!’ And the man answered, ‘Whoy, that’s Master Broome’s house. Eh! ye may well say ’t is pretty. There’s lots of brass i’ that house, lady. Whoy, that young man married his maister’s daughter ten days agoon next Saturday.’

“I thanked him, and said that it was a good thing, and that I wished them well. Then I went back to the tree and tried to pray, with my brow hard against the rough bark. But I could not. Yet I used to do it regular before that. He could pray — oh, beautiful! He prayed in a chapel and at meetings, and was a Sunday School teacher. But I never could pray rightly since then. So I stood there and saw the windows of the cottage light up, and never once noticed how fast the night came down. And hours after, still standing



Ione March

and holding to the tree, I saw the light move and darken below, and then flicker and brighten in the windows above. And then — and then — after a while I saw it put out. It rained out there by the tree, and the big broad drops fell on my face. But I did not care, for I fell down and lay all night in the wet like one dead.

“And next day I was taken to the hospital, for it was brain fever I had. And it was eight months and many things had happened before I came out again, the shadow of the girl that walked along that road from the little station, all to see Joseph Broome’s wife standing at the door. But when I came home I sent him all the sheets that were not marked and the other things I had got ready. And he took them. But you see these were marked, and so I could not send them. For I heard that her name was Alice.”

And all the time Jane Allen knelt by Ione’s bedside, holding the linen in her thin fingers, smoothing it and touching it gently as if it had been a dead child, turning the name this way and that as she looked at the pretty neat black lettering. The water was running steadily down her cheeks now, and with the beginning of that the dry sob had ceased. Suddenly, however, the girl threw her face forward, and with her brow sunk on Ione’s shoulders, she cried out in pain.

“Oh, I think I would n’t have minded if he had n’t stroked her just like he used to do me, on the cheek, I mean, and called her my name — the pet name, he called me long before he ever saw her! ‘Lil’ sweet-heart!’ he used to say, like that! Oh, he need n’t have said that! For he had lots of names girls like to hear. But that was my own — my very own!”

Ione drew the girl to her. She was all trembling now and chill.

Jane Allen's Tragedy

"Jane," she said, "get into bed at once!"

"I must put these back," she said, checking her sobs quickly and rising to her feet.

"You will catch cold—I will do that," returned Ione.

So Ione took the linen sheets, and leaving Jane Allen in her warm place, she went into her friend's room. The little bureau was open. On the bed lay a folded dress, of white nun's veiling, with lace and a blue rosette of ribbons upon it at the shoulder—a poor, tawdry, home-made thing. But the same hard woman's sob came into Ione's throat as she gazed, for she knew that she was looking at the wedding-dress of her that should have been Jane Broome. So swiftly and reverently she returned the linen to its place, and nestled the faded white dress tenderly on top. As she pulled it off the bed, a picture half revealed underneath the pillow. Ione could not help looking at it by the light of the candle. It represented a very smug-looking young man with short muttonchop whiskers, his abundant hair dressed in a sleek cock's-comb. He was leaning in a self-contented and provincial manner against a pillar which stood alone in a classical landscape. Beside him, and upon a chair, sat the dimpling radiant image of the girl whose pale shadow was to-day Jane Allen. The young man's hand was half raised from her shoulder, as if only the moment before he had stroked her cheek and murmured, "Lil' sweetheart!"

Somehow Ione felt that he did it again as soon as the photographer turned his back to go into his dark room.

She returned to Jane Allen, who silently made room for her; and there, till it was time to rise, did the two girls lie without further spoken word, each comforted and strengthened, their hearts lightened, and the coming

Ione March

day made less dark, because of the tears of the night and the mutual heart-opening of the morning.

Each knew now what the other meant by the pronoun "he." And all real girl friendships are based on that.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

DERELICT

THE next morning Ione and Jane Allen were again at the door of the dirty house in Tarvit Street. Ione had wished to go first to Mrs. Vincent Harford in order to enlist her aid. But she had not got half through the account of her interview with that lady when Jane Allen shut authoritatively down on that project.

"I would n't trust a pet white rat to a grasping toad like that!" was the unscientific but clear and unmistakable formula in which she expressed her dislike of the selfishness of Mrs. Vincent Harford. So Ione pressed the matter no more.

Jane began the day by going to the manager of the Gopher & Arlington Company, who was opening his day's mail in the little mahogany-panelled office in King William Street. She demanded a whole holiday, which the manager willingly accorded to one of his best and most regular workers. Down a long vista of type-writing tables he saw the slim figure of Ione, who was standing looking at an instruction book. With a sudden increase of interest he said to Jane Allen, "Is that your friend Miss March, who left us some time ago? I heard that her father was dead. I wonder if she would n't like to come back to us now."

Jane, however, shook her head. She felt that it was not the time to make such a proposition to Ione, and so presently the two girls found themselves stemming the strong morning tide of humanity running eastward and cityward along Fleet Street.

Ione March

Having arrived at number 9, Tarvit Street, E. C., Ione rang the bell. This produced no effect whatsoever, whereupon with a quick and sure hand she knocked loudly upon the rusty unblacked knocker, so that the echo came back at once from roof and basement.

"How is Mr. Harford to-day?" asked Ione with a quiet aplomb, which was made more stern and determined by the presence of Jane Allen, in whom she felt there resided an invaluable reserve of power and language in case of a first repulse.

It was the same grimy unwashed serving-maid who answered the door.

"Muster Harford, mum? Why, 'e bain't no better."

"Can we see him?"

The serving-maid glanced over her shoulder.

"I think as 'ow I could manage to slip 'e oop when missus goes for the neck of mutton."

She leaned over towards the girls with a grimly confidential look upon her face.

"She 's that 'orrid mean — she goes out every day to buy the very cheapest stuff to feed 'em on. She 'll be gone in ten minutes, and she 'll stop a whole hour, nosin' round and cheapenin'. I 'll sneak you up then, mum, an' no one never the wiser."

She nodded to Ione with a knowing twinkle in her eyes. Evidently she had conceived a low opinion of Jane Allen on the spot, for she added, pointing to Ione's companion, "'Er can stop below along o' me!"

But Ione had imbibed a new spirit, which forbade her to be dependent upon the good offices of a lodging-house Abigail.

"Thank you," she said; "you are very kind, and I shall not forget it. But I would like to see Mr. Harford now."

Derelict

"Bless you, miss," said the girl, "I dare n't! 'E goes on just hawful—'E's fairly off 'is chump—an' 'as bin for three days. And missus, she won't let 'im go because she 'as collared 'is trunk, an' — No, ma'am, I ham sorry that you can't see Mr. 'Arford to-day. 'E is not receiving no visingtors to-day."

The abrupt change in the manner of the servant girl was produced by the appearance of Mrs. Horehound, the landlady of the Tarvit Street mansion at the head of the stairs, with an expression of such fixed and deadly hatred on her face that Ione, left to herself, would have precipitately retired, but for the strong reserve behind her in the shape of Jane Allen.

"No," grated Mrs. Horehound, from her coign of vantage, "and you can't see Mr. Harford, an' you shan't see Mr. Harford. This is a respectable boardin' house for young gentlemen, and I can't be admittin' young women promiscuous-like off the street, as it were."

"But I must see Mr. Harford," said Ione firmly; "I hear he is very ill. He may need to be removed to a hospital."

"He will not be removed till the arrears of his rent is paid in full. Nor yet until a doctor certifies that he is to be moved to a place where he can be better taken care of, than by a humble but respectable person in my sphere in life."

"You have called in a doctor, then?" queried Ione.

"And, pray, what business may that be of yours whether I 'ave or whether I 'ave n't?" retorted Mrs. Horehound. "I suppose I am responsible for my own lodgers?"

Then, with her nose in the air, the landlady became exceedingly ironical. "Perhaps, miss, you are the young gentleman's wife or his sister?"

Ione March

"Neither," returned Ione promptly. "I am only one of his friends."

"His friend—yes—friends often come to see my young men. But I'm not going to be took in by you nor the like of you. I've seen too many o' your sort—minxes!"

Jane Allen stepped to the front.

"We have come to take Mr. Harford away," she said, "and get him into a hospital. Try to stop us at your peril. If he dies you will be taken up for manslaughter, if not murder?"

"Is this another 'friend'?" sneered the grim-visaged landlady, making a final rally.

"I am what it does not concern you to know. Let us see Mr. Harford, or we will go away and come back with a policeman and the County Council doctor. They'll see to it that you are prosecuted for having a case of contagious disease in your house without reporting it. You can get two years for that!"

It was an arrow shot at a desperate venture into the air, but the joints of Mrs. Horehound's armour were many and wide.

"I dunno' as 't is any case of infectious disease," she grumbled, "but perhaps you had better bring a doctor. But mind you, I don't let a thing belonging him pass out of my house till I am paid every penny of my just dues!"

She retreated up the stairs without a word more, and led the way to Keith's room. After the first landing the wax-cloth was worn into holes, and the feet of the girls felt the steps uneven beneath. Up and up they went, turning after turning, and at each the floor grew more uneven and broken, the staircase narrower and meaner. All pretence of wax-cloth ceased at the begin-

Derelict

ning of the third flight and even the banisters began to show blanks in their serried array.

As they ascended they became conscious of a voice speaking continuously and very fast, while sometimes an ironic laugh, that seemed hardly human, pealed through the house. Again the softest and most moving accents of adoration and entreaty reached their ears, causing Mrs. Horehound to look to either side, to make sure that the doors leading into the lower rooms were tightly closed.

"Ione March — I beg your pardon, Miss March, but you make me forget myself — you know you are so kind to me. You are not going to marry that rascal! I do know him to be a rascal, Marcus. Hold your tongue! You were angry with me in the Court at Grindelwald, Miss March, but you will forgive me now — now — before I die."

There was a pause, and the voice began again when they were almost at the door:

"Marcus, I did not tell you before that I loved that girl; but I do. I loved her from the very first day I ever saw her. With all my heart's heart I loved her. I would die to save her finger from aching. What do you know about it? You've been in love with twenty girls. I never loved but her; yet she will never know it, Marcus. I would not touch her sweet young life with the shadow of my failure. An old-young man and in love — ha, ha! Forty next year, and the grey already running through the black! Well, both will be laid away for repairs among the worms, deep under the roots of the churchyard grass!"

At this point a feeble elricht voice burst into song:

"John Anderson my jo, John,
When we were first acquent,
Your locks were like the raven,
Your bonny brow was brent;

"Ione March

But noo your brow is beld, John,
Your locks are like the snaw,
But blessings on your frosty pow,
John Anderson my jo."

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

A strange cackling laugh, like that of a parrot, rang out as the door was opened.

And there before them, on a dingy London bed, under a common coverlet, lay Keith Harford, his eyes open and brilliant with fever, turning his head slowly from side to side with the wearying iteration of a chained wild animal.

He had been staring fixedly at the ceiling, but he paused a moment and looked fixedly at the incomers.

"Is that you, Mrs. Horehound? No, Bloodhound, I mean — sired by Vulture out of Horseleech! Ha, ha! Good! The top of the morning to you, Mrs. Bloodhound! Did you happen to see my Sylvia pass this way? If you did, I hope you told her to meet me at the churchyard gate."

Then pausing, he sang, still in that dreadful voice:

*"Great King Pandion, he is dead,
All his friends are lapt in lead!"*

Ione bent down and laid her cool ungloved hands upon the pale and burning brow.

"Keith!" she said softly, with her face immediately above his.

He turned upon her eyes that were vacant of all sight. They seemed to look through and beyond and behind her.

"Hush!" he said impressively, raising his hand and pointing upward; "they told me she was dead. But they lied. I knew she would cheat them. She comes to see me when they are all gone. I heard her voice

Derelict

just now. Once she laughed, softly and sweetly. But I wish she would not play bo-peep with Mr. Sweel behind the curtains. I think it is a little unkind, when I am going to die so soon. But still — I am glad to see her in such excellent spirits. Young lady! — You with the smut on your nose and the hair in curl-papers — pritheer tell me — did you happen to see my Sylvia pass this way? ”

And he smiled as he tirelessly reeled off his wandering sentences; yet he spoke the words themselves as clearly as if he had been delivering a lecture in class.

“They took her money, the scoundrels. But I sent it back. Ha, ha! that was good — eh, Marcus? She could never guess how. And I did not want the books anyway, though the man that bought them was a rogue and cheated me damnably. What should a dying man want with books? But they need not have sent me to prison — for all the time I had to live. I am glad, though, it did not get in the papers; so she will never know. A pauper’s funeral! Ha, ha! I say, Marcus, I wrote up one year ago, when I was on the *Dispatch*. It made all the women cry, so they said. But they never paid me for it, all the same. I nearly cried when I was writing it. But I can’t cry now; when I’m going to have a pauper’s funeral myself. Perhaps some luckier chap will write up mine, and get paid for it! *Don’t let that woman come near me!* [vehemently]. I don’t want to see her. — Well, if I have to, I’ll go through with it. She has a sweet little girl — too good for such a harridan — and after all she was my brother’s wife. I must not forget that. By the way, when I get Up There, I must look up old Lyall. He used to mend salmon rods rather well!”

Keith’s voice altered again. It grew restrained and conversational.

Ione March

"My dear sister," he said, "I am so glad to see you. I am sorry I have no money besides the quarter's allowance which I have already sent you. I cannot put you into a better house. I have no money even for myself, nor can I beg from my friend Mr. Hardy, who has gone to America — for the present at any rate."

Ione's steady hand was cooling his brow. She had taken her handkerchief and wetted it at a water-bottle, greasy and green from lack of internal cleansing, which stood on the bare round table by the young man's bed.

Presently he looked up again.

"I do not know who you are," he said softly, his eyes were very large and dark in their deathly purple sockets, "but it was good of you to send her away. That woman wearies me, and I have no more money to give her. That other harpy downstairs — but I will not rant like a fool! Of course the woman takes what is her due. And she can't help it if her name is Horehqund. With a headpiece like that to support in respectability she ought to have married an honest man named Smith or Jones. Thomson is good name, too, though more uncommon. What o'clock do they wake a fellow up when they are going to hang him — daybreak, is n't it? Well, if they would only put up the gallows somewhere else than just outside the window, I would not care. The strokes of the hammers ring through my head all the time, and I can't get any sleep. I declare I shall write to the *Times* upon 'The Rights of Englishmen about to be Hanged.' What a capital subject for the silly season!"

And so without a minute's pause Keith wandered on and on and ever on. Ione looked up to Jane Allen, who stood with clasped hands and anxious brow at the foot of the bed.

Derelict

"Jane," she said, "we must get him out of this, the place where he can be properly nursed and cared for."

"Not a foot till my just debts is paid in full!" said Mrs. Horehound, determinedly.

"Let me see your account!" said Ione.

"Don't you do anything of the kind, Ione; she can't help you taking him to an hospital."

"I'm going to take him home to Audley Street if the doctor will allow it," said Ione. "Do you fetch him, and I will settle with the woman."

Jane went swiftly and silently downstairs. She knew where there was the office of an insurance doctor close by. She would bring him if he happened to be in.

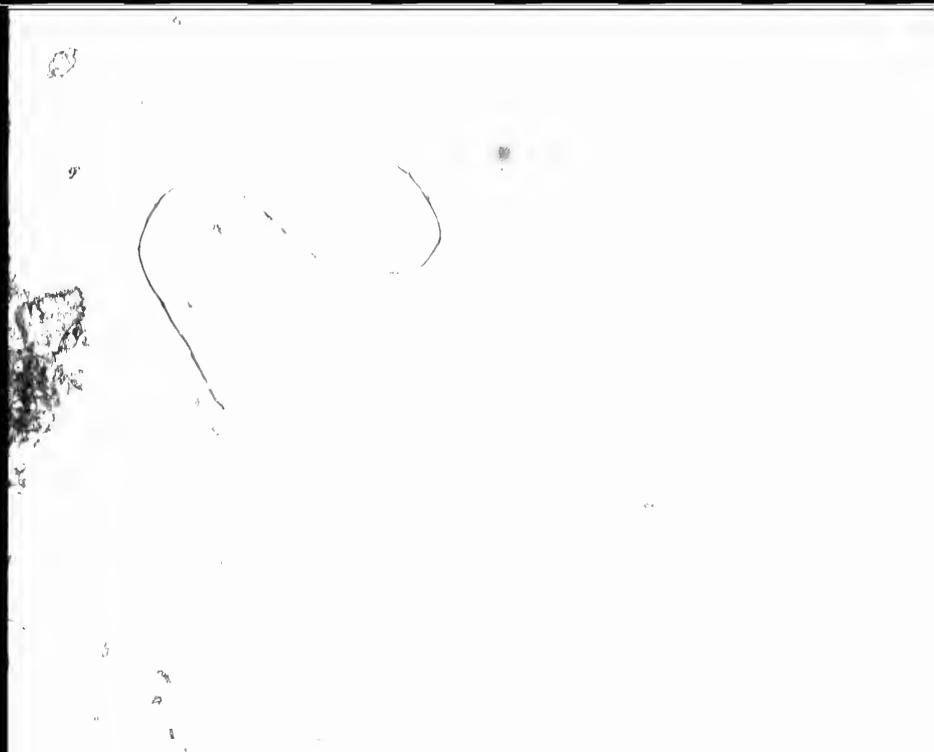
"I do not practise in the neighbourhood," said Doctor Spencer Bateson, a tall, stout man, of genial aspect, beaming down upon the anxious girl; "it is not etiquette; but if there is any danger or need, I will go. Is the gentleman a friend of yours?"

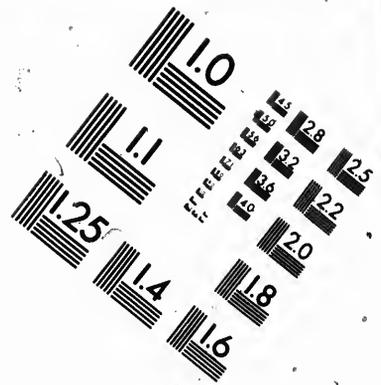
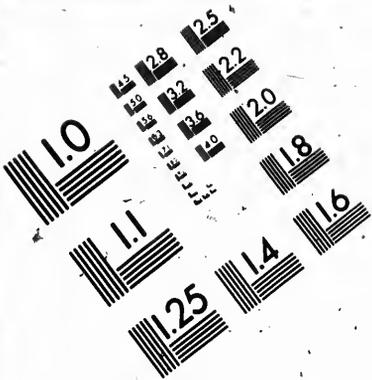
"He is a friend of a friend of mine," said Jane. "She is with him now. Come this way at once, please!"

While she spoke the doctor had been getting his hat, and slipping a small case of remedies and another of instruments into his pocket.

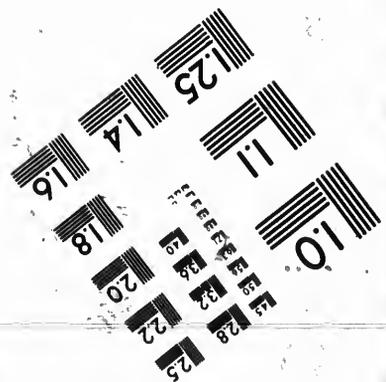
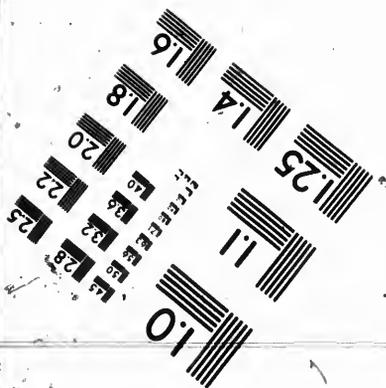
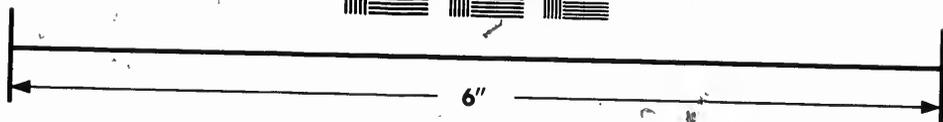
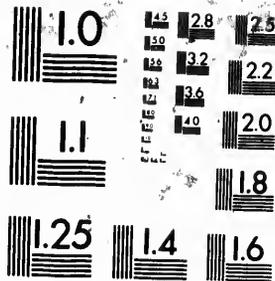
They returned together to the high grimy room in Tarvit Street. The landlady was standing on the lower step of the stair with a dazed kind of look on her face. She had emerged signally worsted from her financial conflict with Ione. For that practical young woman had insisted upon her displaying the vouchers for all her alleged extra purchases. While by comparison with other weeks for which the account had been settled, the fact was established that for the last fortnight she had charged her lodger three times the real rent of the room. Driven from post to pillar, Mrs. Horehound had at last







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Ione March

written a receipt for the amount of her account after full deductions, and this was now safe in Ione's pocket as she sat calmly beside Keith Harford, waiting for Jane's return.

Doctor Spencer Bateson possessed such a majestic carriage and such a commanding and sonorous voice that, from his first entrance, he fairly appalled Mrs. Horehound.

"Where is your patient, madam?" he demanded, as soon as he came within the outer door. "I hope you have him in a clean and airy room, or else I cannot answer for the consequences."

And he sniffed all the way up the stairs in a most discomposing manner.

Arrived in the room in which Keith lay, he made a hasty diagnosis, stood awhile in thought, then tapped with his pencil on his hand.

"The patient is suffering from congestion of the brain, with marked delirious symptoms. The disease is probably the result of worry and mental strain, which has ended in nervous breakdown. He ought to be moved at once to some place where he can have pure air and ample attention."

Ione nodded.

"We will take him home and nurse him there!" she said.

The doctor fought a good fight for the public hospital, but something in Ione's eyes mastered him. Besides, he could not help noticing the purposeful and decided way in which she moved about the sick room.

"You have had experience," he said quickly, as she shifted Keith's head a little higher on the pillow.

"A little," said Ione quietly. "I was only three months in training, but I have been through a season's cholera in an Italian city."

Derelict

The doctor said no more.

"I will bring an ambulance waggon at once," he said, "if you will have the patient ready for removal. I will go down with you myself!"

In this way Keith Harford was taken to 33, Audley Street, Battersea, where he was laid in Ione's own room, and tended daily by Doctor Spencer Bateson—who, curiously enough, found that it was wholly convenient to take Battersea on his way from Hampstead to his office in the Strand.

From the first the symptoms pointed to a somewhat prolonged illness. It was not till the fifth day that Keith began to recover his consciousness. Then the quick over-activity of the brain and the constant and wearying pour of words gave way to a sleepy unconsciousness, from which he only waked at intervals to resume his mental wanderings. Sometimes Ione would go out for a turn in the noble park, the southern entrance of which was within a few minutes' walk of Audley Street, and on these rare occasions she seemed to float light-headed in a new chill world of phantoms and unrealities.

One day as she came rapidly round a corner from the direction opposite to that by which she had gone out, she almost stumbled upon a young man. He seemed to be gazing ardently in the direction of No. 33, while the rest of his body was clapped as close to the brick wall as if he had been crawling along its base like some foul, creeping thing. His attitude suggested that he was exceedingly anxious not to disclose his identity. Something familiar about the hock-bottle slope of the neck and narrow shoulders caused Ione to turn quickly round.

She found herself almost face to face with H. Chadford Eaton, late confidential clerk to Mr. Nathaniel Shillabeer.

Ione March

The youth, finding that he was recognised, suddenly withdrew his head, and pulling out his cigarette-case, he began with an obvious assumption of careless ease to light up, keeping however his eyes persistently averted from Ione's face. She proceeded slowly to the door of number 33. Tom Adair was just going out to meet Jane Allen — as he had got into the habit of doing, ostensibly because in these days of trouble and sick-nursing Jane generally carried home ice and all manner of dainties and medicaments, which could be more cheaply obtained at Billingsgate or Covent Garden than in the suburbs.

"Tom," cried Ione, eagerly, "the fellow who followed us before is at the corner. I wish you would ——"

Ere she had finished her sentence Tom Adair was off. He never paused save to thrust his best new "bowler" more firmly down on the back of his head. But Mr. H. Chadford Eaton knew that the district of Battersea would be warm for him, and as soon as Ione passed he had taken to his heels riverwards.

When Tom reached the first corner he was already disappearing at the end of the street. Tom gave the view hallo, and redoubled his exertions. But H. Chadford knew his pursuer, and did not wish to repeat his experiences of the yard gates.

The confidential clerk ran straight for the nearest underground station. He battered up the long approach to the Albert Bridge. He dived into the intricate maze of small streets and courts which lies to the south of King's Road, and finally just as Tom Adair was close upon him, he ran across an open square and plunged unexpectedly down the steep descent of an underground station. A train passed up the platform at the same moment with a growling creak of brakes and a whirl of escaping steam.

Derelict

Tom almost had his enemy that time, but H. Chadford was through before him. All ticketless, he burst past the guardian of the gates. Tom was about to follow, but the gate porter was not to be caught twice. Slam came the heavy postern in his face. "Too late, sir! Next train in five minutes!"

And before the words were out of his mouth the guardian was at his work of securing doors, and crying in some unknown tongue the name of the station.

H. Chadford passed slowly opposite his pursuer as the train slid groaning and hissing out. As he did so he made that ancient gesture of contempt and defiance whose origin is lost in solar myth, but whose practise to this day arouses passion and excites language of quite different origin.

"Oh, wait — just wait, young man!" gritted the irate Tom Adair between his teeth, as he slowly remounted the stairs — so angry as to be all unconscious that Jane Allen had arrived by the same train which had borne away his triumphant foe. They mounted almost parallel on the stairs. Jane walked a little behind Tom, complacently smiling. She did not speak till they had almost reached the top.

Then she said, "Oh, Tom, I did not think you could be so mean — to let me carry all these heavy parcels up those long stairs!"

Whereupon neither Tom Adair's remorse nor his profuse explanations and apologies availed him anything.

When Ione went into the sick-room one Sunday Keith Harford looked up at her with a new intelligence raying from his eyes.

"Do you know," he said confidentially, "that you very distinctly remind me of some one who did a great deed of kindness for me. Once, long ago, I was con-

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demned to die, and a girl took my punishment and died instead for me."

"She must have loved you!" said Ione softly.

Keith Harford leaned forward. He was so weak that he could not even raise his hand, but the eager boyishness of his face was accentuated by the pallor of a brow from which the Alpine sunburn had quite faded.

"No," he said, "she did not love me—she could not. But it was her fate, and she could not help it. Don't you think it is mean to live on and to let a girl die for you? Would you like to know her name? It was Ione March!"

And as he spoke Ione felt a chill shadow creep over her as if he had indeed spoken the truth, and she was in reality doomed to die instead of Keith Harford.

And she remembered the words of the epistle she had heard that morning in church.

"Yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die."

CHAPTER XXIX

CASTLE GIMCRACK

RAYLEIGH ABBEY in the county of Hants, was as a city set on a hill, conspicuous near and far, taking the eye of the wayfarer from sea and plain, by valley and down. Its massive towers apparently betokened reverend age. Its gateways of rough hewn stone were fitted to withstand the battering elements of a thousand years. A square Norman keep rose in the centre, indented dark and solemn against the sky, a cliff-like wall of stone and lime like those of Loches or Threave. Battlements and towers cinctured it about, vast in their proportions, built apparently of overawing and pretentious masonry. Thus shone Rayleigh Abbey from a distance.

A nearer view, however, showed all this magnificence to be but the "insubstantial pageant of a dream."

The massive walls were relatively no thicker than pasteboard, the flanking towers mere shells, the grand square of the lofty keep was iron-framed with windows uncompromising as those of a factory. While from an interior view the great castle, cynosure of travellers' eyes and a landmark from afar, became a mere "Crystal Palace" set-piece, involving only so many thousand square feet of frontage and a wilderness of ungainly props and struts behind. Its future owner, Marcus Hardy, for once happily inspired with words, had named it Castle Gimcrack. In the meantime, it was life-rented by his mother, Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy, and Marcus and his wife were received only as guests, little more

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favoured indeed than countless others who like unclean birds flocked thither from the four quarters of heaven.

Rayleigh Abbey had been designed, founded, and completed — so far at least as so gaunt a jest in iron and stone can ever be said to be completed — by one Theophrastus Wiseman Hardy, the grandfather of Marcus, and the inventor of the Body-and-Soul Water-and-Mustard-Plaster Mind Cure, applicable to all diseases that flesh is heir to.

Theophrastus Hardy had made a fortune in slave-running from the Gold Coast to the Southern States of America early in the century, and, while yet comparatively a young man, had retired upon an ample competence, an uncomfortable conscience — and a new religion. His only son, Aldebaran January Hardy, had sunk into a too early grave under the unjust burdens of his name and of the wife imposed upon him by his father. Soon after assisting at the preliminary horoscope of his only son Marcus, he laid down the double burden, and became indeed but a name, a bust, and an inscription in carved marble on the chapel wall of Rayleigh Abbey. Thus ran his memorial: —

Here does not lie aught that is mortal of

ALDEBARAN JANUARY HARDY,

only son of

THEOPHRASTUS WISEMAN HARDY

and Beloved Co-partner of

MARTYRIA EVICTA LUCRETIA FORSAKER-HARDY

of Rayleigh Abbey, Hants.

His Ashes, being passed through the Fire, were

Scattered over the Wide Sea.

His Soul, recomposed and reinvested,

as Angel or Jelly-fish,

SOMEWHERE AWAITS THE ETERNAL

MORNING.

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No one could deny a certain extraordinary eclectic vigour to Theophrastus Wiseman Hardy, the original inventor of the Body-and-Soul Water-and-Mustard-Plaster Mind Cure, nor yet a striking executive capacity to Martyria Evicta Lucretia, his daughter-in-law and successor in that thriving curative establishment. All creeds had gone to the making of the Psychophysical Regenerative Religion, as, alternatively, its founder delighted to call it. Theophrastus, a white-haired, keen-faced, venerable man, mostly attired sailor-wise in a blue coat and a stemmed officer's cap like that of a mate in the mercantile marine, had long been dead; but he lived on nevertheless in various pictures and engravings generously dispersed throughout almost every room of the Abbey. Theophrastus had been a man without culture, lacking even (to begin with) the elements of an ordinary education. Yet afterwards he had read all manner of books at first hand, without any of that scholastic piloting which polarises their meaning to most of us. Then, with the assistance of scissors and paste, he had selected and arranged from each what seemed best suited to his purpose, as ruthlessly as in his time he had taken the finest buck negroes out of the slave pens of Bonny, in spite of the wailing of forsaken wives and the desperately clinging arms of orphaned children.

Theophrastus Hardy possessed a vast library in the square halls of the keep, stored mostly according to subject, and the marks of his pencil and scissors were through them all. Here and there pages had been riven clean out. Further on a paragraph had been neatly snipped away. Blue, red, and yellow underscorings ran across the pages, and radiated in all directions to the desecrated margins, like the railway map of a flat country or Signor Schiaparelli's chart of the Martian canals. One of the most characteristic volumes was a copy of

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the Christian scriptures, Grangerised, "improved," and spiced to the taste of Theophrastus Hardy by additions from the astrology and black-stone scrying of Dr. Dee, and from the word-cunning, wet-bandaging, and primitive leechdom of the Elizabethan herbalists.

It is said that when searching for a catchword to give some unity and coherence to his *olla*, Theophrastus hesitated long between Christ and Buddha, and only decided upon the Nazarene on account of the rooted ignorance of a public which (in these pre-Theosophist days) declined to distinguish between Buddha and Confucius, and was apt to take it for granted that all such curious names represented different varieties of tea.

But under the new dispensation of Martyria Evicta Lucretia, the elastic system of the founder had suddenly become mawkishly spiritualistic, and now manifested itself chiefly in the Healing of the Hands of Faith, the Anointing with Oil, the Presence and Manifestations of Spirits good and Spirits evil — and, above all, in the necessity for all mankind to conform to the gospel (as it happened to be at the time) according to Martyria Lucretia, decked in the apocalyptic red shawl, and spiced by an extempore prayer sandwiched between each course at dinner.

All this made the English Mecca of the new eclectic religion a strange place for Ione and Keith to build up their bodies in, and "minister to minds diseased."

But at least the air was pure at Rayleigh Abbey. It stood on the coast at a lonely spot overlooking the waters of the English Channel, set high above the crumbling gravel banks of the southern coast line. Opposite, the purple-grey cliffs of the Needles stood up like shadowy ninepins deserted after a stirring game by dead giants. From the misty water, ten miles away, the Isle of Wight heaved its blue shoulders out of the brine.

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While to the left the long curlew's beak of Hurst Castle promontory pecked perpetually at the tawny breakers of the Solent.

"You don't need to mind the *mater*," pleaded Marcus; "there'll be no end of rum people about, but you can always get a quiet smoke behind the stables."

So with this to look forward to, Ione agreed willingly enough to accompany them, especially as Keith Harford, being now convalescent, was soon to follow; and, in the meanwhile, could very well be left to the motherly care of Mrs. Adair and the tart and caustic encouragements of Jane Allen. For Ione had been insensibly drifting into a condition of constant severe headaches, accompanied by strange lassitude, which often ended in vertigo and chronic dizziness. This had begun so subtly that she could not recall any particular time as the beginning of her illness, the more serious developments of which, however, probably dated from the shock of her father's death.

After Keith Harford's return to consciousness, Ione had but seldom gone into his room, leaving the actual nursing to the capable kindly hands of Mrs. Adair. Indeed, she straitly charged both of her friends that they were on no account to divulge her share in Keith Harford's transference to Audley Street; and both, with the natural alacrity of women to guard each other's secrecies, faithfully promised what she asked.

It was in the dusk of a November evening that Ione and Idalia, with Marcus carrying wraps and dressing bags, found themselves at the little wayside station upon whose platform they had been dropped off the Bournemouth express, with an immense pile of buildings looming dimly up above them, and crowning the seaward cliff.

To Ione, looking upward from beneath, Rayleigh Abbey seemed to rise into the very skies. Along the

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south and west the chill yellow of the sunset still lingered, and as they rumbled dully through the bedraggled woods, the Channel wind drove in their faces in gusts which sent the blood stirring sharper through the veins, and whipped the tingling cheeks of the three voyagers as with tangible thongs of bitter air.

They were driven by an immobile ancient coachman, who had indeed saluted with the well-bred passivity of his race when his young master came out of the station, but who afterwards had devoted himself entirely to watching his horses' ears and to the maintenance of his personal self-respect.

Marcus cast his eye knowingly along the horses' legs from the right front.

"Grey's near fore going rather stiff, Caleb?" he said.

"Yessur — I daresay, sir," returned the coachman with a slight cough of apology. "It's that hold Hadmiral, sir! Well, 't is a wonder as all the grey's legs ain't broke to flinders — 'im ride to meet!"

"Any more up at the house?"

"Lor', Lor' — such a mixed pack they do be, Master Marcus, begging your pardon! There's two o' them broadcloth gypsies — making so bold, as we calls them 'ere mediums — tellin' fortin's an' a-pourin' oil an' a-holding of their hands afore folk's eyes to make 'em better o' what they never was took ill o'! Just the same old gammon done in a new way, interferin' wi' proper doctors and decent droogists wi' licenses from the Queen — God bless 'er! And some there is, that thinks no more o' theirselves than to pertend they's got a summat the matter wi' their insides, and be took into chapel to get anointed all over wi' a slobber o' hoil. And then they sucks up to the Hadmiral and let's on as how they have go the Healing Blessing! *Hup* there, will 'ee!"

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All this Caleb the coachman delivered with his eyes and his whip directed between his horses' heads, and without a muscle of his face altering or (apparently) his lips moving. He did not so much seem to answer Marcus as to confide the matter in hand to his horses, which all the while stood perfectly well drilled and gently restive, with ears alternately laid back to ascertain Caleb's intentions and set forward to be ready for the wild-whooping, incomprehensible stallions which went ramping past upon the iron way.

"We'll have a fine time, Ide; Bedlam ain't in it," Marcus said to his wife as he swung after them into the front seat of the open victoria, and the horses settled into their long, clean, eight-mile-an-hour gait. "There's just packs and packs of lunatics up there. You'll have to learn to smoke, Ide. The back of the stable's the only place I know of."

"Oh, shoot!" cried his wife, turning up her nose, "I guess, if it comes to that, I can smoke just as well as the next man. Why, when I was — I mean, there was once a handsome young Spaniard on board the *Aurania* who made the most lovely cigarettes —"

Ione turned upon her quickly with inflated nostril.

"And you don't mean to say, Idalia, that the Spaniard was another?"

"No, I don't — not any more than usual, that is," answered Mrs. Marcus Hardy calmly. "I only mean that he taught Astoria to smoke, and — well, I got not to mind it so very much!"

"I see," said Ione, seeing very clearly indeed, for with marriage had come discretion, and the pith of Idalia's remarks lay not so much in what she said as in what she omitted.

Caleb, sitting square and immovable aloft as one of the towers of the Abbey itself, at this moment drove

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through a great gate, across an open space within high bounding walls, and finally stayed the horses within a covered courtyard exactly like a railway terminus with the rails left out.

Glimpses of brilliantly lighted staircases were seen on either hand, but no monk of orders grey or brown came forth to bid welcome to the arriving guests at this curious Abbey.

"So long, Caleb!" cried Marcus; "take our traps round. We'll be at the garden house for dinner in an hour, and then I'll get you to coach me as to the particular breed of vampire we are hatching now. You are the only soul in this mad place who has got his head screwed on straight. Lord, won't I just make a clearance here if ever — Ah!"

And Marcus ground his teeth as he looked about him at the ghastly, glass-roofed cave of the winds which served for an entrance hall.

"Well, come on, girls," he cried, affecting a more cheerful tone. "Let's find the *mater*, and get it over!" he said. "There's all the marks of a big carnival on to-night. We're in luck, Idalia. On the first night of our coming to Bedlam, to drop in for a boss A1 Tarantella-show of bounding idiots!"

The journey had somehow given Ione little singing pains in her head, and now the feeling that all this huge bulk about her could be no more than a hollow painted masque came over her. There was a curious smell on the staircase and through all the lower corridors which she could not account for—an odour apparently compounded of stale wet straw and paraffin oil. Marcus explained it in one word, which, however, failed to bring any satisfaction to the girls, who after that walked on tiptoe, lifting contumelious skirts.

"Cockroaches! Millions on 'em!" he said unctu-

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ously. "Wait till night, though; then they come out in earnest to guard the palace from the enemy. Napoleon himself dare not charge over their prostrate bodies."

Idalia gripped her husband's arm.

"Marcus," she cried in a horrified tone, "I shan't sleep a wink in this place. I must take me away this very instant! I'll have hysterics on the spot—I feel them coming on—if I so much as catch a sight of one of the horrid beasts."

"They don't come upstairs, Idalia," said Marcus, soothingly; "and in a day or two you won't mind the smell or even think of it, except as the attar of all true Body-and-Soul Water-and-Mustard-Plaster religionaries."

After this explanation Idalia and Ione lifted their skirts yet a little higher, and walked more gingerly and with still more delicate particularity. At the top of the wide iron stairs they came upon a long array of lights in shaded lamps. They heard also the distant sound of voices, but no human beings appeared either to stay or welcome them. They seemed, however, to leave the musty underground smell of wet straw and paraffin altogether beneath them as soon as they reached this upper floor.

"The recreation hall is to the right, the chapel to the left," said Marcus. "I guess, if it's a big 'do,' it will be held in the chapel. Let's draw that cover first."

The walls of the passage were covered with a curious kind of decoration. Patches of paper faintly yellow occupied the centre of the panels. Ione looked narrowly at one. It seemed to be an ordinary print covered with some kind of varnish, and the whole decorated with garish colours, like a child's first attempt at painting.

"That's English history," said Marcus, with the air

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of a showman. "We are somewhere about the Wars of the Roses here, I think. My grandfather used to stick up pictures like that out of histories issued in six-penny numbers. The worse the pictures were, the better they pleased him. He used to work at colouring them himself on wet days, and say that the Spirit revealed to him exactly what the people were like. For instance, Warwick the Kingmaker was always dressed in green with a red nose, and Queen Elizabeth habitually came out all over different coloured spots, like those you see when you look too long at the sun. As for Adam and Eve, you should look in the dining-room behind the sofa——"

"Marcus!" cried Idalia, warningly.

CHAPTER XXX

THE LADY OF THE RED SHAWL

THE hum of humanity now waxed louder and nearer. The scattered lights grew more concentrated, the air became more stifling, and they entered a gallery, long-vistaed like those of a museum. Here many people were waiting about, some in evening dress, others in the ordinary tweeds of unconventional life, one or two in decent black which suggested the respectable Scot in Sunday attire. The majority of these were strolling about like day-trippers on a pier, while a few looked listlessly over a kind of balcony, as from the boxes of a theatre one may look down on a disturbance in the pit. Not a soul took the slightest notice of the travellers or appeared to recognise in the young man the future owner of this strange house.

Marcus went forward to where there was a break in the ranks and looked over the iron rail. Then, after a glance, he beckoned the girls forward.

"Now please just pinch yourselves to make sure that you are alive, and then look!" he said.

Ione came to the balustrade and did as she was bidden. Directly beneath her, where the pit of a theatre would be, there appeared a dusky chapel enveloped in a blue haze of incense smoke, and scantily illuminated by lamps let down from the ceiling, which glimmered, mere points of twinkling fire, here and there in the gloom. The chapel-like ground-floor was shaped like the deck of a ship. The back part of it was filled with pews of the

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most ordinary design, wherein many people sat crowded together.

The upper end, corresponding pretty closely to the choir of an ordinary church, was dotted all round with little points of light at about mid-way its height, making a complete circle of flame which cast a subdued straw-coloured radiance upon semi-prostrate forms and deep blue hangings.

The figures appeared to be kneeling, and were arranged in a semi-circle as at a communion rail, while two others, clad in priestly robes of spotless white, went to and fro as if administering a rite. Ione fairly gasped, and began to fear, either that her mind must be giving way, or that she had unwittingly set foot in a madhouse. Then her eyes, growing accustomed to the gloom, distinguished two great chairs enthroned on either side of the choir, on which (and directly opposite to each other) sat an elderly lady and gentleman. The lady wore a low-necked evening gown, and held a vinaigrette in one hand, while with the other she continually rearranged a huge red shawl about her head and shoulders, which as persistently managed to slip down again as soon as she had got it to her mind.

Occasionally, when the white-robed figures came near in the performance of the function, this lady nodded and smiled to them in a friendly and encouraging way like a past master familiar with all mysteries. The other throne was occupied by a fine-looking old man in full evening dress, who sat dangling one foot over the other knee, a glimpse of red flowered stocking showing coquettishly on his shrunk shank, and his ten fingers triangled in front of him, precisely in the attitude most affected by the respectable old gentlemen who come down to the House of Peers to support Her Majesty's Government every time the constitution is in danger.

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"That's the *mater* and my uncle the Admiral on the judge's stand down there," whispered Marcus, irreverently; "but I can't make out what these Johnnies in the centre are up to — oiling up, or anointing, or something, it seems to me!"

As he spoke one of the kneeling figures at the rail, immediately on having some liquid dropped on the parting of her hair ("exactly like sweetening a bicycle bearing," said Marcus) leaped up and shouted, "Thank the Lord, I'm cured."

"Praise the Lord — our sinful sister is healed!" rejoined a chorus of twenty or thirty people from the gloom of the chapel, prompt as an echo.

"Stand up and give praise to the Healer," said a deep, stern voice, which proceeded from the taller of the white officiating figures.

The woman who had been anointed rose and began a chant, strange, high, strident — a howl rather than a song — which rose and fell and diminished, and then again took on volume till many of those who had been languidly perambulating the balcony were attracted to the rail of the balustrade.

"Praise the Lord!" Ione heard one white-bearded man say, "she has got it. Jane Grace Tomlins is speaking with tongues."

Marcus for the first time grew somewhat uneasy.

"This is quite a new dodge," he murmured — "how that woman howls! It is worse than the kennels on a moonlight night. I should just like to go down and stop the noise with a dog-whip."

Then one by one, leaping up unexpectedly here and there, like the hammers of a disfronted piano when you play without watching the keys, men and women rose from the kneeling circle, crying out that they had found "healing" or "grace." Then they joined the horrible

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swaying medley of discord till the chorus began to affect all in the chapel, while some even among the promenaders on the gallery fell on their knees and showed hysterical symptoms as the wild barbaric chant rose and swelled beneath them. Tears dropped down bearded faces. Apparent strangers clasped one another round the neck, and the torrent of sound rose and swirled dismayingly among the weird iron arches and gaunt, black, cobwebby network of beams overhead, till the roof itself seemed in danger of being rent off by the explosion of pent-up emotion.

"O Marcus, take me away; I cannot stand this! Do you hear? Why did you bring me to such a horrible place?" cried Idalia, suddenly clutching her husband by the arm, "I know I shall scream the next moment, or jump over the edge of the gallery."

Marcus Hardy looked very grim, and took his wife firmly by the wrist.

"This is a game I knew nothing about—quite a fresh deal since my time. But you shan't see it again, little girl! Just wait a moment to shake hands with the *mater* for decency's sake, and then I'll take you to more respectable quarters."

Even as he spoke the turmoil stilled itself as if by magic. Ione, perhaps owing to the feeble state of her health, was thoroughly fascinated, and could not take her eyes off the pair of veiled, white, officiating figures. They had retired into the deep blue gloom, and now stood with hands above their heads, illuminated duskily by the circle of pale willow-leaves of fire which flickered in a semi-circle around them.

"All things are possible to them that believe," intoned the slow, stern voice of the taller officiant; "only have faith and your diseases do not exist. Give praise to the Healer and He will heal you. Those to whom

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He has given power are but instruments in his hands. Praise them not."

The lights went out as on a set scene. The white figures vanished into the darkness behind, and from the body of the chapel there came up the ordinary sounds of an audience dispersing.

"Come on," said Marcus hastily, "let us go and trap the *mater* before she goes to bed, or else we won't see her till goodness knows when."

And with his wife still clinging distressfully to his arm, and Ione more impressed than she cared to admit even to herself, Marcus Hardy descended a narrow iron winding-stair, which led to a different part of the castle. Ione was growing faint for want of something to eat, while her journey, the drive through the shrewd winterish air, and her strange abrupt entrance upon this place of horrors, mockeries, and incantations had almost deprived her of the powers of thought and speech.

Marcus moved like one who desires to get an unpleasant duty over, and Ione followed him thinking her friend's husband more of a man than ever she had done before.

"Honour thy father and thy mother," she said to herself — "it was never harder to do!"

As the three crossed a dimly-lighted corridor, they saw before them a hall covered with thick Indian matting. The lady and gentleman who had been seated on either side of the choir in the chapel, were walking up and down arm in arm.

"Mother!" said Marcus, going up hastily to the woman of the red shawl.

The lady turned and looked at her son. She was tall, dark, and had been strikingly handsome. Her straight thick eyebrows almost met over her close-set eyes. At this time the lady's weight must have reached eighteen

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stones. Her nose was prominently hooked, the lower part slightly pendulous, as if her habit of perpetually caressing it with the fingers had given to the point a permanent droop.

"My son!" cried Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy, opening her arms, "you are restored to me — you have returned to Grace. Tranter, see that Master Marcus has a mustard footbath in his room! Prodigal, I welcome you! Why did you not send me word, and I would have come out and —"

"Yes, mother, I know," said Marcus; "fallen on my neck and kissed me — with new effects and dresses, also a brand new fatted calf. But the fact is, I'd rather not — on the station platform at least. But, I say, you're looking pretty fit, *mater!*"

"I have at last found peace, my son," returned the tall dark lady, impressively, "this time, indeed, undoubtedly so. I have had THE SECRET revealed to me. There is no more left to discover. These blessed angels, Mr. and Mrs. Arminell Howard-Hodge, have completely solved the mystery of life. The Millenium itself has begun at Rayleigh Abbey. Yes, indeed; and it is such a privilege! So precious! We have had such a beautiful meeting — so refreshing, was it not, Admiral? It would have greatly benefited your soul, my poor dear unbelieving boy. But who are these two ladies?"

"One of them is my wife, mother!" said Marcus, abruptly. "Idalia, come and kiss your mother!"

It was somewhat of the suddenest. But the blood of Cyrus Judd was capable of anything. Idalia ran forward with a little gesture of self-renunciation, as if, in her husband's interest, she had been about to fight with all the beasts of Ephesus. As she went she sent one glance up at Marcus which said as plain as print, "See what I am ready to do for your sake!"

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But Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy fended her off adroitly with one hand.

"Avaunt, woman!" she said haughtily, her eyebrows raised almost to the roots of her hair, "think not to come near me. My son has doubtless been in the far country, and has been spending his substance, ahem — among the usual sort of people!"

"Mother!" said Marcus warningly.

The lady of the eyebrows stopped. Clearly she had her own reasons for being afraid of her son.

"Well," she continued in a milder tone, "remember, if you are really married you have made your bed, and you must lie on it. And if you and this woman are a pair of paupers, don't come whining to me and thinking that I will do anything for you! As you know, my little money is all embarked in the sacred service of the Cause. You won't get a penny beyond your allowance so long as I am alive! So I warn you!"

And she hitched her red shawl over her head, and glowered, like an elderly Fate of a determined frame of mind, down upon the rash couple.

But Marcus, like Pet Marjorie's duck, was more than usual calm. He knew his mother.

"*Mater*," he said, nonchalantly, "I told you that this was my wife. Her maiden name was Idalia Judd, and she is the daughter of Mr. John Cyrus Judd, the great American millionaire."

It was the first time and the last in his life that Marcus used the substantive and attributive adjectives to describe his father-in-law.

Now on this occasion Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy proved herself a woman of quick capacities and a sympathetic heart. No sooner had she heard the distinguished and world-famous (or, according to the point of view, infamous) name, than she flew towards Idalia, who in her

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turn submitted with a good grace to be enfolded and temporarily lost to sight in that capacious maternal embrace.

"My-beloved daughter!" she cried, with the beautiful impulsiveness born of a lifetime of prescribing mustard and water, "I was prepared to love you from the first moment. One glimpse of your sweet face, and nothing more was needed! It was, as if it had been revealed. But who may this be? Your sister? So like you; your very image, indeed! I love and welcome her too for your sake! Such an acquisition as you will both be! We shall hold a thanksgiving service at once. Tranter, go and ask Mr. and Mrs. Arminell Howard-Hodge to come to me!"

"This is Miss March, a friend my wife brought with her as a companion!" interposed Marcus, hastily, just in time to save Ione from sharing the fate of Idalia. He saw from Ione's face that in her present frame of mind, she could not stand that infliction.

"Oh, a companion!" ejaculated Martyria Evicta Lucretia, instantly checking her enthusiasm and promptly losing interest.

She turned to Idalia.

"But tell me about yourself, my love! Is your dear, de-e-ar father with you! Or your charming mother—your mother, I suppose, is living? They might both be of immense use to us in the Cause, if they could only be brought to see the light. I hope you will be *instrumental*, my dear!"

"Thank you," said Idalia, "my father and mother are both quite well. They are unfortunately not with us."

Then she added to Marcus in a lower tone unheard by Martyria, "But I bet a bright new dollar they're *after* us!"

CHAPTER XXXI

THE REFUGE AMONG THE LEAVES

AT this moment there issued from a side door a tall man, apparently built in jointed sections like a fishing-rod, and close behind him a little smooth-faced woman drifted in, with the sharpest and chilliest eyes in the world — the keen acrid blue of a mountain lake when the wind blows fretfully from the north. Abandoning Idalia, Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy ran to them and clasped the tall man about the neck. He bent to receive her embrace with the conscious simper of a spoiled beauty who receives an expected compliment. Then loosening her arms as swiftly, she turned and kissed the woman of the acrid eyes. She, however, only submitted like a sphinx, looking at Ione over Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy's shoulder all the while.

“Oh you loves — you dears,” palpitated, at once asthmatically and ecstatically, the Lady Principal of Rayleigh Abbey; “what a blessed time you have given us! Truly the Power was manifested this night!”

The tall man came forward with blandly beaming smile and outstretched hand; but the little woman stood still and fixed her eyes keenly and piercingly upon each of the party in succession. They dwelt longest upon Ione, and it was to her that she spoke first.

“My dear,” she said, in the mystical jargon affected on all occasions by the inhabitants of Castle Gimcrack, “have you also come to be cured and anointed? Alas! I fear there is not oil sufficient to heal and sanctify you in all the City of Palm Trees.”

Ione March

Ione took the little chill outstretched hand, but only smiled in answer. The words of the Seeress, though spoken in a singularly quiet and incisive tone, sounded to her not a whit wiser or more connected than the howling of the wild women in the hall.

Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy turned upon her, adjusting her shawl upon her shoulder for the fiftieth time. She observed with indignation Mrs. Howard-Hodge holding Ione's hand.

"You mistake," she said; "that is not my daughter-in-law. Let me introduce to you my de-e-ar daughter, the wife of my only son Marcus, of whom you have heard me speak. Doubtless during your American tours you have met with my daughter's dear, de-e-ar father, Mr. John Cyrus Judd, the great American millionaire!"

Marcus flushed hotly at hearing his own description thus repeated.

"I have never had the great felicity of meeting your father, ma'am," said the tall man to Idalia, speaking for the first time. His wife said nothing, contenting herself with shaking hands with Idalia and Marcus, and immediately turning again to Ione.

"You have suffered," she said softly, keeping her old blue eyes fixed intently upon her; "you have lost a near relative. And you must yet suffer more. Fate is written large on your face. Even the POWER itself could not help you. For in suffering only will you work out your soul's perfection, and come out of the furnace as gold seven times refined."

At that moment Marcus effected a welcome diversion.

"My dear sister," he said, "Idalia and Miss March are tired with their journey. You will let up on them till morning."

"If you mean by such language that you wish to retire to your apartments, I can only kiss my dear

The Refuge Among the Leaves

daughter and submit," said the lady. "But where is your friend Keith? I understood he was to be with you!"

She uttered these last words with the first gleam of interest she had shown in anything outside herself and the Cause.

"Oh, Keith —" returned her son, "he is coming the day after to-morrow — that is, if he is well enough to travel. He has been jolly ill for the last six weeks — very nearly croaked, did poor old Keith — would too, but for —"

"Marcus!" interjected his wife suddenly, "if you don't come right along now, I shall drop from sheer hunger and thirst!"

"What," shrilled Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy, "Keith Harford has been ill and I have not known! My Guardian Spirit has been strangely remiss. Why have I had no warning — no presentiment? But when once he comes to this blessed tabernacle in the wilderness we will tend him. He will soon receive the POWER. We shall organise special services of anointing and healing in the Temple."

"The Temple?" queried Marcus.

"Yes, the Temple of the Universal Healing Power, set up in the wilderness of Hampshire like — like — like a pearl among swine!" said Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy, waving her hands; "when I still sat in darkness and was ignorant of the true potency of curative faith, it was called the 'chapel.' But now it is the First Temple of the New Dispensation — so worthily presided over by our de-e-ar friends, Mr. and Mrs. Howard-Hodge." And she simpered somewhat oozyly at the Seer and Seeress, like a butter-cask set in the sun.

"Good-night, *mater*," cried Marcus; "see you in the morning. Come on, girls!"

Ione March

“Good-night, then, if it must be!” cried the dark-browed Martyria Evicta, impressively, once more lifting up the recalcitrant shawl from the floor. “Ah, we are about to have such a beautiful After-meeting—restricted to a few saints—to bewail the sins of this age and the inefficiency of ordinary physicians. I am to give the address in person, and the Admiral is going to burn the *British Pharmacopœia*—also, what is worse, *Squire’s Companion*! If you only could be persuaded to stay, your souls would assuredly be blessed!”

“But, mother, after all, we must get something to eat, you know!” cried Marcus, stamping cheerily down the stairs after giving his mother a hasty peck on the cheek.

Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy was left speaking with her hands uplifted, a stout and rotund Cassandra of the New Faith.

“Ah, young people, young people,” she called after them from the iron girder above, “would that I could make you see of what small avail is the meat which perisheth, in comparison with the POWER which enables us to do without bread, or at least——” (she added the last words, gently swaying her eighteen stone of well-nourished girth to and fro in an ecstasy of devotion), “to prefer the POWER to any pampering of this frail tabernacle of sin.”

She rang a bell for the servant, who appeared with ready deference from an ante-room.

“Has Tranter taken the tray and cover up to my bedroom?” she asked.

“I don’t know, madam; but I will go and see.”

“Thank you,” said the lady, “and tell him to make it a quart instead of a pint to-night, and to ice it well—I’ve been so dreadfully upset!”

“Yes, ’m!” responded the servitor submissively.

The Refuge Among the Leaves

Then Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy picked up her red shawl once more, and rearranged it over her shoulders with the meek and ascetic self-abnegation of the accredited martyr of a great Cause.

Meanwhile Marcus was clattering downstairs and racing along passages with the boyishness which only comes to those who have escaped from school. Idalia and Ione hastened after him. He took a key from his pocket and undid a little iron wicket-door, which opened unexpectedly out of a long passage, whitewashed like a prison corridor.

"Now, girls," he said, standing aside for them to pass, "give me your hands. We are going outside a bit, and it's as dark as my hat. I sent Caleb word last week to have the little old Garden House put in order. I used to sleep and take my meals there, whenever things got too blessedly sultry up here in the Abbey. I could not conscientiously approve of more than three changes of religion in a week. It affected my digestion. One end of the cottage is directly over the coach-house, and smells a little of harness through the cracks of the floor. But to square that, nobody can get at us without going a dozen miles round by the garden-gate — and that's always locked, anyway. I see to it myself!"

So, taking hands like children, the three ran across a gloomy paved court. It felt exactly like escaping from prison. Marcus unlocked another door, which as carefully he locked again behind him. Then Ione found herself stumbling through a mat of ivy into a broad garden walk, which led among cucumber-frames and under orchard trees to the creeper-covered gable-end of a long straggling cottage. A range of steps led up apparently into a nest of leaves.

Ione March

"Oh, this is just lovely," cried Idalia, clapping her hands; "it is like storming an ogre's castle, and being captured, and then in the last chapter escaping from his clutches with the fairy prince. I vote we have a private orgie all to ourselves!"

"Wait here till I open the door and get a lamp," said Marcus. "The steps are not all they should be, but I don't want them repaired. For if I did, some of that vile crew would be sure to come and hang up their hats, if they suspected there was a snug shop of this sort down here. So I've got man-traps and spring-guns all about to keep them away. And those who do get caught, or shot, I fling their bones down the well. Oh, I've thought of everything!"

Ione and Idalia stood hand in hand in the darkness at the foot of the stairs. Marcus went upward and disappeared.

"Oh," cried his wife, suddenly clutching Ione, after a moment of awe-stricken silence, broken only by muttered imprecations from above, where Marcus was struggling with the key, and by the fluttering of bats disturbed among the ivy, "suppose this is a real haunted castle, and he never comes back any more. Marcus, Marcus—I'm coming up after you right now. Do you hear, I'm not going to wait. No, Marcus Hardy—if you think you are going to play with the young affections of Idalia Judd, and then leave her to moulder in a melon-frame, you'll get left, sure!"

Marcus appeared just in time to catch his wife in his arms at the narrow leaf-surrounded landing-place, from the further side of which the rail had dropped away.

"Idalia, you wicked girl," he exclaimed, more soberly than was his wont, "do you know you might have broken your neck over there. Why could n't you have waited?"

The Refuge Among the Leaves

"Well, I got thinking you were n't ever coming back, and Ione and I were two such lone lorn females down there! Besides, I heard just regular armies of cockroaches creeping and scuttling all about! You might have thought, Marcus! You can't love me a bit — not a little bit. And I think you are horrid. I wish I had married Washington Alston. He would n't have teased me so, nor gone and left me all alone up to my knees in fertiliser in the backyard of a lunatic asylum! And, besides, he has a much nicer nose than you."

"Never mind my nose, little woman," said the good-humoured giant; "come inside, and see if you don't think I've got some good points as well as Mr. Washington Alston. Ione, give me your hand!"

'So in a trice the wandering trio found themselves in the sweetest and cleanest little nest of rooms. In the first and largest of these a supper-table was laid, shining with silver and the whiteness of napery. With a pleased smile of anticipation upon his hitherto immobile face, old Caleb stood ready at the door to welcome his master's guests. He was still attired in his coachman's boots and leggings, but his red waistcoat was partly covered by an ancient blue dress-coat with broad brass buttons stamped with an anchor. As the three passed in he saluted each in a stiff manner with his right hand and elbow, as if his fingers still held the butt end of a whip. From the warm-smelling oak-panelled corridor three rooms opened a little further on, and Ione fell into a chair in the first and began to laugh helplessly. Something in the note of her voice brought Idalia flying in from her own bedroom with a smelling bottle.

"What is the matter, Ione? Quiek, out with it!" cried Idalia, becoming fiercely peremptory all at once.

"Nothing," said Ione, still half sobbing, half strug-

Ione March

gling with a wild desire to laugh, "only it seemed so funny to come through the desert of Sahara and the wilds of Colney Hatch, and find your things all arranged neatly on the bed, your dressing case open, and hot water in a tin can in the basin — and if it has n't got a gardener's watering-rose on the spout! Ha — ha — ha! It is so funny. I can't help it!"

This time Idalia knitted her brows and shook her friend by the shoulder. The case was growing serious.

"If you don't stop, I'll tell Keith Harford you nursed him — now!"

Ione stopped instantly, the mirth stricken from her face.

"No, you must not!" she said pleadingly.

"Well, you behave then!"

All this while Marcus was rapping steadily on the door. "Can I come in?" he said, his maligned nose peeping through the crack. "Why, what's the matter?"

"Nothing — do go away!" commanded his wife; "or no — be useful for once, and bring a spoonful of brandy."

In a moment Marcus was back with a small glass of Hennessy XO.

"Had too much of it up there, Ione?" he said. "Well, you shan't be troubled with that galvanised-iron Inferno any more. I'll see to that."

"No," answered Ione, touched by his kindness; "it was n't that. I've not been quite up to the mark lately, I think — and — and that garden-rose on the hot-water can set me laughing."

Marcus went to the door.

"Caleb, you old fool," he cried, "what on earth made you put these things on the hot-water cans?"

Caleb, with suddenly lengthened face, came to the

The Refuge Among the Leaves

door, touched his finger half way to his brow for manners, and then after a pause carried it further, till of its own accord it began to rub the side of his grey crop-head in perplexity.

"Well, the way of it was, sir, that I 'ad to ask Larkins the gardener for one or two of his waterin' pots — there not being none in the bloomin' place, not countin' the one your honour busted with throwing at the cat."

"Bless my soul, so I did!" cried the cheery Marcus, contritely. "Well, come on, and let us see if you have forgotten how to cook."

"Supper is served, ladies and your honour!" said Caleb gravely, standing at his usual half-cock salute as they filed past him.

The supper was a high approved success. The sweetbreads were cooked to a turn, and delicately smothered in white sauce.

The mushrooms on toast were a further joy as they grew less hungry, and the game pleased one sense without offending another.

"Why, Caleb," said Idalia, "I declare you cook better than the stuck-up Antoine, my father's *cordons bleus*!"

"Thank you, Miss!" said Caleb impassively, making once more his curious jerk of his elbow which represented the butt of an imaginary whip.

"Look here, Caleb, you must n't say 'Miss' to this young lady. I told you before she was my wife," cried Marcus.

"Beg 'ee pardon, sir," said Caleb, saluting as before; "of course she is — if you say so. I'll endeavour to remember, sir!"

"Caleb is of the world's opinion — that you can't be a man's wife, if your hair curls naturally," laughed Idalia. "But this is the ring, Caleb, and I've got the certificates here in my ulster pocket, if you'd like to

Ione March

look at them — all stamped and ready fixed for pappa when he pulls alongside with his rights of a father, and all that !”

As Ione laid her head on the pillow that night, the cold blue eyes of the High Priestess of the new religion seemed to search her soul through and through. And more than once she woke with a start, under the belief that Mrs. Arminell Howard-Hodge was standing by her bedside.

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CHAPTER XXXII

THE LITTLE BIRD

TWO days later Keith Harford arrived. Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy adjusted the red shawl once more, securing it fore, aft, and centre with safety pins capable of holding a second-class cruiser. Then she set a wonderful bird-of-paradise hat rakishly over one eye, ordered her own private team of piebald ponies, and finally drove down to the station to meet her favourite guest.

Marcus smiled a quiet smile as he watched her depart.

"The *mater* thinks no end of poor old Keith," he confided to his wife. "I am afraid though, he is in for a shocking bad time. But I expect he knows!"

Usually the lady of the house paid no attention to the exits and entrances of her visitors, contenting herself with summoning them to her chamber to be interviewed whenever she desired their presence. Many of those who most regularly attended the meetings, were lodged in a rambling unattached barracks built in the early days of the water-cure, and now made self-sustaining by an impost of two guineas a week levied upon those adepts who could afford it — and upon neophytes whether they could afford it or not.

The vast stone and iron alleys of the castle itself were honeycombed with bedrooms like a rabbit warren, but the servants attended to none of the guests, excepting a few who dwelt in Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy's own private wing, and were under her immediate protection. The rest shifted for themselves in the intervals between the

Ione March

three regulation meals in hall, of which all partook in common.

At these the lady of the house ate little, claiming ascetic privileges, and (apart even from the society of her intimates) making her truly sustaining meals in the privacy of her own chamber.

Marcus and his guests continued to occupy their fortress in the garden wing, and enjoyed there a delightful combination of runaway match and picnic, which was particularly agreeable to the feelings of the newly-married pair.

"I never thought a Home for Cranks could be so interesting," said Idalia. "Do you know, Ione, I actually saw a man to-day who looked as if his clothes had been made for himself, and a woman who seemed to have got into her gown right side first."

It was a shy, pale, shattered Keith Harford who stood on the Rayleigh station platform that night and looked out eagerly for his friend Marcus. He turned to give some directions concerning his luggage, and when he faced about again he found himself almost smothered in the portly eighteen-stone embrace of Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy.

"Mr. Harford, Marcus is at home. But it is I who am the little bird to welcome you. I could not rest till I had told you the first news of the dear place, and of us all!" cried the widow romantically as she shook his thin hand. "But bless my life, dear, de-e-ar friend, how pale you look! Marcus told me that you had been ill, but had the little bird known how ill you really were — well — I will not confess, but perhaps — *perhaps* she would have flown to you. No matter, it is all over now. The breezes of the Channel; and the manifestations of the healing POWER will soon restore you again. For now the little bird can watch over and cherish you all by itself!"

The Little Bird

Keith, upon whose faculties the journey and the weakness had acted disastrously, could not achieve anything more sentimental in reply to this, than a spasmodic and semi-articulate ejaculation that he must go and look after his luggage.

"Oh, the servants will assuredly have attended to that already!" said Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy, promptly checking this move. "But if, like a naughty, unkind, fidgetty man, you are set on going — why, the little bird will come too!"

At this point she gave a skip intended to represent the charming innocence of her birdlike nature but which was more suggestive of a sportive circus elephant privately practising on tubs, or of a haycock which late in life had taken to step-dancing.

It was as his companion had predicted. Keith's shabby old travelling bags, rescued by Ione from the tender mercies of Mrs. Horehound, were already being driven away in the luggage cart towards the vast bulk of the Abbey, which rose against the sky like a veritable St. Michael's Mount, its lighted windows in serried array, tier above shining tier.

The lady life-renter of Rayleigh and the financial mainspring of all these mysteries, conveyed Keith to the carriage by means of a tender compelling pressure upon his arm. The sleek piebalds stood twitching their long tails at the white-painted gates. The lamps were lighted, and shed a soft radiance forward upon shining harness and well-groomed horseflesh. A trim-buttoned tiger held the door, while Caleb himself sat immovable on the low box looking his woodenest into the darkness.

"Now confess," whispered Martyria Evicta, archly, "was'n't this a sweet surprise to you? You thought it would be Marcus or someone else — instead of *me!*"

Ione March

She cooed the last words like a turtle-dove coquetting with its mate, and bent rapturously over so that she might look into Keith's eyes. By this time they had started, and already the carriage was passing swiftly and evenly over fine roads of hard sand upwards to the Abbey. The lamps shone on the swinging gait of the ponies, whose sides flashed out and in alternately white and tan as the lights from the burnished reflectors and the shadows of the trees fell upon them. Invincibly fixed in his place, as if stanchioned to the seat with iron rods, sat Caleb the sphinx, and beside him Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy's tiger folded his arms inscrutably like one of the junior divinities upon Olympus, or, perhaps, (more exactly) a party-leader at question time.

Presently the widow laid a plump soft hand on the back of Keith's buckskin glove, with an enticing pressure which made the favoured swain wince as if he had accidentally trodden upon a toad in the heather.

"Is Marcus quite well?" he said lamely, to break the silence. Then he laughed to himself. The question reminded him of the homecomings of boyhood in vacation time. For when he met his father at the station, he could never think of anything to say all the way home, except "Is mother quite well?" "I have been quite well." "Is Charlie quite well?" "Thomson Major is quite well." "Is Mary the cook quite well?" "Is old Snoggins still quite well?"

"Do not trouble about Marcus," replied the widow, smiling, "he will answer for himself, all in good time. But tell me about your illness. How came you to be so poorly, and never to write and tell me? You know that there is nothing I would not have done for you. I would have brought you here at once, and if you had been too weak to come, I should have brought the POWER to you, and nursed you myself."

The Little Bird

Her hand was stroking the back of his glove undisguisedly now, and making him as jumpy and nervous as if a steam-roller had been playing with it as a cat plays with a mouse.

"Miss March is with you, is she not?" he ventured at last. For his heart cried out, shy and reticent lover though he was, for news of the Beloved.

"Miss March," said the lady, evidently puzzled, but with a colder strain apparent in her voice, "I don't know Miss March. Is she a patient at the Abbey? There are scores I do not know even by name or sight. But Mrs. Howard-Hodge will doubtless be able to inform you."

"She is the young lady who came with Marcus and his wife," explained Keith, with a certain indignation at what any one should profess ignorance of a girl so remarkable as Ione March.

"Oh, the tall pale-faced companion!" cried Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy. "Yes, I remember now—I believe I did see her. She looks rather like a lamp-post rigged out in an umbrella cover, does n't she? Poor thing! Mrs. Howard-Hodge tells me she is not long for this world. Her position must be a very trying one. It is so hard to be dependent on the charity of others. She was at the same school as my daughter-in-law, I believe—who is, you know, the daughter of the famous John Cyrus Judd, the American millionaire. It is very good of Mrs. Marcus Hardy to countenance her. For she does look dreadfully like a monitor, or a charity scholar, or something of that kind."

"I assure you, Miss March is the daughter of one of the best——" Keith began, indignantly, and then paused. He felt that he had no right to inform his hostess of facts which Ione might wish to keep concealed, and of which, at all events Marcus knew quite as much as he.

Ione March

"Come, Keith," murmured the widow, "do not let us talk of Miss March or any one else! Tell me all about yourself! That is the only subject of real interest between us."

The time was short and the lady was anxious to bring the conversation back to legitimate lines.

"Oh, it was nothing much," said Keith. "I have had a serious illness, but I have been well looked after."

"Ah," said Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy, "the usual doctors I suppose — mere ignorant butchers. And such nasty flirting nurses as they have in common hospitals — not women of Grace and Power!"

"Well," smiled Keith, "my doctor was an M.D. of Edinburgh, with three stars after his name in the calendar — before he was twenty-eight. And as to nurses —"

"All the worse — the more wedded to their despicable superstition," interrupted the widow decidedly. "In the coming manifestation of the True POWER, all surgical instruments of every kind will be banished from the land under the pain of death. Nothing but prayer and the application of God's bountiful provision of cold water, mustard plasters, and anointing oil on suitable linen dressings, will be permitted in all cases. An M.D. of Edinburgh, dear Mr. Harford, will no more be tolerated than a mad dog which runs the streets inoculating rich and poor alike with the froth of his own *rabies!*"

The widow was quoting now from one of the addresses of Mrs. Arminell Howard-Hodge upon the physical manifestations of the POWER.

"At all events I had the best of nursing!" said Harford. For alas! Jane Allen had not been quite as discreet as Ione might have wished. And as he glanced

The Little Bird

up at the gloomy embrasures of the battlements of the Abbey, and then at the lighted windows ranged below, he wondered behind which flake of light was the dear and shapely head of the girl who had saved his life. Ah, if only he were well and a success in life — instead of a wreck and a failure! But what had *he* to offer to such a girl!

With an easy movement of C springs and rubbered tires, the carriage rolled smoothly into the courtyard, and round under the arches of iron and glass, till it stopped at Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy's private entrance to her own wing of the Abbey of New Religions.

The well-buttoned wasp-waisted tiger was at the door obsequiously touching his scalloped hat. Mrs. Hardy descended with the tread of a festive buffalo.

"You shall have all the privileges of illness," she said, smiling, "the little bird will be your nurse — and guardian! And a greater power — a dearer and a sweeter, I might say, than that of any M.D. of Edinburgh — will have the felicity of sustaining your wearied steps."

And she cast her eyes upward as if she had been singing one of the especial hymns of the new cult. For Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy had had a choir of orphan girls trained, who sang at all the fairs and harvest festivals for miles round — and who were expected to pay the cost of their keep by the fees and gratuities they received. Each of these choristers was conspicuously placarded on the back with her name as follows:—

JANET JONES
ORPHAN.

Contributions
thankfully
received on the
other side.



Ione March

"Come to my own rooms, dear Mr. Harford," said the enamoured widow, "a little confection awaits us there, just a trifle of beef-tea, and, ah — sparkling wine — nothing more. The latter is not generally partaken of in this establishment, because — ahem — I hold (as did my dear father before me) somewhat strict views on the subject. But in cases of necessity like yours and mine, dear Keith — I mean Mr. Harford — some allowance must surely be made."

"Certainly, certainly! I — I should like to see Marcus," Keith began, with a nervous dread of any further *tête-à-tête* manifestations of interest.

"Marcus is very well. Your friendly anxiety does you credit!" replied the widow, patting his arm affectionately, "but in the meantime you and I are much better company by ourselves. Who came and met you at the station — Marcus or I? Who brings you to *our* home [she dwelt lovingly upon the pronoun], Marcus or I? Which — ahem — respects you most, Marcus or I?"

"You are very kind," stammered the unfortunate Keith, as they found themselves in the privacy of the boudoir of Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy, hung with white and gold, cosy and radiant with light and the glitter of silver ranged on the board. "You are too kind, Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy!"

"Ah," yet more softly cooed the widow leaning her head towards her victim, "call me by a dearer, a sweeter name! Call the little bird by her own pet name — say 'Tiny.' Call me 'Tiny' — dear Keith!"

And with a sigh of amorous content eighteen stone of devotion (and "Tiny") laid its head upon Keith Harford's shoulder.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE NINTH WAVE

THAT night Keith dined alone with his hostess — as had indeed been that lady's intention from the first. Idalia and Marcus were to come up afterwards. Nothing was said about Ione.

"Better let the *mater* have her fling," commented the dutiful son, as his wife and he were passing through the garden, "it will be all the easier sledding for Harford after. The more mother sees of him just at first, the sooner she'll let up on him."

Ione did not accompany Marcus and Idalia. For that night she was infinitely weary and, as it seemed to herself, she had done with life. Instead she stretched herself upon one of the little low beds, like hospital cots, which garnished the ascetic guest chambers of the Garden-House. These had indeed been originally furnished with an eye to the needs of certain Gentile and unregenerate bachelor friends of Marcus, rather than for the guests to whom at present they gave domicile and harbourage.

It was therefore well over in the next afternoon before it was the hap of Keith Harford to meet Ione. They found each other in a still and enclosed garden fastness, made apparently for lovers' converse and security. Even at this late season it was fragrant with blossom, and sonorous with the song of birds welcoming a fallacious spring in the short and fitful sunshine of an English Indian summer.

The girl had suddenly come upon her lover as she

Ione March

loitered listlessly round a curve of the green privet wall. Whereupon Keith had run to her, eager and impulsive as a boy.

"Ione — Miss March," he cried, "forgive me for calling you that. But when a man owes his life to a friend, he does not stand upon ceremony with him. Tell me of yourself. Do you know you are looking quite pale and ill? I fear what you suffered for me has proved too much for you."

He seized her hand and held it firmly in both of his, gazing meantime into her face as a condemned man might upon that of an angel of mercy suddenly alighted before him with a message of love and hope from another world.

"Thank you," said Ione brightly, removing her hand and putting it for safety into the side pocket of her housewife's morning apron (for she had been helping Caleb with his cookery). "But really I am quite well, and enjoying myself hugely."

"Why then are you so pale — so thin? The wind on these cliffs will blow you away if you venture up there!"

"Oh, as to that," she answered, "I always was a rake. There's no putting good flesh on ill bones, as my father used to say. But you — I think the fine sea air straight from France must be doing you good already! Can't you almost smell the patois in it, the blue houses, the white tilted carriers' carts (how I love them!), the maid-servants with their wide goffered caps? — Oh, there is no country in the world like France —"

"And yet you have chosen England!"

"To make my living in — yes, certainly," said Ione wistfully, "but not to live in — not to holiday-make in. Fancy the delight of a walking tour in France —"

"A walking tour," said Keith, sighing a sigh of melancholy remembrance. "I don't feel as if ever I

The Ninth Wave

could walk again. I am exactly like the gentleman of your ancient national 'chestnut' who was 'born tired'!"

"Exactly," cried Ione, glad to see his spirits brightening; "yet I can fancy a walking tour with you as guide —"

"Can you?" ejaculated Keith, with his heart beating rarely and a new light shining in his eyes.

"Why, yes," said Ione, stoutly declining to be drawn into frivolous side issues; "I can fancy you as the leader of a walking party — elsewhere, of course, than among your beloved Alps. You would have all the knapsacks beautifully arranged. We arrive at the station. We disembark on the platform. But, alas, there, ranged at the 'Sortie' are carriages, voitures, victorias, what you will!

"'Let us get in,' you say; 'Providence has manifestly sent us these as the reward of merit. We shall begin our walking-tour when the horses give out.' There — is not that your idea of a walking tour? It is pretty much mine!"

Keith laughed.

"At present I fear it is something like it. But you — you look ill and tired. Ione, I know what wonderful things you did for a man sick unto death. Oh, if I were truly a man and not a broken-down weakling, I might thank you. As it is — as it is, I can only kiss your hand."

And before she could resist, even if she had wished, gently and very respectfully (much too respectfully) Keith raised Ione's hand to his lips.

Now there is no woman who desires an overplus of deference in the man she loves. He may reverence, in the antique phrase, the very ground she treads on. He may kiss (though the good custom has become obsolete with the evanescence of the "princess robe," that most

Ione March

becoming of all dresses for a woman with a figure) the hem of her garment. But these are the early stages. When the tide rises to flood and like an overflowing reservoir suddenly let loose, his love takes its way, she desires no deference or holding back.

Rather, like a besieged city, she chooses to be taken by storm and to make an end amidst the fierce delight of battle, not to be sapped by mine and countermine or dominated by slow circumvallation. And with all her yearning for work and freedom Ione was a woman. Keith, on the other hand, was a man adept in many things, but ignorant of the very A B C of love. He had explored the mysteries of pure reason. But the heart of a woman, in which (thank God) is almost always purity but very rarely reason, remained shut to him. He had not even approached its intimate fastnesses. He had not explored its hidden ways. So now, instead of clasping Ione in his arms and taking vehement possession of her love for time and eternity, discreetly and coldly he kissed her hand.

Ione stood a moment irresolute, leaving the hand in his keeping. Then with a certain quick returning self-possession as cold and firm as his own, she drew it in to her again, and looked at the man for whom almost she had laid down her life.

"Not yet," she thought, "is it fitting that he should know all."

Yet better than most women she could appraise exactly the delicate reserve of his withdrawal. She knew that Keith's scrupulous honour was a finer and rarer thing than a stronger man's most insistent passion. But she was a woman like others, and in her heart of hearts she desired to be wooed, not by formal observance or delicate restraint, but impetuously, directly, almost as the soldier-citizens of Rome wooed their Sabine brides.

The Ninth Wave

This man with his reverence, his high ideals as to what a man ought to possess before asking a woman to share his lot, appealed strongly to her. But chiefly with pity for the blindness that could not see the equal-glowing love which had grown up in her heart — and with something of contempt too for the weakness which could not take advantage of the yielding in her eyes.

Ione knew that Keith Harford's heart was all hers. What else indeed (save the secret of her own) had she learned during those weariful head-tossing nights when she had sat and watched him? What else had she listened to in the days when the gates of life were drawn back and all the cords of a man were unloosed. She smiled as she looked into Keith's eyes. They seemed to worship her as a divinity set far off. She wondered, with that irritant perversity of mind which comes to women in desperate situations, what would happen if she were to say "Keith — Keith Harford, listen. I, Ione March, love you. I have loved you ever since the first day I saw you!"

But she resisted the temptation to say these words aloud and walked on. Keith followed at her side, slowly growing conscious of the fact that it was now her mood not to be spoken to. Yet he had a sense that something tremendous was about to happen.

Suddenly, as if she had been alone, she began to hum very low the words of the song he had sung on his bed of delirium.

"John Anderson, my jo, John,
When we were first acquint" —

At the first bar Keith Harford stopped and looked at her. The words came to his ear with a strange indeterminate familiarity, bringing with them also the perfume of a woman's most intimate presence. Where had he

Ione March

heard them before, he asked himself? Why should they lie so close to his heart?

“Your locks were like the raven,
Your bonny brow was brent.”

Then a belated breaker from the great sea of unconsciousness, the ninth wave of the tide of love swept over him. In a moment he had taken Ione's hand and drawn her to him. Words of ferventest devotion rose unbidden to his lips. In a moment more he would have pleaded his love face to face unashamed and unafraid. But there, at a turning of the path within a few feet of them, stood Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy with a countenance red as any peony. All her eighteen stone of ascetic adipose quivered with indignation like a shaken jelly. At first she could not speak for agitation. Growing slowly almost purple with indignation, she stood browbeating the two culprits on the path before her. Keith's arm dropped disgustedly from Ione's waist. The effect of the interruption upon the girl was characteristically different. A flush of irritation, mingled with an irresistible smile at the humour of the situation, rose and flushed Ione's cheek and brow. Her lips curled, and in another moment she would have laughed outright.

But Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy turned slowly away with a stamp of her foot, muttering explosively certain words which sounded like “Toad! Snake! Viper! Traitor!” Then she marched majestically out of the garden, and locked the private door behind her.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE PLEASANT PURPLE PORPOISE

IDALIA was lying with her ankles crossed over the brass rail at the foot of her bed. She was reading a novel and yawning portentously as she turned the pages.

"Whee-oooh," she whistled, curling and uncurling herself luxuriously like a disturbed kitten. "This is dull as New Jersey," she said. "I must get off soon, or, as I tell Marcus, I shall have to run away all over again with somebody else — anybody, in fact, who will give me a more amusing mother-in-law."

"If you had seen the lady just now — you could not have wished for more or better," said Ione.

"Du tell! Want t' know!" cried Idalia with instant interest, speaking, as she often did, in the dialect of an old summer landlady of hers in the White Mountains.

"Well," said Ione, throwing herself on the opposite end of the bed and leaning an elbow on the brass bar which Idalia had indicated with the gesture of a man offering another a cigar. Idalia obligingly slid her feet further along to make room.

"I met Mr. Harford by accident in the garden —"

"By accident in the garden! Yes, I know! Go on," said Idalia breathlessly, taking her pretty slipped feet down from the bar and gathering them under her with excitement. "Was he making love to you? How nice. I thought it would come to that — high time too! Say, does he do it nicely?"

Ione smiled reflectively.

Ione March

"Well, no — if it comes to that, he does n't!" (Idalia looked disappointed.) "In fact, to tell the truth, if there was any love in the vicinity, it was I who was making it."

Idalia nodded with the air of a connoisseur. Her lips smiled slightly and daintily at a remembered deliciousness — like one who tastes old memories and finds them good.

"Yes, that's nice too," she agreed, her eyes still mistily reminiscent. "I did n't think you had it in you, Ione. There's more than one kind of man who needs to be made speak. They mean well, but somehow can't make the riddle. Let me see — there was Mortimer Kitson, he was that kind, and Billy Pitt — no, he was n't, quite the contrary in fact. But go on, Ione, don't let me interrupt the progress of this romantic ghost illusion. For when it came to solid spooning, I guess the pair of you would be about as warm as a couple of average spectres on a chilly night. In fact you both look like 'haunts' as it is. It's about time you made it up — if that's what concealment does to your four damask cheeks. Why, look at me, sence I was married I'm getting as fat as a little porpoise —"

She burst into gay song: —

*"A sweetly perfect porpoise,
A pleasant purple porpoise,
From the waters of Chili!"*

"Oh!" cried Idalia, her ideas darting off at a tangent on the track of something new, "did you ever try to say that second line over in different ways? First seductively, 'A pleasant purple porpoise' — as if the dear beast was before you and you were quite determined to take your hair out of curl-papers and produce your best impression on him? Then tragically with

The Pleasant Purple Porpoise

your hands in the air, thus, — ‘A pleasant purple porpoise, from the waters of Chili!’ Does n’t it sound as if all your friends were dead and you yourself were doomed to an early grave — like that tiresome ‘poor little Jim.’ Or blubberingly, like sour butter-milk gurgling out of a tin dipper at the old farm up in the mountains. Oh, do you remember that funny calf they had, and Zeke the farm-boy, who fell in love with me?”

Idalia was sitting up now with her feet tucked under her, heedless alike of skirts and lace frilleries in her heady excitement.

“No,” commented Ione with severity; “I don’t want to hear either about ‘pleasant purple porpoises,’ nor yet of farm hands whom you tried to break the hearts of. Lady Clara Vere de Vere at third hand makes me tired. For, you see, I was n’t at that farm. It was some other gooseberry who aided and abetted. All the same, I don’t doubt you proved yourself the same little fiend you always were, Mrs. Marcus Hardy. On the contrary, if you will attend for a moment I will tell you that Mr. Harford and I had the honour to meet your esteemed mother-in-law in the garden walk, and so it came about, that just when she was almost upon us — she saw him —”

“No; you don’t say,” cried Idalia, clapping her hands joyously. “Good for Keith, excellent good! I never thought he had the spirit.”

“I don’t know what you mean, Idalia Judd,” said Ione with dignity, “nor yet how your inspired cow-herds out Salem way were in the habit of behaving. But, as a matter of fact, Mr. Harford was kissing my hand.”

“*Mff!*” came with a sniff contemptuous from the Paris wrapper, “that all? My L what a fuss about

Ione March

nothing. Why, any young men I'd have had anything to do with always did that the second day on the steamer trip, or sometimes when we were just losing sight of the lighthouse, if the ship was a racer!"

"Idalia, I'll tell Marcus if you talk nonsense like that; I will, for true!"

"Oh, shoot!" cried the married lady, recklessly. "I don't care for a crate of Marcuses. He is a dear old slow-coach anyway, and I had to love him better than the lot of them — I just could n't help it somehow. But he knows all about it pretty well, I guess. Only, as for me, I've quite given up the follies of my youth. And now for the rest of my life I'm going to devote myself to seeing that Marcus does not flirt — nor kiss my dearest friends in corners — that is, when they are as pretty as some one I know."

"Set a thief to catch a thief!" smiled Ione, willing for the time being to let herself be carried out of her own troubles by the gay irresponsibility of her friend.

"Exactly," cried Idalia, unabashed; "but come, you have not told me all. Reveal the dark secret of your crime. Keith Harford kissed your hand, did he? Well — so far good. It is often enough a fair enough opening, and after that I've frequently mated in four moves. But, after all — it is only the gong before dinner — the question is, 'What next?' sez I to myself, sez I."

"Why, then," said Ione calmly, taking no notice at all of this persiflage, "we looked up, and there was Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy standing tragically on the path before us, like Lady Macbeth done up in a red shawl. And that was all!"

"Come now, Ione March," said Idalia, fixing her friend with a hooked index finger, "look me in the

The Pleasant Purple Porpoise

eye! Say, 'Hope-I-may-die,' and then tell me that was all she saw!"

"Well," said Ione slowly, as if trying to recall the infinitely remote, "perhaps he *was* going to——"

"I knew it—I said it," cried Idalia, clapping her hands, "you can always feel it coming miles before it arrives. What a shame! It would have come all right in another moment but for that crazy old woman. And now—why, it may n't happen for ever so long. O it's *too* bad! Keith Harford is just the kind to give up easily when he's crossed—sort of shut off steam sudden-like just when his pressure gauge is registering 160! What an old wretch! Talk about the Scarlet Woman! We must have him here, and then when he is reading us poetry—Tennyson and those things—(he reads poetry beautifully, Marcus says), I'll pretend that I hear Marcus calling me, and I'll slip out! See! I've got a lovely collection in the blue and gold series—'Gems of Love' it is called. We'll give him that—not a miss-fire from cover to cover—all prizes and no blanks, roses and raptures right through from, beginning to end!"

Ione laughed happily. There seemed so few things to laugh about these days that the sound of her own mirth quite startled her.

"Your methods are excellent but crude, Idalia dear," she said; "you might just as well say to Mr. Harford when he comes, as I have heard my father tell of an old negro mammy, at a house where he visited when he was young, 'Go on courtin', honeys!—Doan ye mind ole Sally! Ole Sally's bin dar her own self! Shu-ah!'"

Then Ione went out, and Idalia sped off to find her husband. But, strange to relate, Marcus did not laugh.

Ione March

"You don't know the *mater*," he said, dolefully shaking his head. "She will stick at nothing once she gets started. I'm deuced sorry we ever thought of bringing Ione here!"

And for once in his life Marcus Hardy looked grave for five minutes at a time.

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CHAPTER XXXV

A LIFE FOR A LIFE

IT was a stormy morning some weeks after these occurrences and the wind was careering and rioting up the Channel. Seen from the cliffs above Rayleigh the sea looked all silver-grey like frosted glass, so closely did the short chopping waves follow each other, and so thin, gauzy and almost invisible was the sea mist which was being driven shoreward in fleecy streams. The wind now *whooped* and now trumpeted in the stout Scotch firs, which Grandfather the Founder had with happy forethought planted along the edge of the down to withstand the first breaking fury of the gale.

Ione had put on her cloak, and as the fashion of woman is, had fastened a soft cap on her head by transfixing it with a pin great and perilous. She had no fear of the wet, and a certain dull ache in her brain produced after a while a feeling of intolerable restlessness and oppression indoors. So she went out and walked upon the cliffs, following the wind-swept paths, her hands fully occupied in restraining the manœuvres of her flapping and billowy mackintosh. Sometimes the rain dashed riotously in her face, and then a feeling of resistance and struggle strengthened her soul.

She loved Keith Harford — she acknowledged it even to herself now. Keith Harford loved her, *that* she had known long ago. She did not argue about either fact, for she was persuaded that though their loves might find little expression, they loved each other once and for ever, with a love that was far beyond Jane Allen's



Ione March

strenuous self-sacrifice or Idalia's pretty nestling petulances. With such thoughts in her heart Ione was waging a good warfare with the Channel gusts upon the path nearest the cliff edge, when she became aware that some one was approaching from the opposite direction. She caught glimpses of a tall form bearing down upon her through the swaying branches of the trees. As the man came nearer, she looked up, and there before her was Mr. H. Chadford Eaton. His small eyes were fixed upon her with a hideous sneer, a look at once of thwarted vengeance and concentrated hatred. The seaward path was narrow. Ione, though her heart was beating fast, kept firmly to it. She grasped her unopened umbrella with one hand and put the other into the pocket of her waterproof to keep it tight about her. Eaton glanced once over his shoulder as if to see if he were observed. A woman was approaching at right angles through the woodland pathways. With a growl almost like that of a baffled beast, the dismissed clerk turned aside and strode away through the pines in the direction of the village which nestled in the hollow behind the cliffs on which towered the vast wind-beaten bulk of the Abbey.

As he passed Ione he gave her one look so ugly and hateful that her knees trembled under her. The girl's heart rose in thankfulness as she looked towards the woman whose opportune arrival had saved her from (at least) an unpleasant interview.

It was Mrs. Arminell Howard-Hodge, the High-Priestess of the latest New Religion, presently supreme at Rayleigh Abbey.

She approached slowly, seeming instinctively to avoid the trees and the little inequalities of the path, and keeping her eyes fixed on those of Ione with a certain curious persistence. Her face, even in the fitful morning sun-

A Life for a Life

shine which alternated with the gusty blasts of driving rain, was grey and colourless. The salt scourge of the wet sea-wind did not whip the blood into her cheek. The lips scarcely showed of any other colour than that of the fallow dried-up skin about them.

As the woman came near Ione felt the brisk forcefulness of the description of Marcus, who constantly averred that only to glance at Mother Hodge gave him the crawls down his spine. "She looked," he cried, "as if she had been buried three days, and had gone about ever since regretting she had been dug up." On the present occasion Mrs. Howard-Hodge came and held out a hand to Ione, in which there was a curious tingling power — some electric force which Ione felt resentfully yet was obliged in some measure to submit to.

"Miss March," said the Seeress, "I have been wishing for a chance to speak to you for some days. It was with that purpose I ventured out into this brutal turmoil of the elements. Your face has dwelt with me ever since I saw it. The others are as nothing to me. No tragedy hides behind their brows. You are soulful. You possess the deep eyes of one for whose spirit the gods and demons are at wrestle. You have had strange sorrows and sad experiences."

"If you mean that I am a girl alone in the world, earning her own living — of course I have," said Ione, striving to keep this dangerous woman on a more ordinary level of conversation.

Mrs. Arminell Howard-Hodge smiled, and laid her hand on the girl's arm impressively.

"Come," she said, "better trust me. You are hemmed in here. I will be your best friend, if you will let me. I know that a friend and an enemy are both in this place — the man who loves you and the man who hates you. Is it not so? You are silent. Did not the

Ione March

one slink past you with a fiend's grimace only a moment or two ago? Did you not come hither with the hidden hope in your heart that you might meet the other?"

Ione walked on without speech — half in astonishment, half in annoyance. It was certainly strange, yet after all the woman might have found out so much by casual gossip or acute observation.

"You do not trust me — you do not believe! Well, you shall hear yet more, and then you will know that I am your friend. I see the crisis of your life fast coming upon you. You cannot escape from it — the day that shall test whether you are of gold like those rare ones — alas! too few, or dross like the common multitude."

She paused for a moment. Her eyelids drooped, her eyes turning inwards, as if in intense self-communion.

"You have nursed the man you thought to meet to-day. You have sat beside his pillow. You have hearkened to the words of his passionate love. Do not deny it! I can see you sit there with joy and sacrifice in your heart. I can hear the prayer which you thought only the Power-giver listened to in the silence of the night. 'Take my life for his!' so you prayed. 'Take my life for his!' Girl, your prayer was answered. In your face, when first I saw you, I read the Doom written. There is no escape, and, to do you justice, you desire none. You shall die in his stead!"

Ione was pale now to the lips. She could no longer deny to the woman a certain strange knowledge. How much she might have obtained from information, how much guessed by keen intuition, she did not stop to disentangle. The woman had certainly spoken her very soul, spelling it out, as it were, letter by letter.

Mrs. Howard-Hodge went on again, keeping her chill blue eyes all the time vigilantly upon Ione.

A Life for a Life

"Ah, you believe me now! You are willing to trust me. Your prayer then is answered. It remains only for you to pay the price. Death and falling on sleep — what are they? A light thing, the ceasing of a breath, a slave's emancipation. But yet there remains a time, and a time, and half a time. Take and enjoy every golden hour — they are milled coin from the mint of the gods; days of perfect love they shall be, for which many a gay and loveless ones would give their immortal soul.

And so, leaving Ione standing there in the streaming mist which came boiling up from below and hissing over the cliff-edge, the Seeress abruptly vanished among the red boles of the trees, leaving them gleaming wet and spectral amid the salt sea-smother.

With her nerves shattered by this strange communication, Ione turned towards the garden-gate, still hoping to see Keith Harford on her way. Nor was she again to be disappointed. It was not long before she saw him come towards her with a new spring and alertness in his gait. It seemed indeed as if, the bargain of life for life once struck and acknowledged, the Fates were henceforth to be favourable.

He held out his hand frankly and boyishly, yet with some of the old quickly vanishing shyness in his eyes.

"I am glad to see you walk like that," said Ione, smiling back at him. "I have not seen anything like that stride since Grindelwald. How long ago that seems!"

Keith ranged himself close at the girl's elbow, and looked fondly and yet wistfully down at the thinness of her oval cheek. He went on to admire the crisp curls of her hair, which, being natural, the wind and wet had divided and multiplied into a thousand glistening ringlets.

He would have given all that he possessed (so he said

Ione March

to himself) for the right to touch the least of these circlets with his hand. But the next moment he laughed within him to think how little he had to give. As for him, he could only look and long.

Meanwhile Ione spoke not at all, the mystery of the unknown oppressing her. Her feet seemed shod with leaden clogs. Her heart felt unaccountably weary and old. A sense of on-coming and irresistible Doom for the first time in her life daunted her. She longed to be alone that she might cast herself on her bed and forget in unconsciousness the sick disappointment and the dull incessant ache.

Keith Harford could no more follow a woman's mood than he could read the secret of the stars or commune with such intelligences as may inhabit them. He was one of the unfortunate and unsuccessful men who reverence women so much that they never understand them.

"Goodbye," said Ione, without holding out her hand, as they came to the foot of the ivy-grown staircase; "I am going in now. And you ought n't to be out in a day like this, you know."

Whereupon to be avenged for his disappointment at her swift departure, Keith Harford went and walked long upon the cliff-edge, thinking of Ione amid the drumming of the tempest and the thresh of the rain, until he was wet through from head to foot.

But Ione lay on her narrow hospital bed, and communed hopelessly with her own soul. For she knew not that Keith and she were as two electric clouds that cannot be united till after the bursting of the storm, till the levin bolt has flashed and the answering thunder diapasoned between them.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE PURIFYING OF THE PECULIAR PEOPLE

I ONE had neither seen nor heard of her hostess since the inauspicious encounter in the garden. It was therefore with some relief and surprise that she received the following missive from Caleb at the door of the Garden House:—

"Congregation of the Peculiar People,

"Rayleigh Abbey, Rayleigh.

"First Day of the Twelfth Month of the

"Thirty-second Year.

"The POWER will be manifested at eight to-night. Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy has the honour to invite Miss March to be present. The trumpet will be blown from the walls and the boundaries of Zion purged. 'Without are dogs!' Tea and silent prayer at seven-thirty sharp."

Ione was alone in the Nest-among-the-Leaves, of which Caleb was sole ministering angel. Idalia and Marcus had gone up to town early in the morning — for a "let-up" as the former irreverently phrased it. Ione had refused to accompany them, being of the judicious opinion that the young people had better be left to their own resources for a few days. Also, by returning with them to London, as they had urged her to do, she seemed to be putting an additional barrier between herself and Keith Harford.

So she remained at Rayleigh Abbey, and spent the day with a book in the garden. The early morning interview with the Seeress had somewhat shaken her nerves, and the curious humming sound in her ears which had

Ione March

haunted her for some weeks seemed to have greatly increased. Ione had been feeling faint and ill all day, but in spite of this she resolved to accept the invitation of her lady hostess for that evening. The folly would serve to arouse her, she thought. She owed something to the hospitality she was accepting, and besides — she might see Keith Harford.

Tea and silent prayer were already over when, under the guidance of Caleb, Ione reached the great iron staircase which led to the balcony of the chapel. Caleb had insisted upon Ione partaking of the excellent little dinner which he had prepared for her, alleging as an excuse his master's anger if he permitted Ione "to go and bust herself on that there swill."

It still rained, though in more sedate fashion than in the morning. So Ione had taken with her on her passage through the dark garden her water-proof and a red sailor hat with a black silk band, which, as with inevitable womanly forethought she admitted, "would take no harm whatever happened."

As Ione looked down from the place which had been kept for her in the front of the balcony, she saw the body of the chapel already darkened. The elevated stage or choir was bare and empty while from beneath there came the hum and hushed rustle of many people seated closely and waiting with no ordinary interest. There were but few looking down from the balcony that night, or walking to and fro. The pit seemed to have monopolised the faithful. It was obvious that trumpeting and purgation were important functions among the devotees of the New Religion.

The service began in the usual way. Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy, with magnificent dignity, which was slightly marred by the red shawl dropping midway, stalked to her elevated throne upon the right of the platform. But on

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The Peculiar People

this occasion a new figure attended her. Mr. H. Chadford Eaton it was who picked up the shawl, and conducted the Lady Principal to her seat — indubitably Mr. Eaton, more resplendent than ever in fine frock-coat of broadcloth and the most fashionable of ties and gaiters. Ione could hardly believe her eyes when she saw him take up his position on the seat formerly occupied by the Admiral.

Thereafter Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy, rising with immense dignity, delivered a sort of introductory homily upon the latest phase of the New Religion. This, like all new Truth (with a capital T), ran on somewhat antiquated lines. Water and fire together gave power, she said — the power which connected continent with continent, and enabled the Bournborough express to bring fresh devotees from the centre of the world's darkness to the Treasure-house of the World's Light, whence illumination would presently flash forth upon the Universe. She referred to Rayleigh Abbey. Water and fire were the primordial cleansing elements. They must be applied to the spiritual community before the POWER could be liberated. They must apply them fearlessly — however painful the application for the individual or to their own feelings. There must be no Achans in the camp, and there should be none after that night.

At this announcement a deep-toned "Amen" burst from the multitude of the faithful in the darkened chapel beneath.

Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy went on with renewed confidence. These were her words: —

"Before denunciations of unfaithfulness are made, it will stir the hearts of all true believers who know that there is a very distinguished person amongst us to-night — one who has come with a truly inquiring mind — and who, having in the course of his business, searched out

Ione March

all earthly wisdom, has now become convinced of the wisdom which is beyond and above the earth, as it is revealed by means of the New Religion. I refer to Mr. Chadford Eaton, Late Manager of the World's Wisdom Emporium. Not for years has the Truth received so distinguished a convert, and one too, who was not only a true believer himself, but is prepared to spend his life and ability in the furtherance of the Great Cause, the germ of which, thirty-two years ago, was delivered to the founder of Rayleigh Abbey in the gospel of Mustard and Water!"

Then, after Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy sat down, there ensued a most impressive pause. The choir seemed momentarily to grow gloomier. The willow-leaf lamps shone one by one more clearly out of the gathering darkness. A hush fell upon the audience till even Ione was impressed. Then, without warning, in their stoles of white the Seeress and her husband appeared standing together at the top of the platform. Their hands were raised as if beseeching the Power to descend upon them.

"Let the sinful and the sick, the evil of heart and the sinful of life, the halt, the maimed, the diseased and the dying come forward. All pain is ignorance. All suffering is sin. The purified, the trusting do not suffer. To them is given the Power, and they are healed!"

It was the sonorous voice of Mrs. Howard-Hodge speaking in a rapid recitative, and in short, distinct sentences, clearly heard by every one in the hall.

"Come to the anointing oil. Escape the casting out. There is yet time. The Power can cleanse. The Power can heal. All sin is soul-disease. All disease is bodily sin. The Power cleanses both equally. Have you guilt on your soul? The anointing oil can cleanse and heal. Have you pain and disease in your body?"

The Peculiar People

That also (under the new dispensation) is sin. - Get healed. Now is the time. Come!"

And starting up here and there among the audience, first one by one, and then in little knots and dribbles, men and women came and flung themselves down by the railing. The unseen folk in the dusky chapel beneath accompanied the incantation with a low murmur, which broke ever and anon into a sort of gloomy outburst of thanksgiving, as this or that well-known figure made its way to the front.

"Come in your sin — come in your sickness. Leave the earthly physician. Come to the Power!" cried the Seeress.

"Amen! Amen! We will come to the Power!" responded the faithful.

"Cast your drugs to the moles and the bats! Throw away your crutches! Cast behind you your rags and bandages. Come and receive the anointing oil, which has power to heal all that believe!"

"Amen, it cleanses! — Amen, it heals!" came again the answering echo.

"Bring your children — ye that believe. From the fever that burns, from the decline that wastes, from the anguish of the head, the heart, the limb, deliver your babes and sucklings! All can be cured if you only believe."

The rail was now full. The officiating pair went round and round with the anointing oil, muttering incantations. After they had gone twice about the circle, a man suddenly rose up, and in a piercing falsetto cried aloud, "I believe. Great is the Power! I came with a palsied right hand. Now I can move it. I came in bandages. I have thrown them away. And now, behold, I can lift up my hand in sight of you all!"

And certainly he was as good as his word. Hastily

Ione March

he unwrapped and extended a limb which, though still stiff, indubitably moved in all its parts.

"Great is the Power. Amen!" thundered the faithful out of the dark.

Then, as the Seer and Seeress went their rounds, ever quicker and louder came the confessions of healing, of complete or partial recovery, and ever deeper and more sonorous grew the thanksgivings of the elect.

At last all was over. The last man had given his testimony. The final sick woman had been dismissed with her pining child, strong in the belief that now the oil of new health had been poured into the expiring lamp of its life.

The platform was bare. Seer and Seeress had vanished together. Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy rose again. There was a sheaf of papers in her hand.

"Now," she said, "after this noble manifestation of the Power, we arrive at a stern and unpleasing, but highly necessary part of our work. It is the purifying of the Peculiar People. Let the lights be raised, that we may look upon the countenances of the evil-doers — and, recognising, learn henceforth to shun them."

At her word the lights were suddenly enlarged from willow-shaped, flickering blades to the broad glow of ordinary gas jets.

Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy took the first paper and glanced at it.

"Charity Attenborough — accused of speaking against the Lady Principal of this Abbey. Stand up and say what you have to say in answer, Charity Attenborough!"

A round-faced, merry-eyed girl rose uncertainly and like one utterly surprised, from a front bench. The people about drew themselves away from contamination with the garments of the accused, and the whole auditory settled to a minute and self-satisfied attention.

The Peculiar People

"Please, I never did, ma'am!" said Charity, bristling indignantly beneath the stare of so many unfriendly eyes.

"I brought my father here, and it's done him a heap o' good. I never said nothing else."

"Sub-warden Griggs of D Flat in the Convalescent Annex, rise and give your testimony!" cried Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy sternly.

A slouching man, with his head abnormally to one side, and clad in the uniform of the attendants at the cheap boarding-house connected with the Abbey, rose from the side of the chapel.

"If your ladyship pleases, I heard this girl a-sayin' to another girl in the room next but one in D Flat that you was all a pack of swindlers, chargin' two pound a week for what did n't cost you five bob!"

"I never did!" interjected Charity Attenborough, "that Griggs is a white-haired old liar!"

Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy held up her hands in horror. "Who was that other girl?" she asked the witness, her eyes turned to heaven in a permanent kind of weak resignation.

"Mary Jane Parr!" responded the man promptly.

"Well, and what did Mary Jane Parr answer?"

"She said you was all swindlers, but that your ladyship was a starcher!"

A low moan of horror burst from the audience; as if forced from them by such diabolical sentiments.

"What shall be done to these evil-speaking ones?" cried the Lady Abbess, turning up her eyes yet more, and bringing her fat hands piously together like a marble knight upon a tombstone.

"Let them be cast out!" thundered the chorus with one voice, as if accustomed to the formula.

Several attendants, apparently equally well versed in

Ione March

their duties, promptly advanced upon the culprits, and took them by the arms.

"You will find your boxes packed outside the door," said Mrs. Hardy, with a grand gesture. "The dustman will convey you and them to the station for a consideration."

Then there ensued other cases—first and worst, one Herman Kent, who had failed to pay his week's fees for board, lodging, and baths. Kent rebelliously and publicly declared that the accommodation would have been dear at "nuthin-at-all." Another, Gilbert Greatorix by name, had maligned the Seer, and stated how much coin of the realm he would take (an inconsiderable sum) to knock his ugly nose in.

These, and other similar cases being summarily settled, there ensued silence, and Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy stood a long time quite still with a paper in her hand. At last she spoke, in a sepulchral tone fitted to express the terrible communication she had to make to the Peculiar People.

"Now I come to the most painful duty of all. 'If your right hand offend you, cut it off; or your right eye, pluck it out.' All unsuspecting we have been cherishing a viper amongst us, my friends and fellow-believers. And though this serpent has been warmed in the bosom of those near and dear to me, yet for the sake of the flock and the people committed to me, I shall proclaim, and purge, and spare not. Ione March, stand up!"

A bombshell bursting at her feet could not have stunned Ione more. She felt unable to speak or think. Every eye was turned upon her, and as she sat alone in the lighted front of the gallery, opposite the platform, she seemed to be in a kind of dock.

"This young woman," said Mrs. Hardy in a strident voice, pointing at her with her finger, "came here as

The Peculiar People

companion to my dear and only son's wife — the daughter, as you are all aware, of a very distinguished and — ah — wealthy citizen of America. She came and was received with honour as a modest and reputable person. But alas! how easily and how grievously are the innocent and unsuspecting deceived! She has had an accomplice in guilt — one, too, highly favoured, which makes his infamy the more wicked. I publicly name a sometime dependent, Keith Harford, once tutor to my son. I have long suspected — yesterday I fully discovered their treason. And to-day there has been put into my hand a paper which proves that this woman, under cover of nursing a pretended sickness, removed the misguided young man from the care and tendance of a respectable widow (who is present with us to testify to the fact!) and kept him for five weeks at her own lodgings, in a low and disreputable part of the city. Shall such persons company with the purified and elect? Susanna Horehound, stand up!"

But it was Keith Harford who stood up in the front of the gallery to the right, his face white and tense with anger and surprise.

"Who dares to say this thing?" he cried. "Who dares bring into this place the names of two people neither of whom have ever had the smallest connection with your sect of liars and hypocrites?"

"Blasphemy and defamation hurt us not," responded Mrs. Forsaker-Hardy, "and we have always claimed the right to oversee the conduct of all who sojourn under this roof. We may be a little Zoar amid so many mighty Sodoms and flourishing Gomorrahs, but at least we have always kept our skirts free from pollution."

Meanwhile Mrs. Horehound, holding a scent-bottle to her nostrils, and her heavy face more full of malice than ever, had been standing ready to give her evidence.

Ione March

"Yes," she said, as soon as she got an opening, "I testify that this here is the shameless woman wot come to my house and took away my lodger, that was paying me twenty-five shillings for as good a bedroom, and as well looked after—what with hot bottles and mustard plasters to his feet—as ever could be. Had he been my own son, as the saying is, I could n't ha' done more. She and another that was worse, they come, and cruel hard they spoke against me, that has been a decent woman and much respected in the neighbourhood all my days. And there and then they took the young man away, though he was not in his right mind, but talked nonsense and that continuous."

Thus far Mrs. Horehound, lodging-house keeper, of Tarvet Street, E. C.

Then, as to what happened afterwards, it appeared that there were two reputable witnesses—Mr. Chadford Eaton, the new and distinguished adherent of the Faith, and his coadjutor in the Private Intelligence department of the World's Wisdom Emporium, Mr. Polydore Webster.

But before these worthy gentlemen could give their testimony, Keith Harford had leaped upon the platform.

"Listen," he cried, his face white and rigid with emotion, "this young lady, whose name is too sacred and worthy to be spoken even once in the hearing of such filthy and currish ears, is my affianced wife. Let any man speak against her at his peril. He will find that he must reckon with me—as by Heaven he shall. Neither she nor I have any connection with your drivelling superstitions. We own none of your laws, and we depart with gladness from a sect so obscene, and a place made so offensive by low scandal-mongering and peeping slander."

While Keith was speaking, a great disgust of her

The Peculiar People

surroundings had come over Lone. Dazed and blinded she arose, and walking like one in whose eyes a too bright light has shined, she went uncertainly towards the stairway, feeling her way with her hand. Keith, seeing her depart, abruptly quitted the platform, and sought the nearest way out that he might meet her. And behind them, thus expelled with ignominy from the full college of the elect, pursued the thundered formula with which the faithful ratified the dread sentence of their superior:

"Let the wicked be cast out, and let them no more return!"

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CHAPTER XXXVII

THE BOAT TRAIN

WHEN Keith Harford, betrayed by his over-anxiety into taking a wrong turning and becoming entangled in the rusty iron labyrinths under Rayleigh Abbey, at last reached the outer court, he could not find Ione anywhere. She had, in fact, escaped through the smaller door with the key Marcus had given her. Bareheaded, Keith ran round the house this way and that, but still could obtain no glimpse of the young girl. Finally, in his desperation, he climbed the garden wall, launched himself into the branches of a pear-tree which the wind was swaying in the direction of the coping, and letting himself quickly down at the expense of a torn sleeve and bruised knee, he reached the Garden House, where he found Caleb calmly laying the table for Ione's frugal supper.

"Has Miss March not returned?" he said, gazing about him wildly.

Caleb looked at Keith in reproachful surprise, for a branch of the pear-tree had scratched his brow, his hair was over his eyes, and he wore neither hat nor overcoat.

"Mr. Harford," he answered sedately, "the young lady has gone to the service in the chapel, what they call the Temple, by special invitation of the missus."

"I know," said Harford, "she was there! But she has been denounced and insulted by wild beasts, and while I was facing them, she slipped out into the night, and I cannot find her anywhere."

"That old she-tiger! I thought it would come to

The Boat Train

summat like this," ejaculated Caleb, letting a dish slip from his hand and splinter unregarded on the hearth.

Keith was going out again without a word, but Caleb caught him by the arm. "Wait till I put one of master's overcoats on you! And for God's sake don't go out bareheaded, and you just fresh rose up from a bed of sickness!"

As if he had been putting the harness on his horses, Caleb made his preparations in a few seconds with his usual quiet decision. Then pulling a cap down over Keith Harford's head, he fastened the straps under his chin, as a nurse does to a child.

But before he could finish buttoning the thick overcoat, Keith was stumbling down the steps into the wet and buffeting wind, leaving Caleb vainly calling after him to wait till he could come and help.

"Oh, if master had only been here, this would n't never have happened as it 'as happened," he groaned; "the old hag would n't have dared to let out her spite and jealousy if young master 'ad bin 'ere! But that is the reason why she encouraged him to go away up to London this mornin'!"

It was with anger burning hot in his heart that Keith plunged into the night, to seek for the girl whom he had acknowledged for his affianced wife before the evil-minded pack assembled in Rayleigh Abbey.

Whither could she have gone — a delicate girl abroad on such a night, and in a strange country? Keith beat his way through the wet leathery leaves of the shrubbery, and emerged with aromatic drops spraying down upon him from laurel and holly.

What shelter could she find? He knew her wounded pride too well to think that she would abide a moment longer anywhere near that accursed habitation of asps and cockatrices.

Ione March

"Ione! Ione!" he shouted, calling the beloved name aloud, as he ran headlong down the dark avenues. But the winds swept away the syllables as if his shouting had been no louder than the cry of a storm-driven bird forlornly wandering in the night.

Keith Harford grew wild and desperate. He felt that if Mrs. Peraker-Hardy or her accomplices met him at that moment, he would certainly slay them with his hands. And his fingers tightened upon the palms of his hands as if they were already at the throats of Mr. H. Chadford Eaton and his late coadjutor in Department Z.

So in distress and darkness he wandered about he knew not whither. Instinct more than intention took him inland away from the sea.

He looked back and shook his fist at the long cliff-like wall of Rayleigh Abbey, with its gloomy machicolations and serried tiers of lights. Had he belonged to a former time he would have uttered against its towers a set and formal curse. As it was, he contented himself with a promise to make Ione March's enemies remember that night if ever it should be his hap to meet them again.

So Keith Harford wandered on, now on the streaming road, now brushing the wet from the sides of narrow footpaths where the weight of rain drooped the long, wet grasses thwartwise across like fallen corn. Anon he went swishing and creaking with water-logged boots across flooded meadows — till before him all suddenly shone up the cheerful lights and spick-and-span whiteness of a railway station.

It came upon him with a quick surprise that he had not remembered before that the express passed up from the Channel Islands' boat at twenty minutes past midnight, and that it stopped at the station, there being signalled for, in order to convey through passengers for London.

The Boat Train

Keith leaped the wire fence, and ran along the line till he came to the platform. A smoky lamp, deserted on a barrow and apparently in the last stages of extinction, was here the sole illuminant, but within the station itself the lights were burning brightly. The ticket-window was already open, and a slim girlish figure, wrapped in a mackintosh, bent before the pigeon-hole, purse in hand. In the most matter-of-fact way possible, Ione was taking a ticket for town. Nay more, she was counting her change as calmly as if she had only been coming home from arranging her flowers at the Hotel Universal.

Without pausing to speak to her, Keith made sure from a question which Ione asked of the sleepy clerk that she was going to get out at Clapham Junction. Then, stepping quietly before her as she stood aside to put her purse into her pocket, he bent down and asked for a ticket to the same place.

Still with the pasteboard in his hand he turned, pale and worn with anger and fatigue. He stretched out his hand impulsively.

"Thank God, I have found you!" he said hoarsely, after a long pause, during which both stood staring. And even more than his words, his burning eyes and choked and trembling utterance pleaded for him.

Yet even then Keith Harford remained shy, reticent, self-distrustful beyond the worth of men. He had held love at a distance all his life, and now that it had come to him for the first time when he was verging on forty years of age, he knew not what to do with it.

Ione and Keith walked up and down the little platform without speaking. The train was late, and the porter, tired of his vigil, had set himself down on the seat of the waiting-shed near the fire, and slumbered peacefully, tiding his arms on his breast and lean-

Ione March

ing his chin upon them. At the third turning Ione spoke.

"Why have you come?" she said, without looking at him.

Now doubtless Keith Harford ought to have answered, "Because I love you!" Marcus would have answered thus. The average man, both good and bad, the strong man, the confident man, the wise man even, would have answered so. And the average man would have been right. But Keith Harford was neither an ordinary nor yet an average man. His self-distrust, his lack of the excellent quality of business push, led him to put himself aside and belittle himself—than which there is nothing more fatal in the things of love.

"Why did you come?" Ione repeated her question.

Keith was silent a moment longer, then he spoke.

"How could I stay?" he said at last; "how could I remain among those ravening wolves and sty-fed swine, out of whom the devils of foulness and evil speech have not been cast. But tell me, Ione, did you hear what I said to them?"

"Yes, Mr. Harford, I heard what you said!"

"Do not call me that!" said he, wincing at her tone; "say 'Keith' as you used to do when I was ill. You heard what I said, and you are not angry?"

"Why should I be angry," said Ione softly. "Circumstances make these things necessary at times. It is like telling the servant to say one is not at home."

"Then you are angry—for you do not any longer call me 'Keith.' Speak kindly to me if you can. Remember, I have no friend in all the world but you."

"Keith Harford, I declare I could shake you, for a great silly gaby!" That was what Ione said within her heart. But aloud she answered, sighing a little, "I am not angry, Keith. But I fear you will take cold. You

The Boat Train

should not have come away like this without some protection after your illness."

She looked down at his wet feet. She could hear the water creaking in his boots as he walked.

The train was certainly very late. Ione went and interviewed the man behind the wicket. He was a nice young man—a stationmaster, recently promoted upwards from clerkdom. He stared at the young lady from nowhere in particular, who was travelling at the dead of night without any apparent luggage. But Ione's smiles, even more than her open purse and quick air of practicality, won their well accustomed victory. She came back to Keith with a pair of dry socks, and some brandy in a flask.

"Go and change before the fire," she bade him peremptorily, "and drink this now."

So like a scholar who is chidden by his master Keith meekly obeyed. And when he had finished, Ione added, as seriously as a physician prescribing, "Now I will take a little myself."

At last the train came along, shouldering its way with difficulty eastward right in the eye of the storm. Ione and Keith found an empty "third," with Waterloo above the door in large letters. And all the while Keith Harford was raging at his own impotence. Where were his nerve, his coolness, his determination, tested on a score of mountain-peaks, and a hundred passes? So that Alt Peter had said, half in earnest, if also half in jest, "Don't write books any more, if, as the Herr Marcus says, no one will buy them. Come and be a high-mountain guide like us. We will get you a Führerbuch at the next court!"

But now he dared not even speak to the woman he loved. Why, every slim counter-jumper who sat with an arm about his sweetheart on a seat, by the park-gates,

Ione March

had more courage than he. He thought wistfully and enviously of hair-brained Marcus, who, through all their wanderings had known the word to bring the smile to a girl's lips and the pretty coquettish turn to her head. Whereas he, Keith Harford, like a sullen stupid draff-sack, could only sit silent while the bright eyes of maidens looked over his head and Love himself passed scornfully by.

And now when he was in the presence of the woman for whom he would gladly have died — this in 'sober truth, and as no mere figure of speech — he could find no word to speak to her. At last, however, he managed to begin his perilous tale.

"Ione," he said, falteringly, "I have a word to say to you. Yet somehow I know not how to speak it. I am ill at finding speech wherewith to tell you of my love. But the thing itself is deep in my heart, deep as the roots of my life. I have, indeed, no right to say that I love you. For spoken to a woman that ought to mean, that I am ready to ask you to be my wife. And so much I have not the right to say — I cannot say it. You are too wondrously precious for Keith Harford to ask you to link your bright fortunes, your youth, your beauty, with the failure, complete and absolute, of a middle-aged broken-down man. Ione, I tell you that after I paid my ticket to-night, I had not a shilling of my own in the world that I could count upon. I know not even where I shall lay my head to-night when I reach London."

Ione moved uneasily in her seat, and struck her hands one into the other with the quick impatient movement characteristic of her when she was thinking quickly.

Keith stopped all at once with instant appreciation of her irritation, but with his usual blindness he wholly mistook its cause.

The Boat Train

"No, I do not tell you this to move your pity," he said. "I only pray that God may send some better, happier man to find that which I have no right to ask for. Ione, you are stronger than I, brighter, altogether of the younger day. I will never let myself be a burden upon your opening life. That which I said to-night, I spoke only for the ears of the canting crew up there, and for the hasty words I crave your pardon."

For a space of time, which to Keith Harford seemed hours, Ione was silent as the train rushed along, roaring through tunnels, and plunging again with a certain gladness of relief into the clean dense blackness of the night.

"Keith," at last the girl spoke low and gently, "I am tired to-night. I am not so strong as you think. I cannot bear any more. Do not speak to me just now. I will answer you to-morrow when I have rested. But you will come to Audley Street to-night, and sleep in your old bed where you lay so long. Jane Allen will be glad to share hers with me."

She reached over and gently touched the back of his hand twice, so that he might not be very heart-sore at her silence. And Keith, feeling her words to be the best vindication of his hasty speech at Rayleigh Abbey, leaned back and looked at her, marvellously eased at heart.

So the boat-express sped steadily north-eastwards through the night, leaving Rayleigh Abbey far behind glooming huge and sinister over the gusty surges of the Channel.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

FEY

THE forenoon of the next day after the night journey from Rayleigh Abbey, found Ione March on the doorstep of that very distinguished physician Sir Everard Torrance. He had known her father, and had indeed been his guest years ago at Newport. Ione, as we know, was by no means morbidly imaginative, and she did not lay great stress on the words of the Secress of Rayleigh Abbey. But all the same, during these last months, and especially since her father's death, she had been increasingly conscious of a subtle weariness, which sometimes grew upon her till it culminated in that dreadful feeling of utter depression and desolation for which there is no word in any language.

So now she took courage and went to Sir Everard, who, in the tall young lady in the serviceable plain black dress, could not be expected to recognise the little girl he had ridden upon his knee as he looked down upon the pebbles and sand of the Newport beach.

The kindly baronet listened with gentle patience to Ione's story, before beginning his searching ordeal of personal examination and diagnosis. As he proceeded with this he grew more and more grave.

"You have had a shock," he said, after a long and thoughtful pause. "Your father's death, your fight with the world, the discovery that it is a rougher place than you anticipated — these, and perhaps other factors unknown to me, have undoubtedly had a grave effect upon a constitution never naturally strong. I do not

Fey

conceal from you that the greatest care will be needed. You must go abroad at once. You must cease from all work."

"Sir Everard," broke in Ione piteously, "it is quite impossible for me to do either. Believe me, I have a reason, and a weighty one."

"Be honest with me, my dear; remember that I was your father's friend. Tell me what is that reason," said the physician.

"There is a man whom I love," Ione answered him, without a moment's hesitation. "I would marry him if I could. It is, I think, the only chance for his life or for his success in his calling. He has been completely shattered by a recent severe illness."

"You are not making that commonest and most terrible of mistakes — marrying a man in order to reform him?"

Ione smiled a little and shook her head. Keith's reformation did not need to go beyond compelling him to remember to take his meals, to put on dry socks, and to see that his editors paid within a reasonable time.

"The man whom I love," she said slowly, after a pause, "is noble, honourable, great. But without my help I do not think he will ever be successful. I could make him so — or, at least, I believe I could."

Sir Everard was silent; bending his grey heavy eyebrows downwards and frowning fiercely as he looked at his patient.

The girl spoke again, in the same quick brave voice:

"Do not be afraid to tell me if this weakness is serious, Sir Everard," she said — "if you think it will grow upon me. Tell me even the very worst. It is far more than life or death to me to know just what is before me, so that I may make my plans."

Sir Everard measured Ione with his eye. Fearlessly

Ione March

she gave him back glance for glance. He rose and put his hand on her shoulder.

"You are a brave lass," he said; "I *will* tell you what I think. But remember, I do not know. In a case like this there is no absolute certainty. I hope I may be wrong, but, from the test under that microscope there, I fear that you are suffering from Pernicious Anæmia."

The technical words conveyed nothing to Ione March. She found her eyes straying from the compact, straight-tubed, experimenting microscope of foreign pattern, under the lens of which there was a little speck of blood, back to the kindly features of the great Doctor, grown weightily sober with the burden of what he had to say.

"It is not usual — it is, in fact, hardly professional — but I tell you my opinion, because you have in you the heart of a brave man — or, that which is infinitely more and better, the heart of a brave woman."

"That little speck in the hollow glass means Death, then!" said Ione, looking at the single-tubed microscope with a strange impersonal interest, as if it had been a curiosity in a museum to which her attention had been called.

The Doctor was silent, but he did not remove his straight regard from hers. The little shake of his head meant, "I think so!"

"How long?" She spoke now in a slightly harder tone, yet withal very sweetly and gently.

"I cannot tell," Sir Everard answered gravely. "I should think from fifteen to eighteen months, but it may be more. With ordinary chances, and no further shock, certainly not less."

Instantly Ione rose to her feet.

"It is worth it," she said, half to herself, and then again, "I will do it."

She turned upon the old Doctor, who, his back to the

Fey

fire-place, was standing with moist eyes regarding her. Many strange things had happened to him in forty years' practice of his profession, but few that had ever touched him like this.

Ione's fawn-coloured jacket lay on the table.

She took it up and stood with it a little while in her hand, fingering it. She could hear her own heart beating thickly. "*Sentence of death!*" it said. "*Sentence of death!*" But she must let him see nothing of what she felt. Instead, she smiled at Sir Everard brightly and sweetly.

"Will you help me on with this?" she said. "It is surely growing dark outside. I think there is going to be a fog."

The good Doctor's fingers trembled as they had not done at many a famous operation, while he lifted up the coat, fragrant with suggestions of its owner's sweet girlhood.

Ione turned upon him with a smile that shone gloriously through the strange misty look in her eyes.

"Thank you," she said; "but you have forgotten to tuck in the sleeves at the shoulders."

The great Doctor did as he was bidden with some difficulty, because of the curious mist which had suddenly fogged his spectacles.

It was a transfigured Ione who returned to 33, Audley Street. She had gone out doubtful, tired anxious; she returned with a light and buoyant step. All her difficulties seemed cleared away; her path became plain. Now she knew.

"Sentence of death! Sentence of death!" thudded her heart.

"Eighteen months! Eighteen months!" she retorted, and put the matter from her.

Ione March

Mrs. Adair, from her post in the little back-kitchen where she was "doing the wash," heard a light foot come down the silent street, from which the chilly December breeze had swept both loafers and foot-passengers. It was a step quick, elastic, full of springing life. She heard it turn buoyantly into the narrow brick-paved walk from the sparr'd cast-iron gate of the little cottage house. With a hop and a skip it came within the portal and sprang up the two narrow steps to the door.

Mrs. Adair came out with steaming hands from "dollying" the clothes, to make sure that her ears had not deceived her.

"Wi' lassie, what 's gotten intil ye?" she cried; "ye come in like a licht-fit ten-year-auld bairn — are ye 'fey'?"

"I think I am," smiled Ione. And, indeed, the old Scottish word for the high spirits which come to a fore-doom'd person, defined her position and feelings exactly.

"Where is Mr. Harford? I want to see him," said Ione, with simple directness.

"How should an auld wife like me ken that, lassie?" answered Mrs. Adair. "He slippit oot some whilie since, and I'm jalousin' that he gaed awa' to look for yoursel'!"

"Tell me which way he went, and I will go and meet him," said Ione smiling. "I. have something to say to him."

Mrs. Adair watched the swift lithe gladness of the girl's figure, as she went down the street in the direction of the park.

"If he's no a dullard, he will surely hae something to say to you, gin ye look up at him like that," she said to herself. "I'm thinkin' he'll hae pittin' his pride in his pooch and spoken to the lassie, to gar her skip sae

Fey

croose. Wae 's me, there 'll be a room to let, and decent lodgers are nane sae easy to get in this pairt of the country!"

Even in her childhood, or when she first came home from school, Ione had never before felt such elation of spirits. Something of Idalia's gay irresponsibility rose insurgent to her head. Anæmia — why her blood fairly sang, her heart leaped! Ill, dying — fifteen months — eighteen! It seemed an idle tale, a period that would never end. And when it did — well, at least she would have lived!

Here at last was Keith, standing looking down a vista of leafless trees. He had a note-book and a pencil in his hands, and Ione knew that, according to his custom, he was setting down the thoughts which came to him.

"I could bet I know what will put the note-book to rout," she said to herself; and the look in her face was a fresh and radiant one — that of a young girl, innocently conscious of her own beauty and charm.

Keith did not hear her coming till she was quite at his side, and had put her hand lightly on his shoulder.

"Please let me look," she said. "Poetry — may I read? '*Carpe diem*' for a title. That means 'A bird in the hand,' does it not? Well, I'm the bird. Please don't shut up the book!" And Ione read aloud with a dying fall, like the overword of a song, these lines:

" 'Ere the bursting bud be grown
To a rose nigh over-blown,
And the wind of the autumn eves
Comes blowing and scattering all
The damask drift of the dead rose leaves
Under the orchard wall."

"Why, Keith, that's sad; and when I have come all this way to meet you, too!" she said, smiling up at him. "Do you know, I did not think there was any sad thing in all God's universe to-day!"

Ione March

When Keith looked at her he fairly started back, amazed and puzzled at the radiant beauty of her face, the smile that was upon her lips, the light that dwelt in her eyes.

The knowledge of how happy she was going to make the man she loved, showed in each thought, word, action. She gave a little skip of pure delight, and with the motion of a cheerful comrade who would change a companion's gloomy mood, she caught his arm impulsively.

"Come, let us go for a walk," she said. So straightway she took him off through the park, and the grey London sky brightened before her as she went, so bright and fair and young a thing she seemed.

"Do you know," she said, "I came out seeking you? Does not that make you vain? Or, having been an invalid, do you take all that as your due?"

"I take it," he said gravely, "as the kindest and most beautiful thing that ever was done to me in all my life!"

His eyes smiled seriously down into her dark and brilliant ones, now sparkling and electric with inward excitement.

She made him a curtsey, which seemed to Keith Harford more than half the sportive frisk of a young thing bubbling over with the joy of life. Ione marvelled at herself.

"Have you forgotten the Abbey and yesterday?" he said, suddenly thinking of her transformation.

"All but one thing—something you said!" she made answer, nodding brightly, almost defiantly.

"And what was that?" Keith spoke earnestly. His world depended on her answer.

"Why, ever since I knew you you never said but one thing worth saying. I declare it is I who have to

Fey

say all the nice things." Was there ever such a silly stupid Keith?"

"But dear!" she added in her heart. For she could not bear to speak lightly of so true a man, even in words and to his face.

"Ione, if I thought myself in the least worthy——" Keith Harford was beginning in his deep earnest tones, when all at once he heard a sound which caused him to stop. Ione was humming softly as she walked along. He drew himself up.

"John Anderson, my jo, John,
When we were first acquaint."

The swift dainty notes flowed low and liquid, mellow as a blackbird's warble, through all the mazy grace-notes of a Scots tune sung according to the right ancient fashion.

"Your locks were like the raven,
Your bonny brow ——"

Suddenly the tune changed. Now it was "Did you see my Sylvia pass this way?" Ione's eyes seemed to be looking up at him, though her lashes were drooped dark upon the white of her cheek. Her warm fingers were upon his arm, and the grey November dusk was already closing unheeded around them. But as he listened, wider and warmer horizons were opening upon Keith Harford's shy reluctant soul. He turned his head down, and when he had once looked, he could not remove his gaze from the radiant gladness of love in the young girl's face.

Then she stopped singing, and spoke in a kind of recitative: "Ione March! Ione March!" she chanted softly, as if recalling words well known to her. "I love you — I loved you from the first time I ever saw you. With all my heart's heart I love you, and yet you shall never know it. I will never tell you. Who

Ione March

am I that I should touch your young life with the shadow ——”

“Oh, you witch!” cried Keith, suddenly understanding at last, the barriers of his self-distrust breaking like summer gossamer. They had stopped under the great leafless elms before they turned towards the cottages by the Park gates. Keith Harford would never be a simpleton any more. He caught the girl quickly in his arms, drew her to him, and for a moment the world whirled away from them in seething billows.

The newly-plighted lovers walked home. As they turned into Audley Street, Ione gave Keith's arm a pull of possessive happiness.

“Well,” she said, “it's unmaidenly, I know. But since I have had to do all the rest — make all the love, help you out of all your stupid difficulties, encourage you with a bunch of carrots before your nose like — well, like the animal that dotes on carrots; in a word, since you have made me propose to you — I may as well ask you when you would like to be married.”

Here she clasped her hands with mock earnestness.

“Keith Harford,” she continued, looking at him with a world of mischief in her eyes, “name the day — and I will buy the ring. I know I shall have to do that also, when it comes to the point. Why, Keith, you would either blush yourself away as soon as you opened the door of the shop, or else forget what it was you had come for. And when the man said, ‘What can I do for you, sir?’ you would most likely answer, ‘A penny-worth of fish-hooks!’ Then, after that, I should have to lock you up while I went and interviewed the parson, or you would be sure to be gone when I came back, and I should never find you any more.”

“Ione,” said Keith Harford, struggling to win her

Fey

back into seriousness, "you are not doing this thing out of pity — are you?"

"Why yes, of course — entirely!" said Ione, with a new and defiant sauciness. "I don't love you a bit. You are only a great silly fellow. But then, so dreadfully dear. I can say it out loud now. *And* such a baby! Keith, you do so want to be taken care of! But you've found the very girl to do it, and so you'll find to your cost, Mr. Man!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE NICEST WEDDING IN THE WORLD

IONE and Keith were married in the little, old parish church on the north side of the river, past which the barges creep and the swift penny boats shoot on their way to Putney and Hampton Court.

"Let's spend our last dollar on a special license, and do the thing in style," said Ione.

"Well, you know, there's the house furniture, since we are too high and mighty to go into lodgings!" Keith suggested, perceiving for the first time in his life that he was becoming practical.

"Well, I do admire to hear *you* grumbling," echoed Ione, with the joyous mood which sat so well on her these days; "much you have to do with this wedding! You ain't a-running of this show, not as I knows on — not even taking the money at the door. So don't go stirring up the animals and making it hard sledding for the Lion Queen. All the furniture you need is just a table, a chair, a pennyworth of ink, a quill, and some writing paper. Then you sit yourself down and write about candle-ends and beeswax like a little man till I get back. And that's what you've got to do, Mr. Man!"

And so he did. And Keith's essay on "Candle-ends, considered from a moral standpoint," was the first of a series of charming and popularly illustrated articles in the *Red Magazine*.

It could hardly be called a quiet wedding either, for Idalia and Marcus were there, and (by special request of

The Nicest Wedding

the bride) Seth Livingston was best man. He had, for purely decorative purposes as he affirmed, brought his mother. Of course Jane Allen was bridesmaid, no other being possible. Tom Adair brought her, and never once looked at the bride. Near the door stood Mrs. Adair all in a fluttering fervour of admiration, which made up for the discourtesy of her son.

The service itself was staid and decorous, some said even dull. The old clergyman muttered and murmured, lost his place and found it again, till, as the bridegroom confessed afterwards, he stood in mortal terror lest the bride should forget where she was and prompt him.

"And I declare I should have done it too, if I could, have remembered the words," said Ione viciously. "Slow old thing! I thought I was never going to be real downright sure of you!"

"Were you in such a hurry to be married, Ione?" said Keith tenderly.

"Of course I was," she answered with postnuptial freedom; "you were such a dear desirable old thing, you see, that I wanted you all for my very own, right then! And I'm noways ashamed of it neither."

But all the time her heart within her was thudding low to itself, "Eighteen months! Eighteen months! Can I make up to him for all the after pain in eighteen months? Can I make him great in eighteen months?"

"Do you know, folks, I think this is the very nicest wedding I was ever at! And Keith he thinks so too," affirmed Ione, as soon as the party found themselves back again on the pavement, and the chill wind from the river whipped the colour back into their faces.

"I think so too," cried Idalla, breaking through her new-found sedateness. "It's certainly better than run-

Ione March

ning away and being married in an old dominie's study, with the cat on the hearthrug and the hired buggy horse eating off the top of the minister's golden-rod one minute, and trying to pull up stakes and run home the next. Marcus, do you remember undertaking the solemn vows with one eye squinting out of the window to see what that beast was after? 'I, Marcus Hardy, take thee — *whoa, you brute, where are you coming to!* — Idalia Judd to be my true and — *oh, hang that horse, it will have that old post down in a couple of shakes!*' ”

At this Marcus smiled, and intimated that the scene owed something to his wife's well-known preference for words of the imagination.

“*Now for the wedding breakfast,*” said Ione. “We had just five-and-eight left to do it on, so please think of that, all you greedy people. But I know a milkshop, the nicest place. It's just round the corner. We can get Scotch scones almost as good as yours, Mrs. Adair — do you remember, Jane?”

Jane Allen nodded happily. Time was when she had scoffed at marriage and the faithfulness of men, but like all women she softened when the hated ceremony approached her in the person of her dearest friend. Also, it was pleasant to have Tom Adair bring her — though, of course, it was dreadfully silly of him to look all the time at her, and never at Ione, who was so much prettier!

“Good-morning, Mrs. Dunn,” said Ione to the woman in the shop. “Can you let us have some milk, and brew a pot or two of tea? What lovely scones and butter! Help yourselves — call for anything you like, ladies and gentlemen. And if it is n't here — why, then you must do without it, unless you go out and get it. But with the aforesaid five-and-eightpenny limitation, the world of the milkshop is yours!”

The Nicest Wedding

It was very simple fooling, but not too simple for happy people.

But Idalia looked a little concerned sometimes, and glanced once or twice meaningly at her husband. She had never seen Ione in such spirits, and somehow the mood seemed unnatural. After a time she could not help telling her friend frankly of her wonder.

"Well," Ione answered with equal frankness, "you know, you've never seen me married before. That's the way it takes me. It has made you grave and matronly." (Here Idalia made a grimace of disclaimer.) "You never flirt —"

Marcus's tea choked him at this point.

"You have, in fact, given up all frivolity of every sort, and there are to be no more Aurania Tommies and City-of-Paris Jonathans. Now with me it acts the other way. I am going to run the frivolity branch of this business, while Keith stays at home and scrubs floors."

Then Ione turned quickly on Seth Livingston.

"I am sorry to see that you have fallen into bad company."

"Bad company! On the contrary, I never was in better in my life. Mother and I are at your wedding," said the prompt Seth.

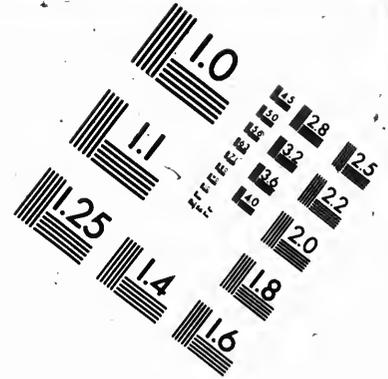
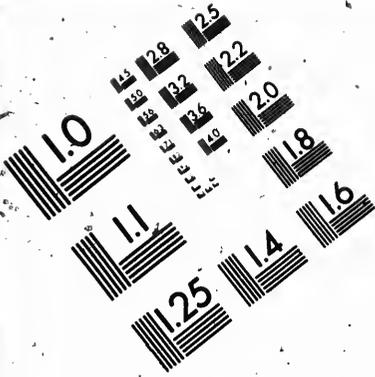
"Well, I saw you going down Northumberland Avenue the other day, arm in arm with Forgan of the *Red Magazine*."

"Well, what's the matter with Forgan? He's all right, ain't he? His cigarettes are, anyway."

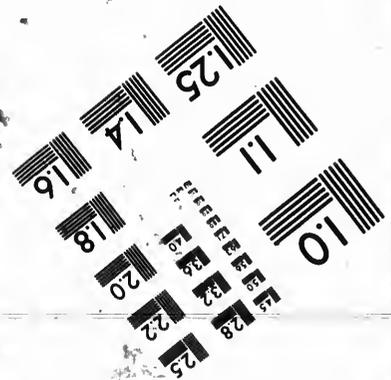
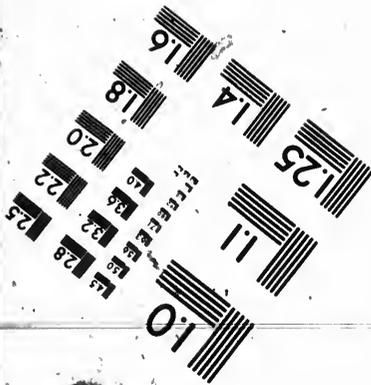
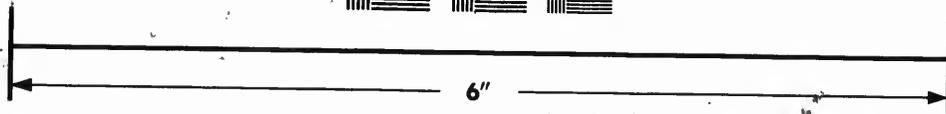
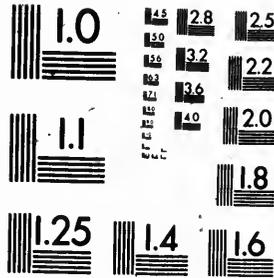
"Right? Well, not much!" retorted Ione, as promptly. "Why, he owes my husband nearly two hundred pounds, and has owed it him for nearly a year. And I saw you go into a club with him, too — drinking, I wager; helping that man to throw away my hard-earned money at a bar — like as not!"







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Ione March

Seth Livingston scratched his head in humorous perplexity.

"Well," he said slowly, "I guess the *Red Magazine* ain't exactly a gold mine; nor the financing of it on all fours with a picnic."

"It would be if they had the sense to print my husband's stories every month."

"Ione!" ventured Keith reproachfully. He was blushing with happy shame in which mingled an intense secret joy. Never (he thought) had he seen his wife so daringly bewitching. He wished that the others would go away in order that he might tell her so.

"Now, Keith," she went on, nodding at him fiercely, almost as if she had absorbed the former manner of Mrs. Marcus Hardy; "be good enough to sit tight and say nothing! You've been a whole year without collecting a penny of that money. But to-morrow, having a family to support, your wife is going after it. Now you tell your friend, Forgan, Mr. Livingston, that if he does n't pay up smart, I'm coming right along to interview him. See this!" Suddenly she displayed a tiny revolver. "Cylinder jammed, trigger won't act, pencil wads up the barrel, generally 'Willie won't work'; but for all that, the finest weapon in the world. Now you tell your editing man that Ione Harford is a little Texas Wonder with the six-shooter, and that she is out looking for him!"

"I guess that's about the last thing in the world to make Forgan pay up," commented Seth. "To tell him a pretty girl is coming to call on him if he don't! All the same, I'll see to it that you get your money from the *Red Magazine*. I'm a sort of director, anyway!"

"Yes; and besides, he has to take ever so many more

The Nicest Wedding

things that we are going to write. We are starting in full speed to-morrow morning. Keith is to work in the parlour. I'm going to honeymoon in the kitchen, playing with the new range!"

The party now adjourned, but even then Ione's spirits did not desert her.

"Does any lady at this marriage breakfast say 'Champaigne Cup'? Any gent fancy 1800 Cognac? Because if so, there's the Buckingham Hotel just across the way, and they can have them by paying!"

The company smiled upon this most unconventional of brides.

"Nobody; then that's all right!" she went on. "Now let's go and view the new house."

Iralia and Ione walked together ahead of the others, and their talk grew whispered and mysterious. Nothing but Ione's last words have been preserved.

"No, dear; I can't let you. It would n't be good for either of us. Let us fight it through on this line. It will do us both all the good in the world. If I need really, I'll come and borrow from you like a shot."

And with this conditional acceptance Mrs. Marcus Hardy had perforce to rest content.

The wedding guests reached the new house. Ione took the key from her pocket and unlocked the door with pride. It was a plain workman's dwelling, similar to the Adair's, but somewhat smaller. It stood at the corner of the street next but three to Battersea Park.

"We are poor, but so far honest," said Ione. "We can't give you chairs all round — not just yet. There's only one each for us, and the coal-box for visitors. But as to that we have spared no expense, and had it specially imported. The overflow meeting can stand

Ione March

around anywhere, or go into the bedroom and sit on the bed. But I present to you this remarkable table. Do look at that table! Now at this little table the greatest works of the century are going to be written. And up there on the wall is where the tablet is to be placed in after years by the 'Society for the Commemoration of Famous Men.' Gracious, what a nice article it will make! I think you must write it up now, Keith, and send it to the *Red Magazine*. Just fancy, the lovely chapter headings, 'So happy and so poor!' 'The Struggles of Genjus'; 'He Sleeps in the Scullery'; 'He Red-bricks the Lobby Tiles!' 'He Sweeps the Front Steps while his Wife goes to the Bake-house for the Four-pound Cottage Loaf, and Rows the Baker if it ain't properly riz!' That's rather long, but the rest are all right!

"Now," continued Ione, after they had seen thing upstairs and down. "You've all got to go home, for Keith and I are going on our wedding-trip. It would n't be nice of you to come along. It is in a 'bus all the way to the British Museum, where I am going to watch Keith look up some stuff to help along the master-piece of fiction we are going to begin to-morrow at nine sharp."

But when the mistress of the house said good-bye to her guests at the door, some of the latter were perilously near tears, and even Idalia grew distinctly pathetic. Ione, however, waved her hand gaily, and cried as a last word, "Say, folks, has n't this been the nicest wedding you were ever at? I think so, and Keith — well, he'd better think so, too!"

Yet, when Harford closed the door and turned to kiss his wife for the first time in their own home, there were tears in her eyes, and she was swallowing down a hard lump in her throat.

The Nicest Wedding

"Ione," he said anxiously; "what is the matter, dearest? You are tired?"

"Nothing," she said; "only they never put down any red cloth for us at the church door, and there will be no list of the wedding presents in the *Morning Post*. That's why I am crying just the least little bit!"

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CHAPTER XL

SATURDAY NIGHT MARKETING

"IT'S a new sentiment and perilously original," said Ione, one Saturday night as they stood on the step of their cottage; "but I don't think any two people were ever so happy as we are!"

Then Ione tried the handle to see if the door were really locked. Keith, with great content, was carrying the market-basket on his arm, while Ione, with a well-accustomed working housewife's air pocketed the key, and noted that the front window hasp was duly fastened.

"Now," said Ione to her husband, "just deliver up all the coppers. I can't have you tipping the tram conductors and butcher's salesmen as you did last Saturday. It's very bad for their morals. Besides which, they think we are rich, and overcharge us promptly. No, sir; you don't! Turn round and let me feel in your ticket pocket! There! I knew it! Reptile, you were concealing all of threepence halfpenny from your legally married wife! Just think of the incalculable harm you might have done with that threepence halfpenny! Ain't you shamed?"

They were going slowly riverwards as she talked. "Now," she continued, for Keith was too busy watching her to speak, too proud and happy also; "I think we shall get some lovely bargains along Paul's Road. I saw the loveliest scrubbing-brushes, only fivepence farthing each for cash at a shop up near the World's End." So with little money in their pockets, but much happiness in their hearts, they went along the crowded

Saturday Night Marketing

bustling streets shoulder to shoulder like the good comrades they were.

"What nice inkstands!" cried Ione presently; "and what a lovely blotter! Why, it's only elevenpence. Keith! I can't resist that! Your birthday is not for three months yet, but I tell you what, I'll give you these and a fender for a birthday present."

"Thank you, dearest," said Keith meekly. "And while I think of it, I'll buy you a pipe-rack, and a pound tin of 'Golden Rose Mixture' for your birthday! Then we shall be quits!"

"Do, dear," returned Ione promptly; "that will be so nice. I know a shop where they trade tobacco for beautiful toilet soap. Yes, and hairpins, or almost anything. And then, you know, there's always our dear Uncle just over the way!"

The woman in the brush shop was kind-hearted and sympathetic, and as they edged their way in between the serried walls of bright tin-plate kitchen utensils she smiled down on them, and exclaimed, "Out of the way, Johnny," to a grubby but happy child of three, who was playing with a sorely stricken go-cart or rather won't-go-cart) right in the fair-way of traffic.

Keith and Ione left the shop poorer by two shillings and threepence, but Keith's basket was heavier by a writing apparatus, a paint can, a ball of twine, a scrubbing brush, a paste-pot, and a pair of strong scissors.

Next they came to a part of the street which had been turned into an open-air market. Shopmen were standing at doors lighted by a strong flare of gas hissing and blowing above the glassless window. Each was vociferating more loudly than the other, and holding up pieces of rather purplish beef and dim-coloured suet.

"Prime beef, fourpence halfpenny a pound! Cheaper than the beast can be bought for in Australy, ma'am!

Ione March

Going at an enormous sacrifice, it being Saturday night!"

"Don't look quite so hungry, Keith," said Ione; "or the man will certainly throw it at us as a present. And we are ever so much too high-toned for that! Besides, we are going to buy *our* Sunday beef farther on at a shop which does not advertise by human lung power, and which disposes of all its left-over stuff to a respectable cat's-meat man. There's going to be nothing second-class about us — now that Forgan has paid up."

So in due time they bought beef. They loaded their basket with vegetables. A turnip came next, then parsnips, and last of all, a delightful baby cauliflower.

"No; not onions, Keith," said Ione decisively. "Onion is — well — bad for the complexion, so, at least, I've always heard!"

At a large shop near the Albert Bridge they bought creamy curtains for the "orielette," as Ione persisted in calling the small bay window of their home, because it was not yet a grown-up oriel.

"No sage-green and dusty crimson for you and me, Keith," she said; "but plain lace curtains that fall straight down, only cream-coloured, because of the smuts! We are working-folk, and I'm going to have a working-man's window curtains."

The lace curtains were wrapped in paper and laid on top of the vegetables, it must be confessed, somewhat to Keith's secret relief.

Presently they turned homeward, the cries of the vendors echoing emptily after them. Keith had never felt so strong in his life, nor yet so happy. Even the Matterhorn, he thought, would scarcely be a breather to him now.

Presently they were attracted by a little crowd at a shop where silver plate sparkled at the window.

Saturday Night Marketing

"Come on, Keith," his wife said, "let's look! As Seth would say, this is as good as a free lunch, with crackers. We can't afford to go to the theatre, so let us see all the sights we can for nothing."

It was indeed a marvellous exhibition for the district — plated spoons, no two the same; claret jugs, in a region which drank only beer; sugar tongs, where all used, in continental fashion, their fingers, or else contented themselves with brown sugar dug out of a paper-bag with a spoon.

Keith was specially attracted by a lemon-squeezer. It was most ingenious. He returned again and again to it, marvelling at the simplicity of its mechanism. He would have gone in and looked at it, but Ione waxed anxious for the remaining shillings in her purse.

"Better pay last quarter's rent and settle with the gas collector before you think of buying lemon-squeezers!" she said, loud enough for the little crowd about the window to hear. These all turned round and stared indignantly at the spendthrift husband who had made such a rash suggestion.

Keith stalked away from the window with a most haughty expression on his face, and Ione walked beside him in demure pretended penitence for having uttered such an unseemly speech.

But they made it up presently. At the dark part of Ely Street she took tight hold of his arm.

"Are you very cross?" she whispered; "you see I had to get you away, or you would have spent all my money. And you know we don't need to squeeze a lemon once a year."

When they were on their doorstep, she turned to her husband again.

"Keith, dear," she said, "I never was so happy in

Ione March

my life. I just did n't begin to know before what happiness meant!"

"Nor I," said Keith devoutly, setting down the market basket within the open door, and kissing his wife before they turned up the gas, which somehow gave it the flavour of stolen waters.

But Ione said to herself, "And there are still thirteen months like these two!"

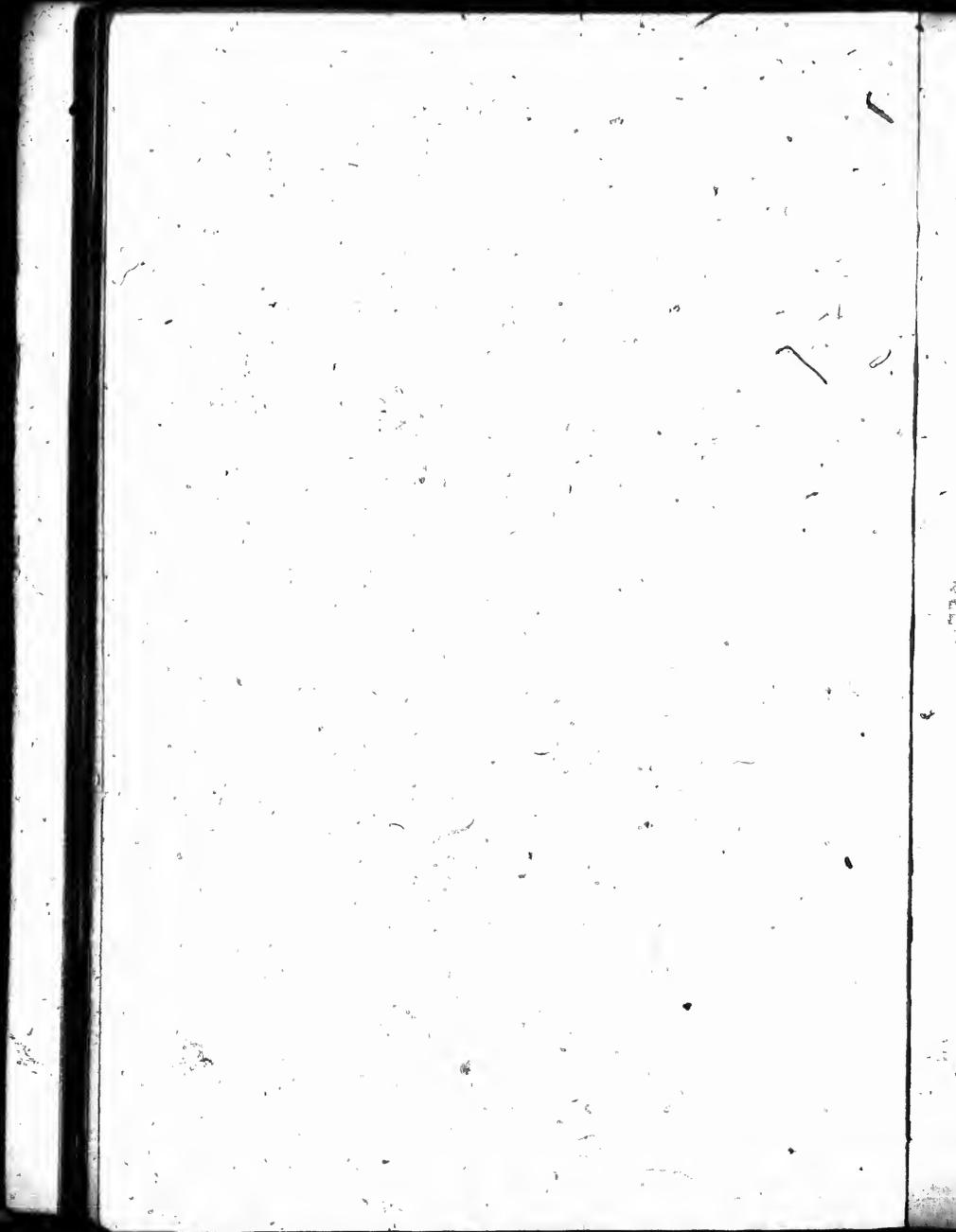
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"STOLE ON TIP-TOE TO THE BEDSIDE."



CHAPTER XLI

NOT DEATH, BUT LIFE

IT was the dull and sullen daybreak of a snowy March morning more than a year after Ione's marriage. She had lain long awake leaning upon her elbow, looking down through the chill grey dawn of a London morning at her sleeping husband. Sobs, half suppressed, convulsed her frame.

"Oh, my lad! my lad!" she whispered over and over to herself. "How will you bear it?"

Keith Harford slumbered peacefully, with a happy smile on his lips, his dark hair falling across his brow.

"I can't tell him! I can't! I can't! At least, I will let him sleep a little while first. There is no use going to the doctor so early. Besides, he must have worked very late last night to have finished all that copy."

And, slipping into her dressing-gown, with the quick expert method of the private secretary she arranged the tumbled pile of manuscript, which lay about the floor as it had dropped, sheet by sheet, from her husband's hands. She went on to correct slips in spelling, and to insert synonyms in place of duplicated verbs and adjectives. She examined the tops and bottoms of the pages for connecting words. And when at last she had got the whole to her mind, she ran a brass clip through the left-hand top corner before finally numbering the sheets and putting them into one of the long blue envelopes used by the literary contributors of all self-respecting magazines.

Then, after a long look at the sleeping man, she stole on tiptoe to the bedside and kissed his forehead softly.



Ione March

Keith stirred, moaned a little contentedly, half opened his eyes, murmured "Ione," and then went back to sleep again like a child.

The tears stole warm and soft down the girl's cheek as she looked at her husband, but she had stilled her sobbing at the first unconscious movement.

"It will be very hard for him," she said, low to herself. "It will almost kill my lad, if it is to be as the doctor said. Dear Keith, at least I have guided him through the worst, past the Slough of Despond. He has made his reputation, and even jealousy cannot take that away from him now. His position is secured. And I — well, I think he will not forget me. He will go on loving me, his wife, to the end.

"He is not the man to love twice. And besides — why should I mourn? Have I not lived through such a year of perfect happiness as no woman ever had. Gladly and proudly would I barter my life for it, were it all to do over again! We have known love and poverty and the beginning of success together, he and I. It is not given to men and women to be happier than that. And no one helped him in his trouble, but I alone. Is not that enough?"

With a glance at the clock she bent to awake the sleeper, but again refrained, retracting her hand after it had touched his shoulder.

"My bairn," she murmured very pityingly, "you can walk alone now. And though you will miss me — sorely, sadly, in dreary days and lonely nights, I think you will not be quite broken down. The memory of our love will uphold you!"

Keith turned on the pillow and murmured some lightest tendernesses, smiling as he did so. Hearing his voice Ione stole farther away and drew the curtains closer. Noiselessly she placed a tea-making apparatus,

Not Death, but Life

a box of matches, a plate of bread and butter, fresh cut and covered with a napkin, all on a little round table by his bedside. Then, sitting down at his desk, she scribbled a hasty note.

"Dearest," (she wrote) "I am going out for an hour, and you were sleeping so soundly that I had not the heart to disturb you after your hard work. Be sure you make your tea when you wake. The bread is under the cloth to keep it moist. I have corrected the copy and shall post it on my way to town. So that is all right. I kissed you before I went. — IONE."

Then by the bedside the young girl kneeled down for full five minutes with her brow against the pillow, and the tired man's regular breathing faintly stirred her hair.

After that she stole out on tiptoe, closing the door behind her.

She took her way to Brook Street, where she had made a second appointment with Sir Everard Torrance. In a little while her allotted span of fifteen months would be ended, and though it was hard to part with life just when it had grown so dear, yet she felt that in a measure she had made a bargain at barter or exchange with God. She had accepted a year of happiness for herself, crowned with success for her beloved — in exchange for her life. And Ione was far too brave a girl to draw back from suffering, or even death.

Yet she could not convince herself that she felt conspicuously worse. Indeed, some of the old dizzy symptoms came to her far less frequently, and though she tired more easily, it seemed strange and impossible that she should be going about under sentence of death, when she was looking only a little paler than the crowd of healthy people about her. Indeed, the ivory transparent pallor of her skin of a year ago had disappeared

Ione March

and left only a clear and living brown in its place, so that her husband often called her his Nut-Brown Maid—and she named herself “Massa Keith’s Niggah Lady.”

In the great formal house in Brook Street, Sir Everard was waiting to receive her. Ione had never visited him in the interval, and had contented herself with taking the arsenic which he had prescribed at less and less frequent intervals, for there had grown up within her a firm conviction of the uselessness of medicine. So it was no wonder that the busy, harassed physician did not recognise the daughter of his old friend Governor March, under the unknown style and title of Mrs. Keith Harford. For she had sent up one of her husband’s cards with only the addition of an “s” added in manuscript.

But when Sir Everard recognised her he came forward with a grave face and looked into her eyes.

“My poor girl,” he said, “why did you never come back to see me?”

“Because I did not wish to trouble you when I knew you could do nothing for me!”

“You are married?” he said, touching the card and looking fixedly at her.

“I was married three or four days after I saw you!” she answered.

“And you told your husband what I told you?”

Ione shook her head, smiling a strange pale smile, which left her eyes dead and sorrowful.

“Not even this morning when I was coming back to see you. I have had my year of joy. I have done my appointed work. And now—now—well, there remains no more than just to say, ‘Goodnight.’”

But in the meantime Sir Everard had been attentively observing Ione’s complexion, the red that went and

Not Death, but Life

came through the clear brown of her cheek. Gently he turned her face about, and examined the white of her eye in the pale winter sunlight. As he looked he seemed to grow more and more astonished.

"The colour is natural — the adipose tissue healthy!" he murmured, as after a pause for examination, he settled once more the tell-tale speck of liquid red under his microscope. Ione watched him a little languidly, waiting quietly for the form to be over. The sentence had long been pronounced. She had acquiesced in her fate, and now she was ready. After five minutes the Doctor rose from his observing stool by the window. He appeared to be labouring under great excitement. He paced the room with his hands behind him, muttering to himself.

"What if my diagnosis were wrong? What if it were not 'Pernicious Anæmia' after all? Yet I was never wrong in my judgment of a case before. Pray God, I may be this time!"

He faced his patient again, almost fiercely.

"Take off your jacket!" he commanded abruptly; "I must go thoroughly into this!"

The smooth professional hand of Sir Everard Torrance trembled and his eyes were suffused with joy, as, this time of his own accord, he helped Ione on with her coat. And as he pushed home the last rebellious shoulder flounce, he bent quickly and kissed her on the brow.

"My dear," he said, "I am an old man. I have seen much sorrow in this world, and some joy. But I never was happier in fifty years of practice than I am to tell you to-day that Love has conquered Science — yes, beaten it clean off the field. At the end of the span of time which I, in my ignorance, set for you, you may confidently look not for Death — but for Life — for the

Ione March

sacred mystery of another new Life to be born into the world!"

When Ione came in, her husband rose to greet her from the table at which he had been writing. But Keith Harford stood transfixed as Ione appeared in the doorway, fairly transfigured by the sudden mighty joy within her soul. Her eyes were misty and glorious, shining by their own inner light. Her lips were red and parted. Her bosom heaved, and her whole slight figure seemed suddenly to have grown fuller, riper, more womanly. And, indeed, this might well be, for the yearlong dread had been removed, and she who had been under sentence of death, was now beating from head to heel with the passionate pulse of a new and more perfect Womanhood.

"What has happened, Ione? What have you been doing?" said Keith, speaking anxiously and tenderly, as he flung down his pen and came quickly towards her.

She spread out her arms gropingly as if she could not see him clearly, for indeed his image seemed to waver before her. He caught her just in time to keep her from falling.

"My husband, my husband," she sobbed, through burning tears, "I went out to bring you back sorrow and Death. And instead I have brought you back Life and Joy!—Yes—and God's own promise to men and women who love one another!"

THE END

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