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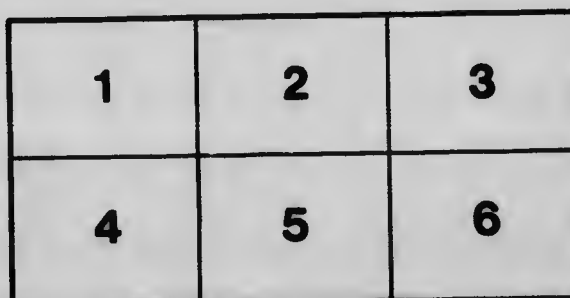
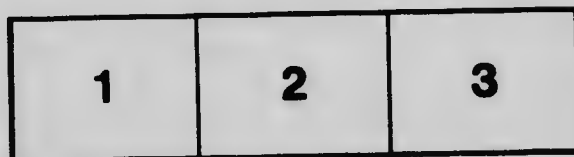
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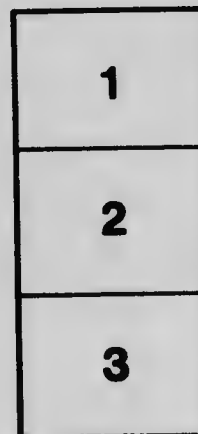
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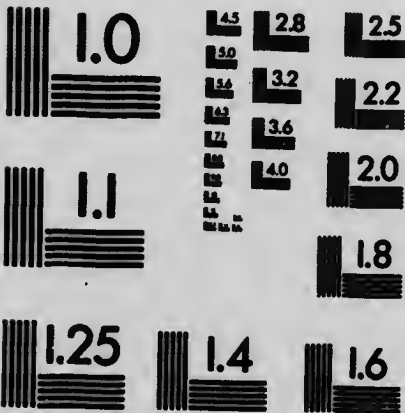
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THE CRICKET

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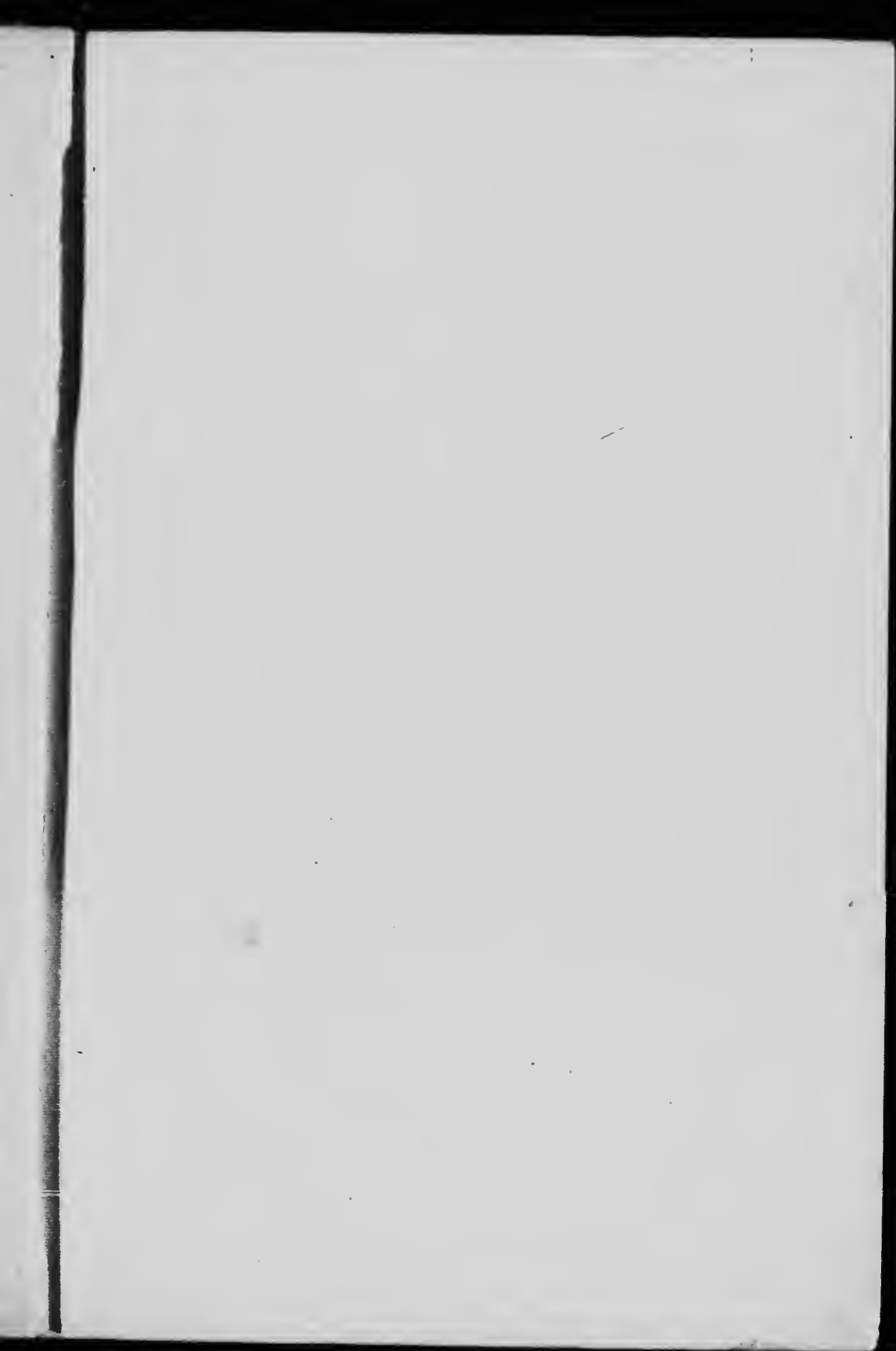
CINDERELLA JANE

"DR. DAVID"

THE DUAL ALLIANCE

THE GIRL WHO LIVED IN THE WOODS

THE THRESHOLD





"What do you mean by acting like this when I give you a birthday party? . . . All the children in the colony are asked to come and play with you, and you make a monkey of yourself"

THE CRICKET

BY
MARJORIE BENTON COOKE



ILLUSTRATED BY
J. SCOTT WILLIAMS

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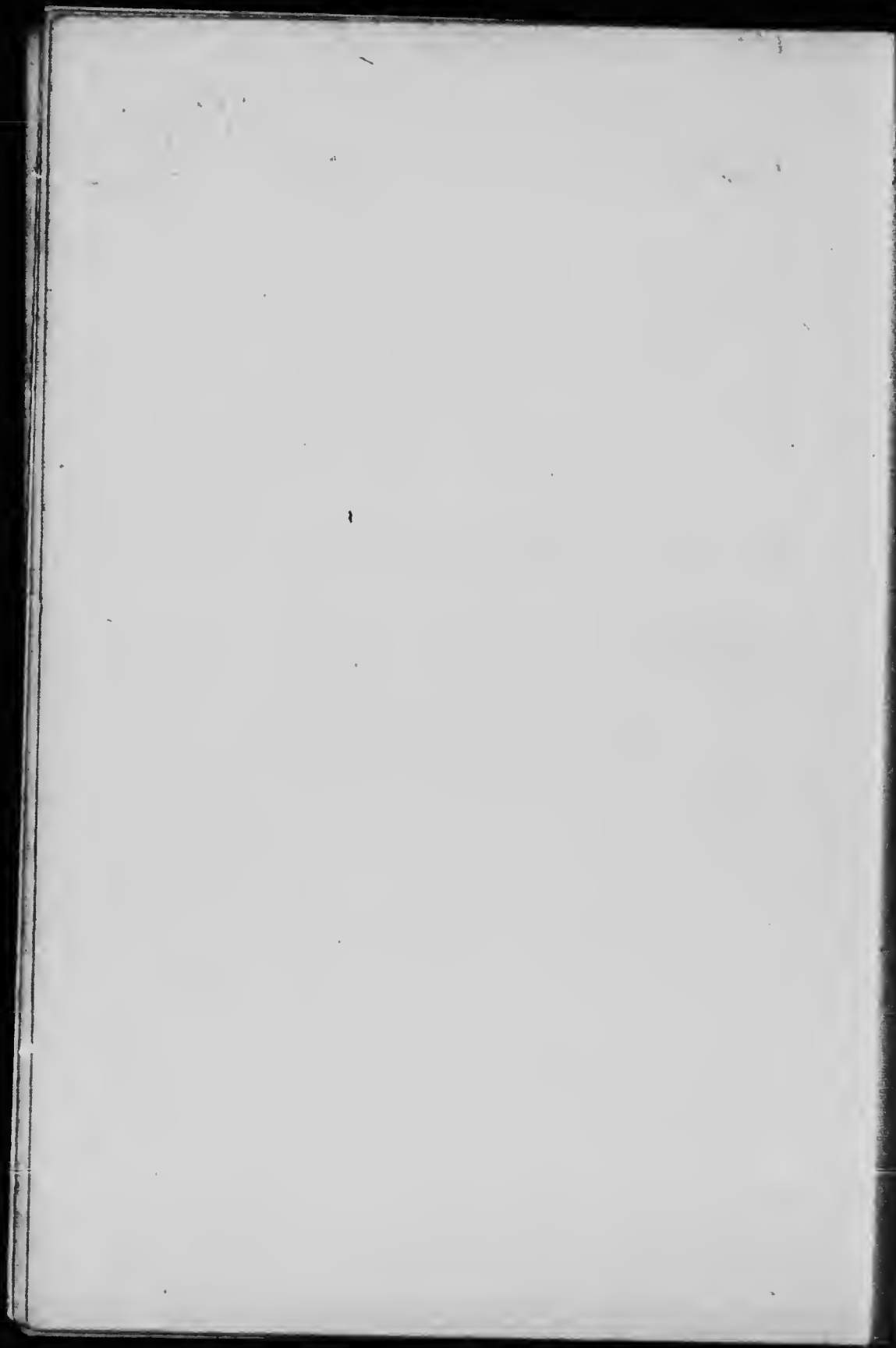
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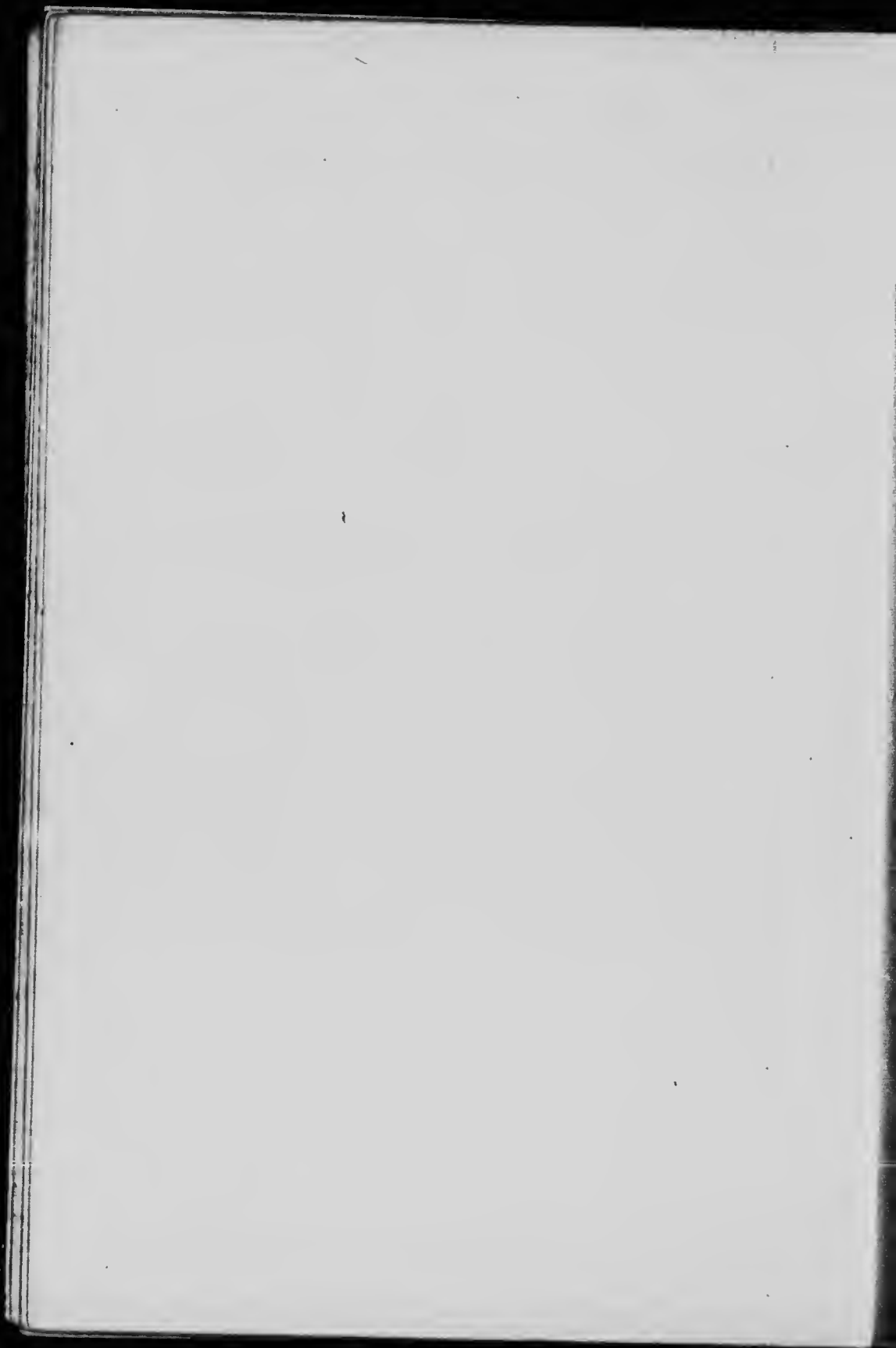
She watched Jerry and Althea pacing the deck
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THE CRICKET



THE CRICKET

CHAPTER ONE

I WON'T have it! I won't have it! If they come, I'll run away and hide!" shouted the child, wildly.

"That will be very rude. No one acts like that—no one except a barbarian," said Miss Wilder, calmly.

"I want to be a bar—one of those things you said."

"You act like one most of the time."

The child brain caught at a new idea.

"What is that—that what you said?"

"Barbarian? B-a-r-b-a-r-i-a-n," she spelled slowly. "It is a savage creature with no manners, no morals, no clothes even. It lives in a hut or a tree, and eats roots and nuts, and nearly raw meat," Miss Wilder remarked, none too accurately, but slowly, in order to distract Isabelle's attention from the late subject of unpleasantness. The little girl considered her words thoughtfully.

"Do they have children?"

"Yes."

"Where do they live?"

"Oh, strange places; Fiji Islands, for one."

"Are there any near here?"

"Not that I know of."

"I want to go live with the bar-barbarians."

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Miss Wilder's stern face underwent no change. She answered seriously:

"You would not like it; you would be very uncomfortable. The children have no pretty clothes, no nice homes with gardens to play in, no kind parents or patient teachers."

"Do they have horses?"

"I suppose so."

"Do they swim?"

"Probably. They have rude boats called dug-outs," continued Miss Wilder, glad of an absorbing subject.

"Do the children go in the boats?"

"No doubt."

"They can't get their clothes spoiled if they don't wear any."

"Obviously. Come, now, Isabelle, put on your dress like a nice girl. The children will be coming to the party, and you won't be dressed."

"I *won't* put on that dress, and I'm *not* going to the party, I tell you; I *hate* them."

Miss Wilder tried force, but in vain. She tried strategy, with no results. Isabelle wriggled out of her grasp and darted out of the room. Miss Wilder called; no reply. She commanded; no answer. Then she closed her lips more firmly and betook herself to the door of Mrs. Bryce's room.

"What is it? I told you not to bother me," an irritated voice called, at her knock.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Bryce, but Isabelle refuses to be dressed for the party. She says she won't go."

"Come in," called the voice.

The governess opened the door and entered. It was a hot day, and Mrs. Bryce, in a cool *négligé*, lay stretched out on a *chaise longue*, with a pitcher of something iced beside her, a book open on her lap. She was the picture of luxurious comfort, except for the frown upon her pretty brow.

"Why don't you make her behave, Miss Wilder?"

"I do my best, Mrs. Bryce, but she is very difficult," the older woman sighed.

"Of course she's difficult—she's a brat! But that is what I have you for, to teach her some manners, and make her act like a civilized being. Where is she?"

"She ran away when I tried to put her dress on her."

"What do you expect me to do about it?"

"I thought you might order her to get dressed."

"Much good it would do! I don't see why I have to be bothered with it. I didn't want the party; it's a perfect nuisance, cluttering up the place with noisy kids; but she owes it to them, and she has to have them here once a season."

A small, determined figure appeared at the door, in a brief petticoat and socks.

"I won't go to that party," she announced.

"Come here to me this instant," exploded her mother at sight of her.

The child walked slowly to her mother's side, with disconcerting dignity, all out of proportion to her four brief years.

"What do you mean by acting like this when I give

you a birthday party? There is everything on earth ordered to eat, and all the children in the colony are asked to come and play with you, and you make a monkey of yourself."

"I won't go."

"Why won't you go?"

"You didn't ask Patsy."

"You can't ask that common little Irishman to a party," objected her parent.

"I won't go. He's my friend. I like him best, an' if he don't come, I won't go."

"But it's *your* party——"

"I hate 'em."

"You ought to whip her!" Mrs. Bryce said to the governess.

A maid appeared at the door to announce the first arrivals.

"Now, you see, your guests are coming, and you aren't even dressed."

"I won't go," reiterated the child, sullenly.

"If we ask Patsy, will you go?" asked Mrs. Bryce desperately.

"No—o; yes."

"Put on her clothes, Miss Wilder, and telephone the Lodge that Isabelle wants Patsy for her party."

"But, Mrs. Bryce, do you think we ought to humour her? Will not the children's mothers object to Patsy?"

"Well, if you want her to go to this party, you'd better make a bargain with her. I know her."

"Come on. Hurry up, Miss Wilder; I want to go after

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Patsy myself," cried the tyrant, racing down the hall.

Miss Wilder followed, and Mrs. Bryce turned to her book, with a sense of irritated futility which her only child always aroused in her. But the party soon faded from her mind, save when shrill shouts from the lawn below caught her attention.

Eventually Mr. Walter Bryce, familiarly known as Wally, appeared at his wife's door. He was an undersized, dapper little man, with almost no chin. His sole claim to attention lay in the millions accumulated by his father.

"Nice row you've got on down stairs," he remarked.

"Isabelle's birthday party," yawned his wife.

"Looks to me like poor old Wilder's birthday party. Just as I came along, a line of kids was marching up to give their hostess their presents. Old Wilder was hanging on to Isabelle so she wouldn't bolt, and the little beast wouldn't take one of the packages. Said she didn't want their presents. The poor Wilder appealed to me, and I told Isabelle to act like a lady, and whadye think she said to me—right there before all those smart-aleck kids?—'Get out, Wally, this is my party'!"

Mrs. Bryce laughed.

"You ought to know better than to give her a chance like that."

"Look here now, Max, she's got to be attended to. She's the limit. She's got no more manners than an alley cat."

"That's no news to me, Wally."

"Why don't you do something about it?"

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"Do something? Don't I get her a new governess every month? Nobody can do anything with her."

"I don't see where she gets it," said Wally.

"She gets it from you, and she gets it from me. She's the worst of both of us personified."

"Poor kid, that's tough luck for her"—seriously.

"A little late for vain regrets"—sarcastically.

He went over to the window and looked down at the party scattered about below.

"Why wouldn't it be a good idea to keep her with you awhile every day, Max?"

"Not much! I come down here to rest, not to play nursemaid. You might take her round with you, if you feel that she needs uplifting."

"She's beyond me. I don't understand her; and, on the whole, I don't like her."

"Nobody likes her; she's *queer*. And plain; my word, why do you suppose I had to have a child that looks like that? She hasn't one good point."

"Um—she's got eyes."

"Great big goopy eyes too big for her head! This parent business is too much of a gamble. If you could go pick out a nice blue-eyed, pink-and-white, ready-made infant——"

"I suppose you should have picked out a pink-and-white ready-made husband, if you wanted that kind," Wally interposed.

"Well, I never would have picked out Isabelle."

"After all, you're her mother, Max," he began.

"Look here, Wally, don't begin on that mother stuff.

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I didn't want her any more than you did, and we were fools to have her. That may be abnormal, unnatural, and all the rest of it, but it's the truth, and there are lots of other women just like me. You can't lump us, any more than you can lump men. We don't all of us have the maternal instinct, not by a long shot."

"Don't talk like that, Max; it's not nice."

"There you go. It's all right for you not to want a child, but it's indecent in me. That's a man-made idea, and it won't work any more. Lots of us don't find motherhood either satisfying or interesting, and we're getting courage enough to say so."

"The less you say about it, the better," counselled Wally.

"To get back to Isabelle, she's here, and she's just as much your responsibility as she is mine."

"Being here isn't her fault, poor kid. Seems as if somebody ought to—well—love her," he finished in embarrassment.

"Go ahead. I've no objection."

Mrs. Bryce returned to her book.

"By Jove, Max, you're hard as rocks."

"Oh, get out, Wally. I'm not interested in your conversation. Go liven up the party."

"Why don't you try a younger governess, for a change?" he went on, undeterred. "Wilder is so old and sort of set."

Mrs. Bryce closed her book with irritated finality.

"Wally, I will give you a chance at running our darling child for the rest of this summer. I declare a strike! You get her governesses, you donate your society to her.

You've got nothing to do. She may keep you out of mischief."

"Oh, I say, I don't want to butt in, I only thought——"

"She's yours. I'm through until September first."

There was an uproar from below, louder than before. Wally looked out.

"I wonder what they're up to," he said.

A maid, red and flustered, appeared at the door.

"Oh, Mrs. Bryce, please come down to the party. Isabelle ran away with Patsy and we've just found her."

Mrs. Bryce, oblivious of her costume, followed Mr. Bryce and the maid down the stairs, as fast as possible. Evidently a crisis had occurred below. All the girls in their white dresses and pink or blue sashes, all the boys in their white collars of ceremony, were grouped about on the lawn, around the base of a big shade tree. Pink hair bows were a-flutter with excitement. The patent leather pumps of the boys trod upon the white slippers of the little girls in their efforts to see what was happening.

At the foot of the tree stood Miss Wilder red and tired, speaking sternly to some one overhead. Mr. and Mrs. Bryce rushed to join her, brushing children aside.

"What is the matter, Miss Wilder?" demanded Mrs. Bryce.

"Oh, Mrs. Bryce, she's—she's——"

"Isabelle Bryce, come down here this moment," commanded her mother, loudly.

There was a whispered colloquy overhead, among the branches.

"That wretched Patsy is with her," wailed Miss Wilder.

"They ran away, and hid for hours, and then we found them up here."

"Isabelle!" shouted her father.

"All right. We're going to drop," said a voice from above.

Suddenly two white and shining little bodies hung side by side from a limb, then two naked youngsters dropped into the midst of the astounded party.

"Isabelle Bryce!" gasped her mother.

"We're playing barbarian," said Isabelle, coolly; "Miss Wilder told me about them."

"Miss Wilder!" protested Wally.

"But I didn't—I mean—I—"

"You said they lived in trees and never wore clothes." The children began to titter.

"This is your affair, I believe, Wally," remarked Mrs. Bryce, and she walked in a leisurely way into the house.

"Oh, I say," he called after her; then: "Get her indoors, will you? Who's the boy?"

"The gardener's child, Patsy."

"Where are your clothes?" he demanded.

"Up in the tree, sorr," said the boy.

"Get them, and cut home," said Wally, severely.

Patsy obeyed, but Isabelle resisted force. "I won't hurry and I won't be carried, I'll walk," said she, and—properly clad in her "birthday clothes"—Isabelle Bryce disposed of her first party!

CHAPTER TWO

FOLLOWING upon the exit of his daughter came the realization to Wally that something must be done about the "party." He turned to the group of children, huddled together in horror, like butterflies in a rain storm. Serious and large-eyed, they focussed their attention upon him, in the apparent belief that, being a parent, he would be able to handle this unprecedented situation. They ranged in age from three to six; they were the children of his neighbours and life-long associates; and yet Wally had the feeling that he was hemmed in by a pack of alert, curious little animals.

"Well, children," he managed to say, "I'm sorry that Isabelle was such a naughty girl at her own party, but she is only four years old, we must remember, and I suppose she did not know any better."

'I'm free an' a half, an' I don't take off my clothes at a party," bragged one of the female infants.

"No, I'm sure you don't. It isn't done," said Wally, helplessly.

"She always spoils parties. I wanted not to have her at mine, but mother made me," remarked Tommy Page.

"Hard luck, old man," said Wally.

"She always wants to boss everything," Margie Hunter complained.

"Are you going to whip her?" demanded another child.

"She will be punished, believe me," replied Wally, firmly. "But I think we'd better call the party over."

"We can't go yet, the nurses and chauffeurs haven't come," Tommy protested. "I'd like to hear her yell when she's licked."

"Our man will take you all home in the big station wagon, so get on your hats," Wally ordered.

Fifteen minutes later the smallest child was packed in, with one of the maids in command, and the motor slid off down the drive, leaving Wally on the door step.

"Little beasts!" he remarked, feelingly.

In the hall he met Miss Wilder, still bearing marks of the late excitement.

"I have put Isabelle to bed, Mr. Bryce. Mrs. Bryce says that you are to prescribe her punishment."

Wally looked his misery.

"I don't want to punish her. Can't you manage it alone?" he said.

"No, I cannot. Isabelle needs the authority of her parents now and then to back me up," said Miss Wilder, severely.

"Well, I'll have a talk with her."

"I think a severe spanking is what she needs."

"What do ye suppose ever put such an idea in her head?"

"You never know what she is going to do. She asked me about barbarians when I was trying to induce her to get dressed for the party. I told her some facts, just to occupy her mind."

"It occupied her mind all right," laughed Wally, who

left Miss Wilder with the idea that he thought the joke was at her expense. She determined to give notice at once, and leave at the end of her month.

Wally went upstairs and turned his unaccustomed feet into the nursery. He hesitated before he opened the door, but no sounds of repentant jobs met his ear, so he went in. Isabelle, the picture of alert interest, sat up in bed and eyed him.

"Have you come to punish me?" she asked.

"Something like that."

"Go ahead," said she.

He sat down on the edge of her bed and looked at her. Max was right; she was no prize beauty, with her baby face like an old woman's, with her nondescript features, her short brown hair. But her eyes were disturbing—big dusky, wise eyes, with no effect of childishness.

"Look here, Isabelle, why do you act like this?" That was regular parent-talk, so she made no answer.

"Here you are, four years old, and you can't behave at your own party," he continued.

"I hate parties."

"Well, but you have to have parties."

"Why?"

"Oh, all children do."

"Nasty things! I hate 'em all, except Patsy."

"Hate those nice little girls?"

"Yes!"—hotly.

"And those handsome boys?"

"Yes. They're ugly. Patsy is handsome."

"Why are you so crazy about this Patsy?"

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"Because he always does what I say." Wally stifled a smile.

"But don't you know you mustn't take off your clothes before mixed company?"

"But we were playing barbarian."

"Well, you shouldn't play that kind of game."

"Why not?"

"Because——" He floundered. "Now, look here, you must never take off your clothes again."

"Not when I go to bed?"—with interest.

"I mean before people."

"Not before Miss Wilder, or Mary?"

"Don't be stupid," he exploded. "You know what I mean—before boys and girls."

"Why not?"

"Because it isn't nice. Don't you know what modesty is?"

"No; what is it?"

"It's—it's—well, it's just that you mustn't show your body to people."

"Isn't my face my body?"

"That's different. Everybody shows his face." She considered that.

"If everybody showed their bodies it would be nice, wouldn't it?"

"No," Wally said, harshly, because he felt she was making a fool of him.

"But the barbarians never wore any clothes, and they were nice."

"That's different. They didn't know any better."

"Didn't they? Why didn't God tell them any better?"

"I don't know."

"Did Jesus wear clothes?" she inquired.

"Who?" he demanded, caught unawares.

"Jesus. You know, God's boy," she replied, earnestly.

"Of course he wore clothes," Wally protested.

"Why didn't he tell the barbarians?"

"O Lord, I don't know. This has got nothing to do with your performance this afternoon," Wally urged, trying to get back to the subject and on to solid ground.

"What kind of punishing are you going to do?" she inquired.

"I don't know," he admitted. "What do you think I ought to do?"

She thought about that with awakened interest.

"There's whipping, but I don't mind that."

"You don't?"

"No. There's shutting up, but that's fun. I play I'm a prisoner then."

"Are there any punishments you don't like?"

"Yes. Parties are punishment, and kindiegarden in winter is punishment."

"You think the party this afternoon was punishment, do you?"

"Yes."

"Who punished you?"

"Max."

"I wish you wouldn't call your mother 'Max.'"

"Why not?"

"Why do you call her that?"

"Because you do."

"I don't have to be respectful to her—I mean——"

"If you call her that, I'm going to," she said, dismissing that subject.

"You're being punished now, you know, being sent off to bed in broad daylight."

"But I like it, when you talk to me."

He rose promptly.

"I'm not going to talk to you. Your punishment is that nobody will talk to you for the rest of the day."

"All right"—cheerfully.

"You'll just lie here, all alone."

"Oh, no," she corrected him, "my playmates will be here, and God's always around."

"No playmates shall come in here," he reiterated.

"But you can't keep Dorothy and Reginald out, because they're just pretend," she defied him.

Wally knew he was beaten. He had never felt so futile in his life. She sat there with her straight little back, her wise eyes fixed on him, and he wished he were well out of the room.

"I hope you will lie here and think of what I have said to you," he remarked sonorously. "I'm surprised at you, Isabelle," he added sternly.

He rose and hurried toward the door.

"Good night, Wally," she said pleasantly, and smiled at him.

It is not too much to say that Wally fled. He sought out his wife, who was dressing for dinner.

"Well, did you whip her?" she inquired.

He evaded that.

"I've had a good talk with her"—firmly.

She turned her face over her shoulder at him, and laughed.

"Terrified her, no doubt."

"Where on earth does she get her ideas?"

"Not from me,—” indifferently.

"She's—she's uncanny, that kid."

"Hurry and dress, we're dining at the club. I wish you the joy of your job," she added, as he left her.

A day or two later, when Wally came out of the bath house on the way to swim, he encountered his daughter on the beach.

"I'll swim with you, Wally," she said.

"No, thanks. I'm going to the raft."

"So am I," she answered.

He looked at her and laughed. She looked like a Kewpie in her abbreviated bathing suit, with water wings fastened to her back. She walked rapidly into the sea, and, perforce, he followed. Miss Wilder shouted orders in vain from the shore. The tide was running in, and nearly high, so she was over her depth in a second, but she paddled out toward the distant raft, her head well out of the water, thanks to her wings. Much amused, Wally swam beside her into deep water.

"It was a great surprise to me, the day I found I could swim," she said.

"It must have been," he laughed.

"It was a pleasant day," she added.

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"It is deep here," he said, to test her.

"I know it. Don't you put your hands on me, Wally. I don't want to be touched," she admonished him.

"Aren't you afraid?"

"No."

In due time they reached the raft. The youngster was winded, but undaunted. Bryce watched her with real admiration. Here was a dare-devil courage he vastly respected. He was timid and cautious himself.

"Throw me off the raft, Wally; I like to splash," she ordered.

"You're crazy," he said.

"No. Mr. Page threw me off the club raft, when I asked him to."

"Better not let me catch him at it. You sit still and get your breath and then we'll start back."

He dived off the raft and instantly she followed him. He caught her by the arm, strangling and coughing.

"You little devil," he said; "you'll drown."

"No, I won't. Let go, Wally; I won't be helped."

He headed her for shore, by pretending to race her, and once on land he urged Miss Wilder to watch her every minute, lest she swim for the raft alone.

But this adventure had fixed Isabelle on her father's mind. He thought about her a good deal, and laughed at the thought. She certainly was a sport, and she was nobody's fool. He wondered if other children were like her, and began to watch them. He asked their fathers about them, but the fathers never knew. They always

said: "I don't see much of the kids; too busy," or: "That's Mabel's job (or Kate's or Mary's)."

He could not seem to remember seeing much of his father when he was a boy, save on state occasions when his parent was called upon to administer extra stiff punishment. He wondered if the other mothers knew more about their youngsters than Max did about hers? But when he asked them at the club, or on the golf course, they looked surprised and said: "I don't know anything about them, Wally; the governess looks after them."

It evidently wasn't the thing, in their set, to bother about children. So he did not get much help from his friends in the difficult situation in which Max had placed him. She stood by her determination to leave the child to him, with irritating completeness. She even refused to give advice or help.

Of course, he could leave well enough alone, let Miss Wilder blunder along with her somehow. That was evidently the way the rest of them did. He had almost decided upon this course, when he met Isabelle, standing on the pony's bare back, making him run, while poor Miss Wilder panted behind, protesting at every step.

It brought him to a resolution. The kid ought to have a younger woman to look after her, one who could swim and ride and take some interest in her sports. If she was going to leap head first into every danger, she needed a girl to stand by, and leap in after her, if necessary.

It took him several days to get up his nerve to dismiss Miss Wilder, but in the end, she met him half way. She said she could not stand the strain, that she had aged ten

years in the two months she had been in charge of his daughter.

"She is a very remarkable child, Mr. Bryce, and she needs very special treatment."

"I suppose that is it. I will give you a month's extra salary, Miss Wilder, so you may take a rest. I know you need it."

The next morning he bustled into Mrs. Bryce's room, where she was taking her breakfast in bed.

"Mercy, Wally, are you sick?" she inquired; "it's barely nine o'clock."

"I've got to go to town."

"Town, this hot day?"

"Yes. I fired old Wilder and I've got to get a new victim for our offspring. Where do you get 'em?"

"Poor Wally," laughed his wife. "I advertise, or go to teachers' agencies, or any old way. Telephone in, and they'll send you something."

"No; I'm going to get a young one."

"And pretty, I suppose."

"Don't be an idiot."

He turned as the door opened and Isabelle came in. She was booted and hatted.

"Good morning, Max," she said, sweetly.

"Morning. Where are you going?"

"To town, with Wally."

"What?"

"Well, I thought I'd better take her. She has to live with 'em, you know, and she has ideas on the subject."

Mrs. Bryce laughed aloud.

"You two!" she exclaimed.

"Come on, Wally," urged Isabelle, taking her father by the hand.

"Which car are you using?" inquired Max.

"She prefers the train," he explained.

This brought another outburst of mirth.

"My word, Wally! You're becoming a wonderful parent!" exclaimed Mrs. Bryce; and they fled before her laughter.

CHAPTER THREE

WALLY was surprised to find the trip to town shorter than usual. His daughter conducted herself with great dignity, and never missed a thing. An unbroken stream of conversation flowed from her lips, to the amusement of the people in the seats near by.

There was one difficult moment, when in hurrying for their seats, Mrs. Page spied them out.

"For goodness sake, Wally, where are you going?"

"Taking Isabelle to town."

"Without a nurse?"

"I have a governess, not a nurse," protested Isabelle, indignantly.

"Oh, excuse me," laughed Mrs. Page. "Where's Max?"

"Home in bed," replied Isabelle, before Wally had formed an excuse.

"I hear your infant introduced an Adam-and-Eve scene into her party," Mrs. Page continued.

Wally glanced anxiously at Isabelle.

"This is Tommy Page's mother," he explained.

"I know. He's a horrid boy," she answered, feelingly.

Mrs. Page retired after this, and Wally undertook to argue with his daughter about unbecoming frankness.

"It's true," she protested.

"You don't have to tell everything you know."

"Don't you have to tell the truth?"

"Not when it hurts people's feelings."

She thought that over, and he wondered what she would make of it. The little monkey seemed to remember every word that was said to her.

"Let's have a punkin coach taxi," she said when they arrived in town.

"What kind is that?"

"All yellow, like the Cinderella one."

"They don't have them at this station."

"Make them get us one," urged the young arrogant.

He laughed and they went out into the street and waited until a yellow taxi came. As they took their seats in the coach, Isabelle gazed at her father speculatively.

"I am Cinderella, an' you've got to be the Fairy Godmother, I s'pose, but you don't look like her."

"Couldn't I be the Prince?" inquired Wally.

"No. Besides, he didn't ride in the coach," she corrected him, scornfully.

They stopped at a drug shop to get a list of agencies, picked at random from the telephone book. The first one was very depressing. There were several governesses, but Isabelle would have none of them, and Wally did not blame her. The second agency offered to summon a dozen candidates if he would come back in two hours. He agreed to that, and made the same arrangement with the third place.

"Now, we've got two hours to kill. What do you want to do?" he inquired.

"I want to go on top the 'bus."

"It's too hot."

"Well, that's what I want to do."

Wally sighed.

"All right, come along," he said, aware of what her determination usually accomplished.

He thought of Max, and felt himself absolutely martyred. This was her job. She was a slacker to put it off on him. In his irritation he glanced down at the cause of it, and found her looking at him.

"Wally, does the hot make you sick?"

"Why?"

"We could go to the Zoo in a taxi."

"Thank you, I should prefer that."

"All right"—cheerfully.

"You're a good old thing!" he remarked, as he called a second coach.

They inspected the animals, and endured the awful smells thereof, with great satisfaction on the part of Isabelle and much self-restraint on the part of her parent.

"Couldn't we have a gorilla out at The Beeches, Wally?" she inquired.

"Lord, no! What do you want of a beast like that?"

"I like them. They're so . . . different!" she said, hesitating over the adjective.

Wally burst out laughing.

"Don't you think they are?" she inquired politely.

"Yes, all of that."

On the way back to the agency, he counselled her on her behaviour.

"Now, don't be fresh, Isabelle, and say, 'I don't like the wart on your nose,' or that kind of thing."

"Do I have to get one with a wart on her nose?" she asked seriously.

"No, no. I mean—don't say the wrong thing all the time."

"But I don't know what is the wrong thing, Wally," she assured him.

"I should say you didn't! You just let me do the talking. If you like the one I'm interviewing, just nod; if you don't, why shake your head. Get me?"

"Like this?"—with neck-breaking violence of the head.

"No—no. Gently, like this."

They seated themselves in the agency room, and the governesses were presented. The usual drab, rather faded women, used to living in the background. Some of them resented Isabelle's presence, some of them spoke to her as to a baby. After about three sentences had been spoken, her head would move violently, and Wally got rid of the candidate.

"Lord! they're a sad lot," he exclaimed.

"What makes them sad?" she inquired.

"Kids like you."

They finished the first consignment without any luck, and went to the second place. It was simply a repetition. Isabelle seemed to sense their adhesion to type, for she finally burst out with:

"Wally, I'd *like* one with a wart on the nose."

He finally approached the woman in charge.

"Look here," he said, "we want a young one, with some pep."

The woman stared in amazement.

"Isn't there some place where the new ones go to register?" he continued.

"You might try the college agencies. Their graduates sometimes try governessing."

She gave him some addresses.

"Thanks. I think we'll try them. My daughter, here, is rather exacting."

The manager peered over her desk at the child, hostilely.

"I don't like you, either," said Isabelle, promptly.

Wally hurried her out. He was about worn out with this unaccustomed and exhausting strain. It had been years since Wally spent a whole day boring himself. His rage at Max grew, and he vented it on Isabelle.

"For God's sake, don't sass the managers! We may have to go back there."

"Does God care?"

"What?"

"You said, 'for God's sake.'"

"Did I? Excuse me. Now go easy this time. We've got to get somebody, and we won't find an archangel, either."

"I'd like an archangel," she remarked earnestly, her flagging interest reviving. "But she couldn't swim with wings, could she?"

Wally groaned, but made no reply. At the college agency, they telephoned for two applicants, and after what seemed to Wally a week of tedium, they arrived.

The first one was pretty and she knew it. She talked a great deal, and was saccharine to the little girl. Isabelle shook her head twice, but Wally seemed hypnotized by the woman's eloquence.

"Don't let her talk, Wally; I won't have her," announced Isabelle.

It took considerable finesse on Wally's part to get this explained and to get the young woman out of the room.

"One more remark from you, like that last one, and I will engage the next hatchet-face that appears," he thundered.

"What is a hatchet-face?" she asked, with interest.

The other girl was tall, and undeniably plain. She was deeply tanned by the sun. She looked athletic, boyish in fact. She had a nice voice, and clear grey eyes. She met Isabelle's inspection with a grin. The child slid off her chair and went over to her.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Ann. Ann Barnes."

"Can you swim?"

"Yes," smiled the girl.

Isabelle took her hand.

"I'll take you," she said.

The girl stared at Wally, who, so far, had made no explanation.

"Is she your child?" she inquired.

"Yes."

"Is her mother dead?"

"No, Max is my mother," explained the youngster.

"You see," said Wally, "Isabelle is a little devil. You might as well know the worst at once. She's got no manners at all, and she's spoiled to death."

"Wally, you don't have to tell everything you know," quoted Isabelle, sharply.

"Upon my word!" said Miss Barnes. "How old is she?"

"She's just had her fourth birthday."

"But she needs a nurse, not a governess."

"I won't have a nurse. I want you."

"She's had a lot of women, mostly old ones. I told Mrs. Bryce I thought she ought to have a young woman with her, and she told me that if I knew so much about it, I could get her a governess myself."

"I see," said Miss Barnes; "and just what do you want her governess to do?"

"Ride and swim with her, and keep her out of mischief. I suppose you would teach her something—letters and counting, and all that?"

"A governess usually does," she smiled.

"You would have full charge of her. We live in the country from April till Thanksgiving, and in town the rest of the time."

"Come on, Ann, let's go; I'm tired," interrupted Isabelle.

"But you aren't letting this baby decide who is to take care of her?" she protested.

"I thought it was better. She gets rid of one a month, so in the end she does decide."

"But it's so absurd."

"We're—we're an absurd family," he admitted, gravely.

"Don't talk, Wally; come on."

"What does she call you?" Miss Barnes inquired.

"Wally. My name is Walter, but every one calls me Wally. She calls her mother Max. We try to break her of it, but we can't."

Miss Barnes shook her head.

"I want to be a governess, you know, not a nurse."

Isabelle realized that a crisis was at hand.

"Sometimes I'm nice, aren't I, Wally?" she appealed.

Miss Barnes could not have told why, but for the first time this abnormal, prissy child, with her self-assurance, and her impertinence, caught at her sympathies. Wally saw that she wavered.

"Suppose that we call it an experiment for a month. I'll pay a hundred dollars a month. Come out with us this afternoon and try it. She's the limit of a kid, but she's got a lot of sense for her age, and maybe she'd be all right if somebody just gave her mind to her."

"I'm willing to try it for a month, if I may have full charge of her. Would her mother agree to that?"

"Oh, Max is never home; besides, she never sees me," spoke up the child.

"She does see you," protested Wally.

Isabelle made no reply, but somehow Miss Barnes caught the situation—the sense of neglect, of the child's loneliness.

"I'll come for a month at the salary you mentioned."

"Good. Can you pack a bag and go out on the 4:10 with us? We'll send you home in a taxi and send for you."

She considered a moment.

"All right."

She rose, explained to the head of the bureau, and later they went out together.

"Wally, when's lunch?" demanded Isabelle.

"Now. We'll send Miss Barnes off in our cab, and pick up another. A cab will come for you at three thirty, Miss Barnes, and we'll meet you at the Information booth."

"I'll be there. Good-bye, Isabelle."

"Good-bye, Ann."

Wally and Isabelle made their way to his club, where she insisted upon all the *verboden* things for lunch.

"Are you allowed to eat that?" he demanded.

"Oh, yes, at parties."

"Don't it make you sick?"

"Yes. You're always sick after parties," she replied.

A man stopped at the table to address a few jocose remarks to Wally, and he turned his glance upon the small girl.

"Who is your beautiful companion, Wally?" he inquired.

"My daughter, Isabelle. This is Duncan, the Club cut-up," he added to his guest.

She inspected the man closely.

"Who cuts you up?" she inquired.

"The other club members," he retorted, followed by laughter and applause from the surrounding tables. Isabelle beamed in the spotlight.

"I like this better than Max's club," she said, to the amusement of the next table.

"Take us on, Wally, will you?" called one of them, and at his invitation they all moved over.

"She doesn't look like her pretty mother, Wally," said one of them after they were presented.

"No, poor kid, she looks like me," laughed Wally.

"I look like Wally, but I'm smart!" she said, and beamed again at their uproar of mirth.

She left, later, amidst reiterated invitations to come again. One man tried to kiss her, but she promptly blocked that.

"I don't like kissing," she said.

Wally inspected her on the way to the station. Her eyes were bright, her colour was high. She certainly had been a success at the club. There was something about the little beggar——"

"I liked those men," she remarked.

"You were too fresh," he said, anxious to prick the bubble of her egotism. She made no answer, but he had the uncomfortable feeling that she knew he had been proud of her.

"If you like this new girl, and want her to stay, you've got to turn over a new leaf," he warned her.

"I haven't any new leaf," she said.

"To turn over a new leaf means to make a new beginning, to be good, to act like a lady," he explained.

They found Miss Barnes waiting for them. As soon as they were in their seats, aboard the train, Isabelle went to sleep, leaning against her new friend. Miss Barnes smiled, made the child comfortable, and opened a magazine, thus relieving Wally of any necessity of conversation.

As they drove up to the house, they saw Mrs. Bryce come out on the terrace, where the butler was arranging the tea-table and chairs. She wore a soft pink gown, and a broad, rose-laden hat. She looked very young and lovely. She sauntered to meet them with her slightly disdainful smile.

"Well?" she said.

Wally turned to present Miss Barnes, but Isabelle was before him.

"Max, this is Ann Barnes," she explained.

Mrs. Bryce nodded at the newcomer.

"What did you do in town?" she inquired of the child.

"The Zoo, and Wally's club."

"I hope you don't confuse them," laughed her mother.

"I don't envy you your job," she added, over her shoulder to Miss Barnes.

"What room is Miss Barnes to have, Max?" Wally called.

"You'll have to attend to that," she replied, with a sort of arrogant disregard of Wally's protégée.

"I'll show you, Ann," said Isabelle, adding: "nasty old Max!"

"Isabelle! your own mother!" protested Miss Barnes.

The child took her by the hand and led her into the house, with a dignity which would have been admirable, had it not been so pathetic. Miss Barnes felt that she was stepping off terra firma, and lighting on Mars, so strange and muddled was this new world she had entered upon.

CHAPTER FOUR

IT WAS a strange throw of Chance that tossed Ann Barnes into the heart of the Bryce family—or rather into its midst, for it seemed to Ann that there wasn't any heart to the family. The first weeks she spent at The Beeches were positively bewildering.

She was the eldest daughter of a small-town lawyer, in Vermont. There were five younger children, and after Ann's graduation at the State University, she set forth to make fame and fortune, with the ultimate object of rescuing her father and mother from the financial anxieties which had always beset them.

She was just an average healthy, fine American girl brought up in a normal, small-town American family. As the eldest, she had been her mother's assistant. She had served her apprenticeship in cooking, nursing babies, patching small clothes, turning old things around and upside down, in order to make them over. She could market wisely, she could "manage" on little.

So much for her practical training. She knew all the inconveniences and anxieties of an insufficient and variable income. But she also knew the unselfishness, the affectionate give-and-take of a big family. She knew what miracles the loving patience of her mother daily performed. She knew the selflessness of her father, which

kept him at the treadmill of his profession that his children might have an education, might have their chance. Hospitality, kindness, love; these were of the very fibre of Ann's being.

It was part of the trick Fate played on her that Wally's offer had come to her the first week she was in New York, when the terror of the Big Town had just laid hold of her New York, contemplated from Vermont, was the city of all opportunity; but New York, face to face, with a financial reserve of fifty dollars, was a very different matter.

Isabelle had amazed and interested her, and Wally had offered her what seemed a fabulous salary. No wonder she had seized the opportunity, with happy plans of sending the first check home, intact. But daily for the first week, amidst the undreamed-of luxuries of The Beeches she felt that she must run away, back to the things she knew and understood. And yet every day brought her evidences of Isabelle's need of her, and Ann's intrinsic sense of fairness made her feel that somebody ought to stand by the child.

Her first interview with Mrs. Bryce did not occur until the second day after her arrival. She waited to be summoned all of the first day, but heard nothing, saw nothing of her new employer. The second day she sent word asking for a conference. She was given an audience while Mrs. Bryce's maid was dressing her to go out to lunch. She nodded casually to Ann.

"You wanted to see me?"

"Yes; I—I thought we would better talk over your plans for Isabelle."

"I haven't any plans for her. My only desire is to keep her out of the way."

"But I don't know what she is permitted to do," Ann began.

"She is permitted to do anything she wants to," laughed Mrs. Bryce.

"But that isn't good for her"—earnestly.

Mrs. Bryce's glance at the girl was full of scornful amusement.

"No, but it's good for the rest of us. We can't live in the house with her otherwise."

Ann stared. She did not know how to cope with this kind of woman. Mrs. Bryce made her feel a clumsy fool, a sort of country bumpkin.

"This isn't my job anyway, it's Wally's. He is guiding Isabelle's destiny this summer. Didn't he tell you?"

"Yes, but I thought the child's mother would naturally want to say——" blundered Ann.

"Well, her mother doesn't. Do anything you can to make her less of a nuisance, that's my only advice."

It was clear that the interview was ended, so Ann rose. With glowing appeal Mrs. Bryce turned her pretty face, with its sudden smile, upon the girl.

"Nice, kind Miss Barnes, don't bother me about Isabelle, will you? She bores me to death."

Ann got out of the room somehow. She felt cold shivers down her spine, as if she had touched something revolting. She thought of *her* mother, and Jinny, the little sister nearest Isabelle's age. She was so homesick

for them, she just thought she would die. She went to the nursery where she had left Isabelle, and, as she entered, the child was shaking hands with an imaginary guest, saying in perfect imitation of her mother's manner: "Oh, howdye do, Mrs. Page?"

"Dorothy and Reginald and I are having a bridge party," she explained.

But Ann didn't listen. She just picked Isabelle up in her arms, and hugged her tight, kissing her over and over again.

"You poor baby—you poor little mite!" she said over and over.

But after the first shock of surprise, Isabelle rebelled.

"Don't! Put me down! I don't like to be kissed!" she cried.

Ann set her down and knelt before her.

"Why don't you like to be kissed?" she demanded.

"Because"—defiantly.

"Isabelle, have you ever been rocked and sung to and tucked into bed at night?"

Isabelle shook her head, her big eyes fixed on Ann's face, so full of emotion.

"Did you ever have anybody tickle you awake, in the morning, and kiss you until you laughed?"

The child shook her head again.

"It's a shame!" cried Ann. "Why Jinny gets kissed a hundred times a day by everybody."

"Who's Jinny?"

"My little sister, who is your age."

"Where is she?"

"In my home, up in Vermont."

"What does she do?"

"Sit down, and I'll tell you about her."

Isabelle promptly sat down on the floor beside Ann.

"In the morning, after breakfast, she picks up the papers and school books and toys and things the children leave around——"

"What children?"

"My other brothers and sisters. There's Walter and Helen and Tommy and Barbara, but Jinny is our baby. When she gets things picked up she dusts the bottoms of the chairs and the legs of the tables. Then she helps mother make the beds. She can beat up the pillows and tuck the sheets neatly."

"Isn't there any chambermaid?"

"No. Then she studies her letters. She almost knows them. She goes to market with mother, and then she plays in the yard until dinner."

"Max doesn't go to market."

Ann ignored that.

"Then the children troop in to dinner, from school. Such a scramble, such a wrestling, and shouting, and face washing! You ought to hear it."

"But it's *lunch* at noon," corrected Isabelle.

"No; we have dinner."

"What do you have for dinner?"

"Boiled beef and potatoes, bread and butter and jam, and a pudding. Then the older ones tramp off to school again and Jinny takes her nap."

"I hate naps."

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"Jinny doesn't. She likes them. She knows they make her strong and sweet-tempered and pretty."

"Would naps make me pretty?"

"I think so. Everybody is pretty who has pink cheeks, and a kind expression, don't you think so?"

"Max hasn't a kind expression; she's cross"—quickly.

"But she has lovely skin, all pink and white."

"I think you're prettier than Max. Then what does Jinny do next?"

So the story went on with elaborate detail, until every waking moment of Jinny's day was accounted for. It was absorbing to Isabelle, and it was a satisfaction for Ann to have this outlet for her homesickness. So it began, but it grew to be a significant make-believe, for as the days went by, she discovered that Isabelle could be absolutely ruled by her imagination. The new game was called "Playing Jinny." She began to dust the nursery chairs and to pick up toys and playthings. She demanded lessons in letters. Any misdemeanour that was met with the remark, "Of course, Jinny would never do that," was never repeated.

Day after day she demanded the story again, and daily Ann added to the picture of her mother, always at the call of her children, of her father, reading aloud on Friday nights, as a special treat, while they all sat round the fire in the shabby old living room.

She described how they all worked and saved to buy Christmas presents for one another; how happy they were over simple gifts, even a red lead pencil. How they hid the presents all over the house and had a "hunt" on

Christmas morning, instead of having a tree. The story went on and on, until Isabelle actually lived in the circle of the Barnes family.

But one unfortunate day, Isabelle strayed into her mother's room, determined upon experiment.

"Max, will you take me to market with you?" she inquired.

"I don't go to market, silly; the housekeeper markets."

"Why don't you tuck me in, and kiss me good-night?" the child continued, her eyes fixed on her mother's startled face.

"I'm never here when you go to bed," defended Mrs. Bryce. "What is all this? I thought you didn't like to be kissed."

"I wish you'd have six children," Isabelle sighed.

"Good heavens! Isabelle, don't be silly!"

So Isabelle gave it up. She realized that something was lacking. She sought out Miss Barnes with the problem.

"Why don't Max and Wally do like father and mother Barnes?"

"Well," Ann evaded, "it is different, you see. Your father and mother are rich, and mine are poor. Your parents have lots to do—golf and bridge and parties—and father and mother Barnes have only their children to interest them. They're just regular parents," she added, lamely.

"But I want some regular parents," replied Isabelle. Ann was nonplussed.

"We can't all have them, honey," she said. "Jinny

would like lots of things you have—a pony, and toys, and pretty clothes.”

“She can have mine.”

“She has to do many things you would not like to do.”

“I don’t care. I’d do them.”

“But you can’t change your parents. God gives them to you, and you have to keep them,” she laughed.

“Then why didn’t God give me regular parents?”

Ann hastily diverted the youngster’s thoughts into other channels, but she came back to it again and yet again—her desire for “regular parents.”

One of the habits acquired from Jinny was a daily nap. She religiously put herself to bed, after luncheon, and each day upon rising she inspected herself in the glass to see if she was growing prettier.

“I don’t see that it helps much,” she said frequently.

But Ann encouraged her to persevere, partly because she felt that the highly strung child needed the rest, and partly because it was Ann’s only breathing space in the twenty-four hours. Usually she went for a walk, carrying a book under her arm.

One day as she started off on such a ramble Mrs. Bryce sent for her.

“Miss Barnes, would you do me a favour? The dry-cleaner in Rockville has a lace gown of mine which I want to wear this afternoon, when some people are coming to tea. Would you motor over and get it? You could take the imp with you.”

“Isabelle is asleep just now.”

"Go before she wakes up, then."

"Could one of the maids look after her, if she wakes?"

"Yes, of course. I shall be so obliged."

So Ann set forth in the motor, glad of a free hour or two in the open. She enjoyed it to the full, and although it took longer than she had anticipated, she carried the gown to Mrs. Bryce's door at five.

"So much obliged," said that lady, sweetly.

The nursery was empty, so were the bedrooms. Ann asked the maids where Isabelle was. No one had seen her. She went out into the grounds and to all her favourite haunts, but no Isabelle. Then, thoroughly alarmed, she went to Mrs. Bryce's door again.

"Mrs. Bryce, did you send a maid to look after Isabelle?"

"Oh, no, I forgot it"—in an annoyed tone.

"I can't find her."

"Can't find her? Oh, she must be somewhere,"—absently.

"But I have looked everywhere. No one saw her go out. I have been gone over two hours, you know."

Something of Ann's excitement affected Mrs. Bryce.

"Oh, she couldn't get away far. Kate," she called to a maid in the dressing room, "did you see Isabelle?"

"I saw her just after Miss Barnes left," said the girl. "She had on her best hat and coat, and I sez to her: 'Where ye goin?' an' she sez to me: 'I'm goin' to look for some reg'lar parunts' an' she went out the side door. I thought somebody was lookin' after her.'"

"Oh, Mrs. Bryce, she's run away!" cried Ann.

"Wouldn't you know she'd do it on a day when I was having a special tea!" she blazed.

"Oh!" said Ann, looking the other woman straight in the eyes, and Mrs. Bryce knew that this girl despised her. Not that it mattered, but it was annoying at the moment.

"Don't stand there talking. Get the chauffeur and tell him to go look for her," she ordered, turning to receive the lace gown that the maid held over her head.

Ann ran out of the room, and down the stairs. She started for the beach where they went swimming. Henry the chauffeur passed her, calling out that he was going to the neighbours to inquire. Ann turned back to go to the gardener's lodge and find out the whereabouts of Patsy. As she ran she sobbed to herself, at the thought of the forlorn little figure in its best hat and coat, setting out on a crusade to find "regular parents!"

CHAPTER FIVE

MRS. BRYCE wore the white lace gown, and had her tea. Wally commandeered all the servants except the cook and the butler to help in the search for Isabelle. He and the chauffeur and Ann conducted scouting parties in all directions.

"Where's Wally, Max?" inquired Mrs. Page.

"He's dashing around somewhere looking for Isabelle. She's lost."

"Lost? But where is the jewel who looks after her? Wally told me yards about her."

"I sent her on an errand, and Isabelle got away. She can't have gone far."

"Do you share Wally's enthusiasm over the new governess?"

"I do not," replied Mrs. Bryce, adding, "Wally has become a passionate parent."

"Whatever started him?"

"I did, worse luck! You know how all the useless men in the world dote on telling a woman about her duties? Now Wally's only job is to invest money in the wrong things, but he is full of ideas about being a mother."

There was general mirth at this point, on the part of the guests.

"I was so moved by his remarks that I dumped my

cares upon him for the summer. He is outrageously superior about himself as parent. *He* has found the perfect governess, *he* discovers that our offspring has a brain; you should hear him go on."

"I have," protested Mrs. Page. "He used to make love to me, but now he tells me his domestic problems."

"He has the entire house upset now, because she has run off, but when he finds her, he won't have backbone enough to spank her," laughed Mrs. Wally.

"It always amuses me how parents agonize over the lost child, and spank it when it's found," said Martin Christiansen, the guest of honour at the tea.

"Not being a parent you don't realize that there is a large, well-defined body of parentisms. We all say the same things, do the same things to children, instinctively and without thought," Mrs. Page assured him.

"Puts you at such a disadvantage with your child, for the y. ster thinks freshly, doesn't it, Mrs. Bryce?"

"I know mine thinks freshly—she's a brat! I keep out of her way, myself," remarked his hostess.

Presently dusk fell and still no signs of the child. Wally came back to telephone the police stations of the towns near them. He barely glanced at the laughing group on his terrace, but Mrs. Page spied him, and came to call out: "Found her yet, Wally?"

"No."

"Better come have your tea, Wally," Mrs. Bryce suggested.

"Damn," said Wally, under his breath, as he hurried into the house without any reply.

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"Had we not better go? Aren't you anxious, Mrs. Bryce?" inquired Christiansen.

"Oh, no; she'll turn up."

"Nothing will happen to her, she's too smart," commented Mrs. Page.

They took their departure shortly. Mrs. Bryce ordered the cook to hold back dinner. Then she let her vexation grow. It was outrageous that this little pest should upset things so completely. She had been especially anxious to impress this Mr. Christiansen, whom she had recently met. He was a distinguished *littérateur* and critic, as well as a stunning giant of a man. The white lace gown had been entirely for his benefit. And yet because of Isabelle he had been critical of her. Man-like he had convictions about woman's job. He probably thought she should have been running around the country, in hysterics, looking for her chee-ild.

At nine o'clock she heard the motor come to the door. She went into the hall. Ann got out first and helped Wally. He was carrying the heroine—asleep, in the utter relaxation of tired babyhood. She was dirty, and her best hat dangled from its elastic, crushed and dusty.

"Well," remarked Mrs. Bryce, "where was she?"

"I'll take her up to the bedroom, Miss Barnes," Wally said, and he started off.

"Really, Wally, Miss Barnes can certainly manage to get her to bed," protested Mrs. Bryce.

"She's rather heavy. I'll just——"

"Put her down and let her walk then. I've waited for my dinner as long as I intend to."

Wally went on upstairs with his burden, and as Ann passed Mrs. Bryce her scorn and hatred of that lace-clad lady was as obvious as a spoken word. Mrs. Bryce went to the table and ordered her dinner. When Wally joined her he looked "all in."

"I suppose you don't care whether she gets killed or not."

"Well, but she didn't get killed, so I don't have to excite myself, do I?"

"You might show a little decent feeling before Miss Barnes."

"I don't have to please Miss Barnes—or any of my servants, if it comes to that."

"You're a brute, Max!"

"If you're going to be tiresome, I'll finish my dinner upstairs," she replied. "Heaven knows, if I'd had any idea you would be such a bore about her, I'd never have turned her over to you."

"Do you know why she ran away? She went to find some 'regular parents'—so she said."

"We don't suit then?" Mrs. Bryce laughed crisply.

"The poor little devil walked and walked, and when she was too tired to go any farther she asked a milk wagon driver to give her a lift, so she got away over to Rockville."

"Where did she get this idea about parents?"

"Miss Barnes explained to me on the way home, that she and Isabelle have a game called 'Playing Jinny.' Jinny is Miss Barnes's little sister and Isabelle pretends that she lives in the Barnes family."

"So, it is your paragon who has set her against her own parents."

"No, she didn't mean to do that. She says she had no idea that the child would take it seriously and start off to find the Barnes home."

"Do you think it desirable to have your child in the sole charge of a woman who poisons her mind against you and me?"

"But she doesn't do that, Max. Isabelle adores her. It was just a game, I tell you."

"So *she* says."

On the way to the library, after dinner, they came upon Ann in the hall.

"May I speak to you, Miss Barnes?" Max inquired coolly.

"Certainly," the girl replied, and followed them into the room beyond.

"Just what is it that you have been telling Isabelle, which sets her off on this ridiculous jaurt?" demanded Mrs. Bryce, insolently.

"I told her about my home, and my little sister, who is her age. She started off to find her," answered Ann, simply.

"Do you think it is a part of your duty to set her against her parents?"

"I have never discussed her parents with her."

"I'm sure Miss Barnes isn't to blame, Max," put in Wally.

"I think she is." Mrs. Bryce cut him off. "You may take the noon train to town to-morrow, Miss Barnes."

"Oh, I say, Max!" protested Wally.

"It's all right, Mr. Bryce," Ann said. "I hate to leave Isabelle, but what can I do to help her? She's just doomed!"

"Doomed to live with us, Wally," laughed Mrs. Bryce.

"Yes, doomed to live with you," the girl replied. "To get along without help, or love. To see her mother occasionally—a strange woman in the house. What right have you and your crowd to have children?" she demanded, hotly.

"Such impudence!" burst out Mrs. Bryce.

"I've never known any one like you before, and you fill me with horror!" Ann retorted.

"This may amuse you, Wally, but it doesn't me," remarked Mrs. Bryce, walking out of the room.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Bryce; I didn't mean to say all that. I am so tired and excited from hunting Isabelle, and it seemed so terrible to me that she didn't care about her own baby being lost, that I just burst out."

"I know how overstrained you are, but of course, under the circumstances you will see——" he answered miserably.

"Oh, I couldn't stay in the house another minute."

"Mrs. Bryce is very self-contained, she's not excitable as you and I are," he tried to explain.

"I hate to leave Isabelle. Oh, Mr. Bryce, try to look after her a little, try to love her a little, she does need it so!"

The next day as she stepped to the platform of the train the chauffeur handed her a letter from Wally. There was an enclosure of two hundred dollars, which he begged

she would accept as a present from Isabelle. He thanked her and regretted the necessity of her going.

So Ann passed out of Isabelle's life, mourned and lamented for months by the child. She represented the only tenderness, the only understanding and sympathy that came into Isabelle's childhood. The little belated tendrils of affection she had put forth toward her world, under Ann's warm influence, shrivelled and died. Her wits against them all, that was the motto she decided upon, in the bitter wisdom of her four brief years.

CHAPTER SIX

DURING the years that followed many were the governesses set up by Mrs. Bryce to be promptly knocked down, as it were, by Isabelle. They would either depart of their own accord, or they would be sent flying by the irate Mrs. Bryce after some escapade of her incorrigible offspring.

"She'll end in a reform school!" she remarked to Wally one day, upon the dismissal of the latest one.

He sought out his daughter and laboured with her.

"Look here, kid, how many governesses have you had lately?"

"Oodles of 'em."

"But what do you do to them?"

"Get rid of 'em, they're no good. Can't you get Max to let me have Ann again?"

"I'm afraid not."

"I won't have any of these she gets me—old snoops!"

"She does the best she can," Wally defended.

"She does not. She doesn't even look at 'em, just telephones for one to be sent out. Let's you and me go pick out another one, Wally."

"I'm sorry, but your mother won't stand for it. Ann gave her a piece of her mind before she left, and Max blames me for it."

"If she'd get Ann, I'd be so good she'd never have to change again."

"Why don't you tell her that?"

"I did. It makes her mad. You tell her, Wally."

"She gets mad at me, too."

"If you get mad back and yell at her, she stops. That's what I do," she advised him.

"Look here, it would be a lot more comfortable for you to put up with some woman, even if you don't like her. You always have to get used to a new one."

"I don't. They have to get used to me," the imp replied. "Where you going?" she added.

"I'm going to exercise Nero."

"Take me."

"Can't look after you and that horse, too."

"I'm not a baby," she scorned him. "Tell them to bring the pony round, Wally."

Later when she threw her breeched leg over her horse, and waited for Wally to mount, he exclaimed:

"Lord, I wish you'd been a boy!"

"So do I."

They started off. She had discarded the old Shetland pony as too childish, and demanded a real steed. So Wally had given her a small Peruvian horse, delicately made and fleet of foot. She rode him like a leaf on the wind. She jumped hedges and fences and ditches; she did circus tricks, and finally nagged Wally's Nero into a race.

"You're some rider, Isabelle," he said, on the way home.

"You bet I am!" she replied.

At the door Matthews, the butler, announced that the new governess had arrived.

"Damn it!" ejaculated Isabelle.

Wally reproved her sharply, but she was inattentive.

"Let's fire her, Wally, and you take care of me."

"Would you like that?" he said, touched by this unusual mark of affection.

"Yes. You always do what I want you to," replied his tactless child.

"I have other things to do than to look after a fresh little shrimp like you."

The "new one" was a middle-aged English gentlewoman of the usual governess type. Isabelle knew the kind thoroughly. She had initiated whole companies of them into life at The Beeches. Miss Watts, this one was called. She was putting her things into bureau drawers, when Isabelle appeared at the door of the bathroom which joined their rooms.

"Is this Isabelle?" inquired the new victim.

The child nodded.

"How do you do? I am Miss Watts."

"I know."

"I hope we are going to be friends——"

"I never like governesses—only one."

"Why did you like this one?" inquired Miss Watts.

She was so used to the lack of manners in the children she taught, that this one seemed no worse than usual.

"Because she was young and could swim and ride and tell me stories."

"I'm too old to swim and ride, but I can tell stories."

She went on with her unpacking.

"What kinds of stories?"

"All kinds. I know hundreds of stories. Can you read?"

"I know letters, and 'cat' and 'rat,' but I can't read big books. Let's hear you tell a story."

"I will, with pleasure, when I finish here."

"But I want it now."

"It will take me only a little while."

"But I won't wait."

Miss Watts became aware that this was the initial clash of arms.

"No? Well, don't let me keep you then. Is that your room?"

"If you don't do what I want, I'll yell so everybody in the house will come to see what's the matter."

Miss Watts glanced at her and smiled.

"That will be interesting," she said.

Whereupon Isabelle opened her mouth and emitted long, loud shrieks. Miss Watts continued counting handkerchiefs. The howls grew more artificial in quality, but louder in volume. Isabelle grew red in the face. This was hard work. After about three minutes of bedlam Miss Watts remarked:

"But where is the audience, Isabelle? I'm afraid you have cried 'Wolf! Wolf!' too often."

Isabelle stopped long enough to shout:

"I didn't cry 'Wolf!' "

"No?" said Miss Watts, seating herself by the window.

"I've finished now. Is your concert over?"

The child stared at her.

"Maybe you'd be interested in the story of the man who cried 'Wolf! Wolf!'"

Isabelle smarted under a sense of defeat.

"I won't have any stories now."

"Very good. Of course, I only tell stories as a favour," she added, pointedly.

The youngster went into her own room. Miss Watts heard her banging around in there. Presently she appeared again.

"Why did the man cry 'Wolf! Wolf!'" she demanded.

"Sit down, and I'll tell you," answered Miss Watts, pleasantly.

So the story was told, and the new relationship inaugurated which was to last for several years.

Miss Watts was a woman of considerable intellectual capacity, with a passion for books. She was ill-fitted for the sole charge of a five-year-old girl of Isabelle's vitality, but her poise and sense of humour won the child's respect. After that first experiment there were no more spasms of howling. Miss Watts never tried to sentimentalize their relationship. She recognized the child's unusual quality, and her precocity. She was at present an unendurable human being, thanks to her bringing up. Her ideas and ideals were servant-made. If she could be brought to see herself as socially an outcast, because of her bad manners, Miss Watts knew it would effect a cure.

On her side, Isabelle found Miss Watts's mind a storehouse of treasures. She told stories of all countries, and all times, and she told them well. The only punishment ever inflicted was the abolishment of the story hour, and

this was the only chastisement Isabelle had ever regarded as such. There was a marked improvement in her behaviour and the members of her household drew a long breath of relief.

Miss Watts piqued the girl's interest in the study hours, and, as if by a miracle, she learned to read. The teacher found an extraordinary concentration of effort to acquire anything the girl desired. Promised the joy of finding stories for herself, the student applied herself and learned by magic. She was extremely proud of the new accomplishment, and would have read constantly if Miss Watts had not settled upon literary pursuits as the reward of virtue.

One of the by-products of the new ability was a tighter hold on her leadership of the children she played with. Everything she read suggested new and wonderful games. As originator and inventor she always played the leading rôles, assisted by the others.

Summer days provided uninterrupted opportunity for her talents. She turned the playhouse into a theatre, and organized a supporting company. Sometimes Miss Watts assisted with the scenario, sometimes Isabelle was sole author or adapter.

It was the year when she was eight, and just beginning to read Dickens, that she prepared a presentation of "A Tale of Two Cities." She worked at it with great enthusiasm for fully a week. Then she appeared in her mother's room.

"Max, can I have lemonade and cake for the audience this afternoon?"

"What audience?"

"At the Isabelle Theatre."

"Who's coming?"

"Everybody. Parents and relatives. I rode around to all the houses this morning and issued the invitations. They all accepted."

"Why didn't you consult me before you invited the neighbourhood in?"—hotly.

"I thought you'd kick about the refreshments."

"If you ever do this again you will get no refreshments and I will send your friends home."

"They're yours too. Martin Christiansen said he would not miss it for a kingdom."

"You call him Mr. Christiansen, when you speak of him, Miss Impudence. What do you intend to do to entertain all these people?"

" 'A Tale of Two Cities,' by Charles Dickens."

"In the playhouse?"

"Yes; it will be crowded, but people can sit on the floor."

"You can't ask people to sit on the floor in that stuffy box!"

"Well, I asked you to let me use the garage and you wouldn't."

"So that's why you asked all these people."

"That's only one reason. Matthews and Henry can carry chairs to the garage this morning. We can move the stage our own selves. The play begins at two."

"Hottest time in the day."

"You don't have to come."

"Who's in your show?"

"I am the star, and Tommy Page is Carton. He's no good because he giggles, but Mr. Christiansen wouldn't play it. I asked him first."

Mrs. Bryce laughed.

"I suppose you could do with ice cream and cake."

"We could"—promptly.

"What are you going to wear?"

"I have several costumes. I took your velvet opera coat for the rehearsal. Do you mind?"

"Mind? Certainly I mind. Don't you dare touch anything in my closet."

"All right," replied her daughter, coolly; "Tommy brought over his mother's best coat in case you were huffy."

"I shall call Madge Page up this minute and tell her."

"Very well, but if you do, I'll announce before the curtain goes up, that because of *traitors* there are no costumes."

She saw that that shot took effect.

"You'd better let it alone, Max. I've got it all thought out," she added.

"I'd like to spank you!" Max exploded.

At the door Isabelle turned.

"Don't you care anything about ART?" she demanded.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AS MRS. BRYCE and Wally came out from luncheon, they beheld the first consignment of friends and relatives, a motor car full from the Pages.

"We've come to the matinee," laughed Mrs. Page.

"It's ridiculous of you," retorted her hostess.

"I would not have missed it for anything," said Martin Christiansen.

"I hear she invited you to play Carton," jeered Wally.

"I never was more flattered in my life. But I persuaded her that I was not the type."

Other motors began to arrive with beaming parents, and excited children. The terrace was almost crowded when finally, after much delay, and trips to and from the house, Teddy Horton rushed into view, announcing through a megaphone that the doors of the Isabelle Theatre were open. Everybody strolled toward the garage and soon all the "stalls" were full.

Isabelle appeared before the sheets which served as curtain. She was pale, composed, and in deadly earnest.

"Fathers and mothers, and ladies and gentlemen," she began, "we are going to give a play called 'A Tale of Two Cities,' by Charles Dickens and me."

She was undisturbed by their laughter and applause.

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"We didn't have time to print programmes, so I will tell you the characters: Mademoiselle Lucy Manet—Isabelle Bryce; Dr. Manet, her father—Margie Hunter; Madame La Farge—Isabelle Bryce; Mr. Lorry—Margie Hunter; Charles D'Arnay—Teddy Horton; Sidney Carton—Tommy Page. Manager—Isabelle Bryce."

More applause.

"The first scene is An Inn. Mr. Lorry is waiting for Lucy Manet."

She made a low bow, and walked off, followed by much hand clapping. Some time elapsed, and then by slow laborious jerks the sheets were parted, and Margie Hunter, a fat serious girl of nine, was discovered in her father's overcoat and hat, pacing the floor. She rather overdid the pacing, so a strident voice prompted: "My Blood!" and yet again, and louder: "My Blood!"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Lorry. Then in a deep chest tone, he inquired: "My Blood! Why doesn't Mademoiselle Lucy Manet, my old client's, child, appear?"

Enter Lucy Manet. She wears Mrs. Page's best opera coat, which extracts a groan from the owner. Her bobbed brown hair is barely covered by the long yellow shaving curls which more or less crown her head. A Gainsborough hat of her mother's threatens to submerge her countenance, and she carries a walking stick of Wally's as a staff. But for all the ridiculous figure she cut, there was an earnestness and a sort of style to her entrance, that cut short the first outburst of laughter.

"Sir, are you Mr. Lorry?" she demanded.

"I am. I kiss your hand, Miss."

"I have had a long trip in the stage coach. . . . Did you bring me to England when I was an orphan child?"

"Miss Manet, it was me, but you aren't an orphan."

She kneels.

"Quick, sir, the truth!" she cries.

"Your father is found. He is a wreckage in prison."

Lucy Manet faints. Curtain.

Both actors were forced to take a curtain call after this. Isabelle manages to push fat Margie into the wings while she stays on, bowing, to announce:

"Margie Hunter is Dr. Manet this scene."

The next scene discovers Margie Hunter, in a long beard, cobbling a shoe, hastily contributed by Tommy Page at the last moment. A dramatic and tender meeting between father and child was played in a tense key, only slightly marred by the frequent loss of Father Manet's hirsute appendage.

The scene changed suddenly and unexpectedly to the court room in England where D'Arnay appears as prisoner. Margie Hunter played the judge. Teddy Horton as D'Arnay was so overcome with stage fright that Isabelle had to tell him all his lines. However, when it came to Lucy Manet's testimony the scene lifted. At the climax, just when Sidney Carton was to make his dramatic entrance into the story, it was discovered that Tommy had not his shoe. In the quick change, it had been left in the corner of Manet's garret. The action was held up while it was restored to him, but he put it on so hastily that he lost it once or twice during the scene. It kept his mind off his lines, rather. The moment came when the

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striking resemblance between D'Arnay and Carton is pointed out by Lucy. Tommy Page—plump, short, red-haired, with freckles—and Teddy Horton—tall, gangling, half a head taller than his double—stood side by side facing the audience.

Up to this moment a certain restraint had marked that body, but at this sight they went into uncontrolled spasms of delight. Martin Christiansen, dramatic critic, was seen to wipe tears of joy from his cheeks. The actors were spurred to renewed efforts.

Carton declared his eternal devotion to Lucy, in words that were scarcely Dickensian.

"I like you, Lucy; you're all right. I'll stick to you for ever," he improvised frantically.

The marriage scene between Lucy and D'Arnay ran something like this. D'Arnay, very accurate in his lines, remarks to Dr. Manet:

"Dr. Manet, I love your daughter—fondly, dearly. You loved once yourself; let your old love speak for me!"

Dr. Manet's lines escaped him, so he replied informally: "Oh—all right."

Whereupon the bridal procession entered, with Isabelle as climax, in her mother's best tulle scarf as a veil.

The scene once more shifted to Paris. D'Arnay was arrested, and resisted. It took the entire company to overpower and drag him forth to the Bastille.

A bit of unequalled histrionism followed in which Isabelle entered as Lucy, with little Nancy Holt as her child. She proceeded to impersonate both that heroine and Madame La Farge. It was simpler than it sounds.

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As Lucy she still wore the wedding veil, as Madame La Farge she snatched off the veil, wrapped a fur boa around her, seized her mother's knitting, and by leaping from one side of the stage to the other, by using now a high voice now a low one, the illusion was perfect. The chee-ild was rather roughly pushed about during the scene, which was highly emotional.

"Be merciful to my husband for the sake of my chee-ild," cried Lucy, passionately, pushing Nancy forward.

"Never!" growled Madame La Farge, pushing Nancy back.

"Don't, Isabelle, you hurt," objected Nancy, but quailed into silence at Isabelle's terrible look.

The audience was almost hysterical.

The part where Carton rescues D'Arnay and changes places with him, important climax though it is in the book, was omitted by the dramatist, because it had no opportunity for Isabelle. D'Arnay arrived in Carton's clothes, many inches too small for him, and explained to Lucy what had occurred. So she and her child and her husband escape.

The curtains were closed now, and the audience stirred as if to rise. Isabelle rushed forth.

"Sit still," she commanded, "it isn't over yet."

There was a long wait, and much hammering back on the stage. Then the curtains parted again on the big realistic moment of the drama. Suspended at back was what at first glance looked to be a wooden window frame. It was suspended from above by ropes, which disappeared over the gallery which ran around the garage. Under this

frame was a wooden saw-horse, and beneath that a pail. Only a look sufficed to show that this was *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, the guillotine.

A ragged rabble appeared at back, shouting and shaking fists. Then—led forward by D'Arnay and the able Margie who had been Dr. Manet, Lorry, and the Judge—came the blind-folded figure of the hero, Carton. They led him to the foot of that terrible machine of destruction, and after several vain promptings from the gallery above, Carton cried in a loud, manly voice:

"It's a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest I go to, than I have ever known."

Then he laid his noble head on the saw horse, and *bing!* went the window frame down on his neck.

"Gosh!" yelled Carton, just as it struck; and then no more.

"Good Lord! Tommy!" cried his mother excitedly from the audience. "I think she's killed him."

"He's all right," cried Isabelle from the gallery. "There wasn't any knife in it—it couldn't hurt him much, unless it just broke his neck."

Carton sat up and lifted a red and angry face toward her.

"It just about did break my neck, you big nut!" he cried, feeling himself, gently. "I told you that darned thing wouldn't work."

"Draw the curtain," hissed Isabelle fiercely, sensing that the shouts of the audience were too abandoned to be complimentary.

The curtains were hitched shut, and she looked over the balustrade on to the group below. Wally was beating Christiansen on the back, and Max was laughing hysterically. Mrs. Page, whose stupid maternal plans had nearly ruined the climax, was now panting for breath.

Isabelle, even while she was delighted with their applause, despised them. Had they no feeling for the noble tragedy of Carton? Of course, Tommy Page, the fool—— just then she caught Martin Christiansen's eye. He held up his hands to her, clapping, and bowing and throwing kisses. He rushed to the garden, and came back with a huge sunflower which he tossed to her, calling: "Author!"

After many and prolonged calls, Isabelle came modestly forth.

"Thank you," she said. "I think Mr. Charles Dickens is dead; if he is, I will thank you for him."

"Company! Company!" shouted the parents and relatives. Isabelle felt this to be bad discipline for the actors, but after a moment's hesitation, she led them all forth.

Martin Christiansen was the first to reach her side. With a low bow he indicated the sunflower which she carried.

"My flower!" he murmured tenderly. "Isabelle, I've seen them all, Bernhardt, Duse, Fiske, but I've never seen any acting that could be compared with yours!"

It was that supreme moment which made up to Isabelle for everything else. She knew then the joy of appreciation——knew that Martin Christiansen was a finer soul, and akin unto her own!

CHAPTER EIGHT

ISABELLE'S DÉBUT as dramatist and actress was much discussed and laughed over in the colony. Her pranks had long been a favourite topic, but this last one marked her as a real personality.

"Isabelle," Martin Christiansen said to her, a day or so after the performance, "you gave me so much pleasure with your interpretation of Mr. Dickens's work, that I want to do something for your pleasure."

"Do you?" said Isabelle, enthusiastically.

"Theatrical stars are so temperamental, I scarcely know what to suggest. What does a leading lady and producer like to do in her moments of idle ease?"

It was a great opportunity, and Isabelle considered it at length.

"I should like to go bathing on the club beach, and have lunch afterwards on the club porch."

"Most reasonable of Leading Ladies, what day would suit you best?"

"To-morrow"—promptly.

"Good. Shall we say at eleven? I will give myself the honour of coming for you."

"You ask Max to let me go, will you?"

"With pleasure. Shall we ask the other members of

your company, too? Does a star permit the company to eat below the salt?"

"Oh no, don't let's have them—just you and me."

"Most flattering. I would prefer that."

"You won't ask the Wallys?"

"You refer to your parents?"

She nodded.

"This is your party—you may ask the guests," he laughed.

So it was decided, and Christiansen broke the news to her mother.

"I think she should have a chaperon. You might ask me."

"She was very explicit that the party was to be a tête-à-tête."

"She'd never ask me," laughed her mother.

"Aren't you friendly?"—curiously.

"Oh, not at all."

The next morning Max honoured Miss Watts and Isabelle with an unexpected call.

"What is she going to wear, Miss Watts?" she inquired.

"I'm going to wear my riding clothes," announced Isabelle.

"How ridiculous! You're going in a motor, not on a horse."

"I don't care. I look better in my riding clothes."

"You'll put on a white organdie frock and a big hat."

"I won't! I hate those girl-things! They look silly on me."

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"All children of your age wear white dresses and pink sashes, Isabelle," interpolated Miss Watts.

"Well, I'm not a pink-sash child!" quoth Isabelle, with one of her flashes of insight.

"Oh, well, Miss Watts, let her go in her riding boots. If she wants to make a laughing-stock of herself, let her! Poor Mr. Christiansen will be sorry he ever asked her!" said Mrs. Bryce.

"Very well. I'll wear a white linen dress, with a black belt, and my black hat," announced the girl."

"Chaste, but not gaudy," laughed her mother, as she sauntered from the room.

When she was finally dressed Isabelle walked to a long mirror and surveyed herself at length. Her slim, pretty legs in their black silk stockings caught her eye.

"Don't you think I have nice legs?" she inquired of Miss Watts.

"Um—rather. They are serviceable at least."

The party was a marked success. A great many people were bathing, which always made it exciting. They went out to the raft and Christiansen and some other men took turns in throwing her off. It was perfect for Isabelle. Then, afterward, all the tables were full on the club veranda, when Mr. Christiansen led his guest to a two-chair table, marked "RESERVED." Everybody smiled and nodded at them. She saw Wally and Max cross the room grinning at her. But she bore herself with great dignity, and it seemed to her that life held

nothing more, when Christiansen seated her. There was a tiny, old-fashioned bouquet at her plate.

"Is this for me?" she inquired.

"Yes. My offering on the day of your triumph was so inadequate, I wanted to do better to-day. By the way, I ordered the lunch. I trust you do not mind."

"Oh, no. That's all right," she replied graciously.

"It seems to me you are looking very fine to-day."

She looked at him gravely.

"I had an awful time about my clothes," she confessed.

"Max wanted me to wear a party dress and a sweet hat——"

"What is a sweet hat?" he inquired with interest.

"Oh, you know the kind—floppy, with cherries on it, and everybody says: 'Oh, isn't she sweet?' "

Her host smiled.

"You object to being thought sweet?"

"Yes. I'm not that kind of a child."

"What kind of a child are you, Isabelle?"

"I'm plain, but I've got a great line of talk," was her unexpected answer.

"A witty tongue is worth all the pretty faces in the world," laughed Christiansen. "But I wouldn't call you so plain."

"I look very well in my riding clothes."

"Do you?"

"Have you seen me in them?"

"No, I regret to say."

"Well, you must."

"Thank you. I take it that you did not accept your mother's advice upon your costume?"

THE CRICKET

"Oh, no. I never do. Parents have such silly ideas, don't you think?"

"I suppose they do, poor things."

"You have to have them, of course"—politely.

"In this badly arranged world," he admitted.

"So many people are having babies this summer," she remarked.

"Are they, indeed?"

"Oh, yes. The Hunters and the Reillys, both have them."

"Do I know the Reillys?"

"He is the gardener at The Beeches. Patsy is my best friend."

"Is he a member of your company?"

"Oh, yes. He was away when we did 'The Tale of Two Cities.' He speaks rather Irishly, but he's a good actor."

"Your leading man seemed to have a comedy talent."

"Tommy Page? He's a terrible fool, but we had to have him. There never are enough boys to go round for the parts."

"So often happens in summer resorts," he agreed.

"Why not have a company of Amazons and disdain the weaker sex?"

"You mean all girls?"

"The Amazons were, you know."

"They fuss so, and get mad. They always want to play the best parts. With boys, you can just settle them."

"You nearly settled poor Tommy Page on the guillotine," he laughed.

"He nearly spoiled everything, the poor coward. He couldn't stand a little pain."

"Peculiar to our sex, Isabelle; not Tommy's fault, strictly speaking."

"He'll never get another good part," she said firmly.

They were just finishing their ice cream, chatting amiably, when Wally came to their table.

"Hello," he remarked.

Isabelle bowed.

"Hope I don't interrupt?" he added.

"Not at all. Won't you sit down?"

"No, thanks. Just ran over to say that we'll take the kid off your hands after lunch."

"Oh, don't bother——"

"Certainly we will. The car is going back in ten minutes with Max, and she can go along."

Isabelle could have cried with rage. As it was she swallowed hard, and when Christiansen said: "Is that agreeable to you, Isabelle?" she nodded assent, but the look she cast at Wally might have assassinated him. He, blissfully unaware of it, sauntered away.

"Don't hurry. Wouldn't you like some more ice cream?" her host suggested.

"Yes, thank you."

She did not really want it, but it might serve to delay the hated departure. The car might go without her, and Christiansen would then take her home. She dawdled over the second ice cream, chatting feverishly to prevent his suspecting her plan. But the end came, as the end needs must, and on the veranda they found her mother waiting.

"If she has been eating all this time, you must be bankrupt," she laughed as they joined her.

THE CRICKET

"Our conversation absorbed considerable time, didn't it, Isabelle?"

"Yes"—gravely.

"Did you behave yourself?" inquired her mother.

"Perfectly," Christiansen hastened to say.

"Well, make your manners and get into the car," ordered her parent.

Christiansen leaned over her hand gallantly.

"Thank you for giving me so much pleasure," he said in a confidential tone.

"Thank you. I loved it," she whispered ardently. On the way home her mother glanced at her.

"Have a good time?"

"You and Wally spoiled it!"—hotly.

"What did we do?"

"Treating me like a infant!"

"Which you are," retorted her mother.

Later, in talking it over with Miss Watts, Isabelle said:

"Mr. Christiansen is my ideal. He thinks he would not call me very plain," she added. Then, "Miss Watts, what is an Amazon?"

"The Amazon is a river."

"But he said a comp'ny of Amazons."

"Oh, they were women warriors," instructed the teacher, and expounded the subject at some length.

"What did they wear?" demanded Isabelle.

"We'll look up some pictures of them and find out."

"Riding clothes would do," mused Isabelle.

"Nicely, I should say."

The next day she organized the Isabelle Amazons. They were only four in number, counting Nancy Holt,

who was under size, but they drilled and hunted and rode to battle in the wake of their peerless leader. They met imaginary foes. They challenged Tommy Page and Teddy Horton to mortal combat, and put them to flight. It was a wonderful game, and Isabelle thrilled to think that it was "her ideal" who had suggested it.

"When am I going to entertain Mr. Christiansen?" she asked her mother.

"You entertain him?"

"Certainly. He had me to lunch, didn't he?"

Mrs. Bryce laughed.

"I'm having a house party over the week end and he is coming."

"This week end?"

"Yes. Your beau arrives on the noon train Saturday."

"But I am spending the day with the Hunters Saturday," the child protested.

"I can't help that," replied her parent.

"May I come down to dinner Saturday night?"

"Certainly not."

"Can't I come in with the cocktails, and stay till you go to the dining room?"

"Nobody wants you under foot."

"He's my friend just as much as he is yours!" blazed Isabelle.

"You can see him at tea."

"With everybody around? I have something private to tell him."

"What, pray?"

"About Amazons."

THE CRICKET

"Well, we'll not have Amazons with the cocktails, I can tell you that," said her mother with finality.

Isabelle brooded over the matter until the end of the week. She tried to get out of the day with Margie Hunter, but Mrs. Bryce was glad to be rid of her and forced her to go. She ordered Miss Watts not to go after her until half past five, when tea would be safely over.

Isabelle composed a note of explanation and left it on the bureau in the room which Christiansen was to occupy.

DEAR FRIEND:

Because of others, and Margie Hunter's mother I cannot meet you at the station. I have to spend the day with old Margie Hunter. I have organised the Amazons, as you said, and we are strong and true, in riding breeches. I have a plan, but don't tell Max.

Your loving friend,

ISABELLE BRYCE.

She forgot her troubles somewhat at the Hunters'. All the Amazons were there, as well as Margie's brother, Herbert, an elderly person of twelve, with some of his friends. They treated the girls with great scorn until Isabelle told them the story of the persecutions she endured at home, in order to be an Amazon. It featured imprisonment in a tower room, on a diet of bread and water, branding irons and flogging with a buckled strap. They formed a delighted circle about her, and urged her on.

"Some little liar, that kid!" exclaimed Herbert. "Then what did you do?"

The big boys followed her about all day, to the exclusion of the other Amazons, who took refuge in chanting derogatory remarks, such as:

"Herbie Hunter is stuck on Isabelle!"

When 5:30 arrived and with it, Miss Watts, Isabelle departed with a feeling of a day well spent. She turned her thoughts to the next event. They had a puncture on the way, and the terrace and halls were deserted when they arrived home. Miss Watts hurried her off to the schoolroom, for supper, and urged her to take her bath and go to bed after her strenuous day. The child was docility itself.

While she was at supper a note was brought to her. It was from Christiansen. She read:

MY DEAR ISABELLE:

You cannot imagine what a pleasant welcome your note gave me. I am thrilled to know that I am under the roof with a real Amazon, and I live in the expectation of seeing you "strong and true in riding breeches."

Your devoted admirer,

MARTIN CHRISTIANSEN.

An idea was born at that moment! When Miss Watts went to carry the supper tray downstairs, because the maids were busy, Isabelle hastily donned her riding clothes, turned on the bath water to mislead Miss Watts on her return, crept down the stairs and out. From the terrace she peered into the long drawing room. The French doors leading on to the terrace were open wide, and in the softly lighted room she saw the house-party guests assembling. They straggled in, one by one. Isabelle's eyes brightened at Christiansen's big boom of laughter, and she admired his broad shoulders, as he leaned on the mantelpiece at the far end.

THE CRICKET

She flew to the stables, crept in at the back, led out the Peruvian horse, saddled, mounted him, and kicked him gently in the flanks. Up and onto the terrace she guided him, just as indoors, Matthews arrived with the cocktails.

In through the open windows rode Isabelle, and slowly down the long drawing room. Everybody gasped.

"Isabelle Bryce!" cried her mother.

"Martin," she said eagerly, "this is how I look as an Amazon!"

It was part of the cruel fate that dogged her, that at this supreme moment the Peruvian horse slipped on a rug on which Matthews happened to be standing, whereupon they all went down together, pouring a generous libation of cocktails at Christiansen's feet!

CHAPTER NINE

Poor Isabelle languished in disgrace in her own room for the two days of her mother's house party, as a result of her Amazonian entrance to the dinner. Martin Christiansen pleaded her case, took the blame upon himself; the rest of the party laughed heartily over the episode and demanded more Isabelle, but Max remained adamant and refused to release the prisoner.

Wally visited his daughter on Sunday, carrying a note from Christiansen. He expected to find her raging at her confinement, but, instead, she was curled up in a chair with a book on her lap, and he had to speak to her twice before she heard him.

"Hello, Wally," she said, unenthusiastically.

"Hello. How are you getting on?"

"Fine."

"Pity you have to be shut up this nice day."

"I like it."

He grinned derisively.

"I do—honust."

"What was your idea of coming into the drawing room on a horse, anyhow?"

"I wanted to show Mr. Christiansen something. He understood it all right."

THE CRICKET

"Made your mother hopping."

"Oh, well, she's always hopping. Why didn't you ask Mr. Christiansen up?"

"Against orders. No one admitted. He sent a note," he added, handing it over.

Isabelle read:

DEAR CAPTIVE ISABELLE:

Do you languish in your dungeon cell? Your true knight points an arrow with this missive, and shoots it in at your window. (I trust your father will not resent this poetic license.) I was thrilled at the sight of you as an Amazon, and I agree about the riding breeches!

Yours eternally,

CHRISTIANEER-KNIGHT.

"What's poetic license?" she asked Wally.

"Poetic license? Why—it's some kind of license poets get, I suppose."

"Like a dog license, or a chauffeur's?"

"Well, something like that. Why?"

"Oh, nothing."

"What's the book?"

"'Idylls of the King.'"

"Good?"

"Great. I'm going to give it in my theatre."

"Playing all the parts yourself?" he teased.

"All the important ones," she answered, seriously.

"Shall I tell your mother that you are enjoying yourself?"

"Yes."

"I'll toddle along now, I guess."

"Wait a minute. I have to answer him."

"Hurry up about it then."

Wally took up her abandoned book, while she went to her desk to compose.

Dearest Knight:

I languish a little, but not much. I'm writing a play out of "Idylls of the King." I wish you would be Launcelot, Tommy Page could be Merlin. I knew you would understand about the Amazon and horse. I'm glad you liked the . . .

"How do you spell breeches, Wally?"

"What?"

"*Breeches.*"

"B-r-e-e-c-h-e-s. What are you saying about them?" he inquired, coming to look over her shoulder.

"This is private," she said, and wrote:

. . . breeches. Wally did not mind your license. He thought you ought to have it. The police are so crooel.

Your loving friend,

ISABELLE.

She folded and addressed it carefully.

"Here it is."

"What do I get for running the blockade for you like this?" he inquired.

"Much obliged, Wally," she answered, returning to her chair and her book.

"You don't appreciate me!" he protested.

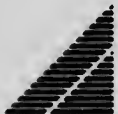
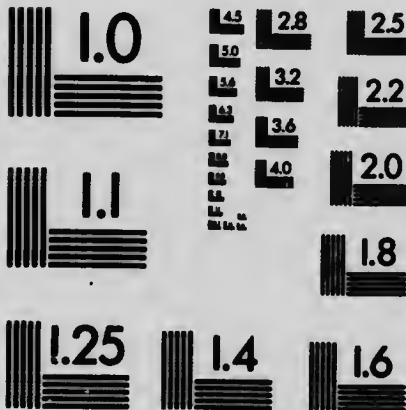
"Yes, I do, Wally. I like you the best of all my parents."

Upon her subsequent release, Isabelle turned her entire attention to a continuous presentation of the "Idylls." Every day the story progressed, and it would have



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occupied her abilities for some time, save for an accident.

The company, including Tommy Page and Teddy Horton, had gathered at Margie Hunter's, where there was a swimming pool. Isabelle planned to stage a scene with herself as "Elaine, the fair, the beautiful," floating in the Hunters' canoe, laboriously carried up from the shore by the entire company.

They launched the craft, and laid out Elaine, with flowers about her, hastily plucked from the garden, and the play was all ready to go on, when Herbert's crowd came by, on the way to a baseball match. At the arresting sight of the Lily Maid of Astelot, they halted and demanded explanations. These were received with exclamations of derision and delight, so that the incensed leading lady rose from her barge, landed, and pursued them with the canoe paddle. They gave her a race to the baseball diamond, where they disarmed her by force, and forgot her.

She sat down and watched their preparations. She heard their mighty oaths against the ninth man of the team, who hadn't "showed up." She offered to play, but they jeered at the idea. Herbert Hunter urged her acceptance as a sub, saying that they could throw her out when the regular fellow came.

The game was new to Isabelle but she concentrated fiercely upon Herbert Hunter's orders. By happy accident when she came to bat, she shut her eyes, fanned the air, and knocked a home run. She sped around the bases like a "greased rabbit" as Herbert said. When it came to pitching, she did not star.

"But she's got a loose arm; she could learn all right," her champion remarked.

It was the proudest compliment of her life. The deserted "Idylls of the King" company came and sat at a safe distance and watched her, wide-eyed. Tommy Page rushed forward, shouting:

"Let me play, Herbert."

"Aw, get out of here, kid. We don't want any babies!" was the brief reply.

"Isabelle's a baby!" howled Tommy.

Now Isabelle happened to be toying with a bat when Tommy made this disparaging remark threatening to topple her off the dizzy height she had attained. She saw red! She made an infuriated rush upon him, and brought the bat down on his offending head. Tommy crumpled up like a paper doll. There was an awful moment of silence.

"She's killed him," one of the boys whispered.

Herbert tried to stand Tommy up, but his legs folded under him and his head fell back, so they laid him down again. Isabelle stood, rooted to the ground. Her terror had frozen her.

"I'll call mama," cried Margie Hunter.

"No, you won't. We must keep it from the police!" ordered her brother.

A shudder went through Isabelle.

"But if he's *dead*?" protested Teddy Horton.

"Let's pour some water on him," suggested somebody.

They all ran to get it, all except Herbert and Isabelle. He noted the anguish of her set face.

"Never mind, Isabelle; maybe he's only a little bit dead," he comforted her.

"Will we have to bury him?" she asked, through chattering teeth.

"I suppose so—sometime."

The others returned with a pail of water. They were for dumping it in one deluge upon poor Tommy, but Herbert prevented their drowning him.

"That isn't the way, you nuts! You dribble it on him. Here, give it to me."

He knelt over Tommy and poured a slow stream of cold water on his face and down his neck. When this had no effect he continued the stream over his body, clad in linen clothes, much as one waters a flower bed. The children held their breath and watched. Signs of returning life were visible. As the cold shower struck the pit of his stomach, one knee hitched. Encouraged, Herbert spilt the last pint in his upturned face. It contorted, he choked, gasped, yelled defiantly:

"Mmmm-bah-what ye doin'?"

Margie Hunter knelt at his head.

"You aren't dead, are you, Tommy?"

"I'm all wet," he exclaimed, irritably.

Isabelle still stood on the spot where she had struck the blow. Her face was set and white.

"I guess we better get him in the house now," Herbert advised.

"What will we tell them?" Margie asked.

Herbert looked at Isabelle, then he swept them all with a chieftain's glance, and remarked:

"Tommy fell into the pool, an' nearly drowneded himself. Get me?"

They nodded.

"Make a stretcher with crossed hands."

His men obeyed.

"Now, you girls, move him onto our hands."

They all worked except Isabelle, who never moved.

"Qu'... I want to walk," said Tommy.

"All right, Tommy. You fell into the pool."

"I did not," said Tommy.

"Yes, you did, and if you leave it to us, we'll square it so you won't get licked," Herbert promised.

The stretcher men rose and bore the hero off toward the house, followed by the children, all except Isabelle. Her breath came in agonized gasps. As they disappeared she threw herself down on her face and let her nerves have full sway. She did not cry tears, but her body shook in a nervous storm of excitement, and misery. She did not hear the swift feet that approached, she scarcely heard Herbert's embarrassed voice saying:

"Say, Isabelle, it's all right. The chambermaid put him to bed and telephoned his mother to send him some clothes."

She raised her tragic face to him.

"Will the police take me?" she whispered.

Without meaning to do so at all, Herbert dropped down beside her.

"You didn't kill him. He's all right," he repeated.

Then as a nervous tremor shook her body, he patted her, awkwardly.

"You're all right, Isabelle, it was just an accident," he comforted her:

She shook her head, and the tears came. Herbert leaned over and planted a kiss under her right ear. She stopped crying. He did not know what more to say, so he just sat by. In that half hour of self-accusation, of reaction from terror, of the consciousness of the sympathy of a friend who had saved her from the police, Isabelle closed the chapter of childhood and stepped over into young girlhood.

CHAPTER TEN

DURING the next few years of Isabelle's life she was more of a trial to her household than ever before, if such a thing were possible. She overplayed the tomboy, just as she did every rôle she essayed.

From the moment Herbert Hunter came to her rescue in the affair of Tommy Page, he was exalted to the highest pedestal in her temple of worship. Boys knew what loyalty meant. Her hero had forced all the witnesses on that occasion to keep absolute silence about it—with police, arrest, and prison terms as alternatives. That he, "an older boy," should condescend to champion her cause was a triumph for our heroine.

She scorned girls, she endured only the society of males from this time on. She could scarcely be forced into any costume but her riding clothes. She applied herself to sports until she played better than most boys. By disguising this fact, and pretending to be a mere novice, she was admitted to their games.

Herbert accepted her as Man Friday with considerable reluctance, but she made him feel that her very gratitude gave her a sort of hold on him. She was very useful, if you knew how to handle her; and sheer loss, if you did not. She abhorred authority. If you told her she

must do a thing, she stubbornly refused. If you asked it as a favour, it was done instantly. If you dared her to do a thing, nothing could stop her. She was appallingly indifferent to danger. She terrified the more timid souls in Herbert's crowd. But aside from the fact that she was good at their games, her main contribution was the original things she thought up for them to do.

She had, at fourteen, a fair acquaintance with American history, and she devised rare amusements, based on the primitive life of our pioneer forefathers. These games lasted for weeks. Bands of Indians preyed on the settlers; the settlers sent messengers to the tribal chiefs. There were periods of parleying, smoking of the peace pipe; there were war dances and uprisings.

The scene might run like this. The ship which was bringing the pilgrims, was wrecked off the beach, and the passengers took refuge in rowboats and canoes, from which they landed upon the unfriendly shores. Red men lay in wait for them, lurking behind sand forts. Occasionally when women settlers were absolutely necessary, Margie Hunter and the other girls were allowed to come along, but for the most part they were ruthlessly shut out. Isabelle, as author and stage manager, was indispensable and, therefore, safe.

It took much strategy on Isabelle's part to effect her freedom. She assured Miss Watts that all the children went daily to play at the Hunters', because there was a pool, and "You have the most fun there"; so when, of an afternoon, Miss Watts accompanied her to the Hunters', and stayed chatting with the Hunter governess until

it was time to go home, her charge was always wonderfully behaved until she was out of sight. Then she left the girls and sped off to her true companions. Margie threatened to tell on her, but Herbert took the matter in hand, and nothing came of the threat.

Of course Max and Wally had no idea of her associations; that was Miss Watts' business. Isabelle played with the children of the right set, which was all that really mattered. That she swaggered and boasted and whistled about the house, these were annoying details, but she had always been a pest.

Wally protested once against her hoydenish manners.

"You talk like a jockey, Isabelle. You haven't a grain of feminine charm."

"Feminine charm! Ha!" snorted his daughter, with scorn.

"You'd better try to acquire a little. You'll need it," he warned her.

"Need it for what?"

"Need it for your business."

"What is my business?"

"Getting married."

She stared at him with an angry flush mounting her face. She turned and mounted the stairs, leaning over to shout as she went, with unmistakable emphasis:

"When you've bats in your belfry that flut,
When your *comprenez-vous* line is cut,
When there's nobody home
In the top of your dome,
Then, your head's not a head; it's a nut!"

THE CRICKET

Wally swore gently, and gave it up.

Isabelle's life seemed to run in a series of crises. It was always mounting toward or descending from a climax. The present summer of her fourteenth year was no exception.

The historic American scenes were still highly popular, but Isabelle's creative spirit was not yet satisfied. She was preparing the episode of John Smith and Pocahontas, to be played by Herbert Hunter and herself as principals, when it occurred to her that the scene ought to be played, by night, in the woods. She proposed it to Herbert but he scoffed at it. They never could manage. How could they get away at night? But Isabelle had it all planned.

Her idea was to pick out the spot in the woods, put up the tepees, collect the firewood, lay in supplies, and get everything ready in advance. Saturday night would be the best one for the encampment, because their parents always dined and danced at the club that night, so the coast would be clear so far as they were concerned.

"It isn't parents, it's servants that will get in our way," objected Herbert.

"If you *think* how to get by them, Herbert, you can," urged the temptress.

"How? Just tell me how I can get past old Mademoiselle when she sits in the hall outside my door?"

"Tell her you forgot something downstairs, and then run out."

"Fat chance! She'd give the alarm and they'd all come on the jump."

"Well, if *I* can get out, I should think *you* could," she taunted him.

"How'd we get back in? Suppose parents got back before we did."

Her inspiration flared like a torch.

"We'd sleep in the tents all night."

"Gee!" said Herbert. This was sheer daring. It captured his imagination. He decided to submit it to the others. A council was called. They in turn were struck dumb by the idea that they should spend a night in the woods, untrammelled by authority.

It took an enormous amount of planning and preparation. The problem of the best means of escape for each member was taken up and decided upon. The hour for meeting, and the place, were named. Governesses as a rule had their dinners early, with the children. Later, each boy was to complain of weariness or headache and go directly to bed. At nine o'clock they would make a getaway and meet at a certain spot, centrally located for them all. All of them had ponies, so they could ride to the trysting place. Blankets must be brought by each camper, and it was agreed that they would sleep in their clothes.

The day came. As the idea was to be kept secret from all girls, Isabelle had some trouble managing not even to see Margie Hunter, with whom she was, ostensibly, to spend the day. She induced Wally to drop her at the Hunters' on the way to the club.

The boys were hard at work. They greeted her casually, as was their habit. It was the way they kept up the bluff

to themselves that they had no use for girls. Isabelle was satisfied with their manners. She knew in her own mind that she was the brains of the whole concern, so why cavil at their bluff, male ways?

They worked like beavers all day long. They went without any luncheon. They lugged out the tents and set them up. They made beds of boughs. They laid fires ready for the torch. They cached the grub in a hollow tree out of the way of prowling creatures. They carried out pails of drinking water, and borrowed the kitchen utensils from Margie's playhouse. It was late afternoon when they limped wearily back to the Hunters' in search of food.

"Mother was awf'ly mad at you, Isabelle, because you kept luncheon waiting," said Margie, snippily. "Where have you been?"

"Oh, we were playing, and we thought we'd go without any lunch. I hope there's tea, though," she added.

There was; and they put away quantities of bread and butter, with jam, and lemonade, which infuriated the cook, who had to supply the demand. They parted, later, with fervent farewells, *sotto-voce* remarks, and mysterious signs.

At home, Isabelle got ready for her supper without being told, and sat quietly with a book until she was called. A close observer might have noted that she never turned a leaf, that when a motor chugged off bearing her parents, she was seen to smile and sigh.

After supper, she complained of utter weariness and went to bed. Miss Watts looked in at half past eight;

Isabelle was breathing evenly. A few moments later, she heard the governess close the door between their two rooms. Immediately she got up, dropped her night gown, worn over her riding clothes, and slipped out. A moment later she was in the stable, getting a saddle on her horse, tying her blanket to the horn. She managed her exit without interference, because Saturday night there were "doin's" among the servants.

Once on the road, she let the pony run. She had never been out alone at night before. It was scary, she admitted to herself. Once an automobile, on the way to the club with somebody's parents, caused her to dash off the road into the underbrush. Finally she reached the meeting place, and found two scared boys ahead of her. Shortly, the others arrived. There were no signs of hilarity over this adventure, they were all solemn and glum. Some of them were in Indian garb, with tomahawks; others in boy-scout hats, as pilgrims.

When they were all gathered they moved in a body to the camp. It was darker than pitch in the woods, so they had to lead the ponies, and they stumbled over tree trunks, and logs. Unseen things scuttled away underfoot, and terror began to spread like measles.

"Get the fire lighted, then we can see all right," said Isabelle the dauntless.

They managed that finally and peered about them, as the weird shadows danced and made fantastic shapes.

"Let's get the grub and eat," said Herbert.

"Not yet, not till we do the play," objected Isabelle.

"Somebody bind up John Smith and the rest sit round the

place where we're going to execution him. The Indians can lurk——"

"Say, I ain't goin' to lurk in the dark, out there," protested a brave, peering into the blackness.

"I am!" said Isabelle, marching upon unseen terrors among the trees.

"If you're going to let a *girl* dare you!" cried Herbert, secretly glad that his rôle required no heroic exposure.

The Indians reluctantly followed Isabelle Pocahontas into the shadows, stepping high, and jumping back with exclamations now and then.

The chopping block was brought out where John Smith's head was to rest, then Pocahontas crept through into the firelight and the play was begun, but there was no real spirit in the affair. Isabelle felt this; so, to create a new interest, she urged John Smith to break bread with the Indians after he had been saved by her, and released. They hauled out the food, slightly the worse for squirrels; they cooked the bacon, eating it nearly raw, with hunks of bread. They had a thermos bottle of cold tea which they referred to as "rum." There were plenty of doughnuts and a bakery pie.

The repast roused their spirits considerably. After it was finished, John Smith invited the Indians to spend the night, and everybody agreed to turn in. There was an obvious reluctance on the part of some to enter the dark tents. Things unseen rattled inside.

"Say! why not roll up in our blankets around the fire?" said doughty John Smith, the Pilgrim's pride.

"Good boy—that's the boy," agreed the Indians.

So they curled up in a circle inside their covers, as near the blaze as they could lie, wide-eyed and on the watch. Each one secretly longed for his bed at home, and excoriated Isabelle with her devil's gift of invention. But after a while the hard labour of the day began to tell, and as the fire grew fainter, one by one they dropped asleep, and the shadows closed in upon them completely.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AT THE club the Saturday night hilarity was at its height. The Country-Club set took themselves very seriously—at least as seriously as they took anything. They conceived themselves as a group, somehow set apart. They lived idle, luxurious lives. Like the lily they toiled not, which of itself was an obvious mark of distinction in a work-a-day world.

In the winter they “played together” in town, at Palm Beach, or in California. In the summer they played together on yachts, or at the Country Club of “the colony.” They hedged themselves in with a thick wall of prejudice against the newcomer, the outsider. Like the Labour Union, they valiantly fought the “open-shop” idea!

Now, since their superiority—real or imagined—lay in the triumph of artifice over Nature; or, more brutally, since it lay in money rather than in wit; the natural recourse of the elect was to various forms of spirituous assistance. They never could have endured each other twelve months in the year without it. So, on Saturday nights a sufficient number of cocktails was served to ensure a certain hilarity, and, in case this should wear off, the bar worked steadily during the evening. So it was on the Saturday night in question, and the party was “going” very well.

Wally was dancing with Nancy Horton, when Billy, her husband, stopped them.

"Look here, Nance, the butler just telephoned that Teddy isn't in his bed, and they can't find him."

"Rubbish! He's somewhere about. Come on, Wally."

"No. Hold on a minute. They phoned the Hunters to see if he was there, and they discovered that Herbert is missing."

"The little beasts! Where do you suppose they are? Do the Hunters know it?"

"The servants were going to telephone them."

"What do you want me to do?"—shortly.

"I think we ought to go home——"

"I will not! You go, if you like, and give him a good thrashing when you find him. Come on, Wally."

She whirled away with Wally, who said:

"Thank the Lord, my kid is a girl!"

But, one by one, parents were called by the 'phone, until a sufficient number of fathers had left to make the affair one-sided. So it broke up, with loud protests on the part of the women against the tyranny of children, and the slavery of parenthood.

Max grumbled all the way home, and Wally slept. But once indoors, he surreptitiously crept to Isabelle's door and tiptoed in. Her nightie was a heap by her bed, the bed crumpled and empty. He hurried to Miss Watts's door and roused her.

"Miss Watts, where is Isabelle?" he demanded.

"In bed, Mr. Bryce."

"No, she isn't. I've looked."

"But she went to bed at half past eight. I saw her asleep myself. Just a minute, please."

He heard her pattering about. He went downstairs and summoned Matthews. He knew nothing. He had been on duty all evening, but he had not seen her. Wally ordered him to question all the servants. Miss Watts, greatly excited, appeared in a bathrobe. A telephone call to the Hunters' house brought the reply that Mr. Hunter and the servants were out looking, now. Wally went up to his wife's room. She was in bed.

"Isabelle's gone," he said.

"Gone where?" she asked, sitting up.

"I don't know. With the others, I suppose."

"Where is Watts? She is responsible for Isabelle."

"She saw her asleep in bed at eight thirty. Miss Watts put out her light at nine. The kid got away somehow."

"Watts had no business going to bed. Where were the other servants?"

"They were on duty and saw nothing."

"On duty, in the kitchen, having skylarks!"

"No matter. The thing is what to do now?"

"Go to bed. She'll turn up."

"Don't be a fool! I'll take a car and join the searching party. Nobody knows what those kids are up to."

"All right; go ahead. But this time, Wally Bryce, I punish her."

He hurried out, and got into a fast car, with Matthews and Henry, the chauffeur, in the back seat. He went like the wind to the Hunters'. No news yet, but they informed him that twelve boys were missing.

"My Isabelle is with them," said Wally.

The Hunters' butler look startled.

"My word, sir, she is a limb!" he exclaimed.

On the road Wally met Billy Horton in his car.

"They must be around here somewhere. They couldn't get far. If I don't fix that young man of mine!" he threatened.

"My kid is with them," Wally groaned.

"You don't say!" ejaculated Horton.

Just then a streak of light, as from a fire, flared up in the woods, to the left, and died out.

"Did you see that?" demanded Wally.

"Yes, looked like——"

"Beg pardon, sir, fire in the woods, that was."

"They've set the woods on fire," shouted Wally, and started off full speed. Horton followed.

"Keep your eye on the place, you fellows. About here, wasn't it?"

He stopped the car, and they jumped out. Henry carried a bunghole light and they penetrated the woods, single file, shouting as they went. No answer came, but they kept on. Before they had gone very far, a pony whinnied.

"Hear that? We're coming to something."

They heard motors on the road behind, and shouts in answer to their shouts. Other fathers rushed in presently and joined them. Henry stopped and halted the entire line.

"Well, I'll be blowed," he said.

He swept the cleared place with his light, and they all

crowded up behind him. A bed of ashes smouldered, and around it, in deep oblivion of well-earned sleep, lay thirteen blanketed braves, a trusty weapon—tomahawk or sword—at hand beside each sleeper.

The fathers descended upon them, and with difficulty aroused them to the capture. They were led, carried, or dragged to motors, and carted home. Isabelle borne between Henry and Matthews scarcely woke at all. In fact, when she woke in the morning to Miss Watts's grieved expression, all memory of the transfer was gone.

"Oh, Isabelle," said she, "how could you?"

The child struggled with her memories.

"Who found me?"

"Your father."

"Were the others found too?"

"Yes."

"Did they get taken home?"

"Certainly."

"Gee!"

"Is that all you have to say?"

"What are they going to do to me?"

"I don't know, but your parents are very angry."

"I bet they are," grinned the culprit.

"What is to become of you, Isabelle?" inquired Miss Watts, with tragic fervour.

Isabelle ate a huge breakfast, and waited cheerfully for her summons to judgment. It came at eleven. She went to her mother's room, where that lady sat in her bed. Her husband sat by, arms folded, expression stern.

"Hello," said Isabelle.

"Sit down!" her mother ordered, fiercely.

Isabelle sat.

"How did you get out of this house last night?"

"Walked out."

"Where was Miss Watts?"

"Asleep in bed."

"Where were the other servants?"

"At their regular Saturday night party. They call it Club Night."

"When did these boys induce you to go on this disgraceful expedition?"

"They didn't induce me," replied Isabelle. "It was my idea."

"Isabelle Bryce!" her mother burst out. "You asked twelve boys to spend the night with you?"

"No, I thought it would be fun to play John Smith, Pocahontas and Indians at night, with a fire. So we planned it. Then we thought you might get back from the club before we did, and kick up a row, so I said why not sleep in the tents, and sneak in at daylight, so you'd never know."

"Did you ever hear anything so awful?" Max demanded of Wally.

"I don't think she understands just what it is she has done," he said, hesitatingly.

"Don't you dare make excuses for her!"

"Don't you know it isn't decent for you to spend the night in the woods, with twelve boys?"

"Why not?" asked Isabelle, interested.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Bryce.

"Well, why don't you tell her why not?" burst out Wally.

"Don't be vulgar, Wally. Just leave this to me, please."

"Go on," he said.

"I've tried every way I know to make you act like a decent human being, and you won't. Now, there's only one way left."

"Penitentiary?" inquired Isabelle in all earnestness.

"No impudence! You have disgraced yourself thoroughly this time, and us, too."

Isabelle turned to her father. She had not the least idea what they were hinting at.

"Wally, what's all the row about?" she inquired.

"You've got to explain it to her, I tell you," he repeated.

Mrs. Bryce ignored him.

"I have decided that your punishment this time is to be a severe one," she said sternly. "You are to be sent away to school. We will see if that can save you."

"School? Boarding school?"

"Yes."

"Not a girls' school?"

"I suppose you'd prefer a boys' school?" Max said, sarcastically.

"Yes, I would," her daughter answered, literally.

"There's no use!" exclaimed Mrs. Bryce. "Take her away, Wally. I shall decide upon a school—a very strict one—and she shall be sent there next month. It is evident Miss Watts *can* not cope with her."

Isabelle, somewhat dazed, walked back to the school-room. She grasped the idea that this time she had ex-

ceeded her limit. She had never seen her mother so angry, and even Wally was as grave as a judge.

"Why is it wicked for me to play Indian with the boys?" she demanded of Miss Watts.

"It isn't playing Indian; it's—little girls can't spend the night in the woods with boys," she replied.

"But why not? They were my regular friends."

"Didn't your mother tell you why it is wrong?"

"No."

"Then I must speak to her, Isabelle, before we discuss it."

It was only the beginning of the revelation of her ignominy. She was not allowed to go anywhere or to see her friends. Once when she saw Margie Hunter on the road, and waved to her, Margie looked the other way and did not wave back. She smuggled off a letter to Herbert and he smuggled one to say that he was not allowed to see her, or write to her—that he was being sent away to school.

When she questioned Miss Watts she met with pained reticence—no frank explanation. The girl felt that she was a prisoner, under sentence for something which she could not understand. She turned hither and thither in her appeal for help and understanding, and everybody turned aside as if she were an outcast. The iron of injustice began to enter her soul. She was at the impressionable age, when she felt deeply every injury done her. She thought much of Ann Barnes and Martin Christiansen, her two friends. They would have understood. They would have answered the questions, told her the truth which

her mother hinted at yet failed to explain. It was a period of bitterness and revolt, of enforced inaction and isolation. It was to bear fruit in her whole life, and no one guessed it—or cared.

But it so happened that Christiansen, all unknown to her, was to help her. He happened to meet Mrs. Bryce, full of maternal anxiety about the school question, and he immediately suggested The Hill Top School, conducted by some friends of his who were Quakers. They accepted only a few children, but they accomplished wonders with them. Max listened and took note. He offered to write a letter in Isabelle's behalf. Mrs. Bryce accepted this help gratefully, and in the end it was arranged that Isabelle was to be sent there. But the little girl knew nothing of this.

Events marched. She was taken to town and a school outfit bought for her. She was allowed no word of choice in her things. Max, coldly distant, and Miss Watts, nervously conciliatory, accompanied her during this ordeal of fitting and ordering. A month earlier, she would have worked up a plan of revolt and carried it through, but now, it did not seem worth while. Their attitude toward her struck in on her spirit. She hated the thought of the school, but she was glad she was going away.

"What's the name of this place they're sending me?" she asked Miss Watts one day.

"The Hill Top School."

"Where is it?"

"In Massachusetts. It is a very nice school, and I think you will be happy there."

"Won't I? Just!"

Miss Watts frowned. There was a queer streak of cynicism growing in the child that gave her pause. She was fond of her, in her way, but she was glad that her responsibility for her was soon to cease. She had been induced by Mrs. Bryce to deliver Isabelle at the school, as the day of her departure fell in horse-show week, and The Beeches was to be full of house guests.

It was a ripe, mellow, September day when they left. A day on which Isabelle longed to fling herself into the saddle and gallop and gallop through the red and yellow world. Instead, for some heinous but incomprehensible crime, she was being sent to prison. That was the attitude of mind in which she viewed it.

"All right, now, Isabelle; the motor is here. Have you said good-bye to your mother?" inquired Miss Watts, all a-flutter.

"Yes," lied Isabelle, and hurried down to the car.

Wally was at the wheel.

"Are you driving us to the station, Wally?" she asked.

"I thought I would," he answered, embarrassed.

She got in and sat beside him. Her attempt at a smile worried him. After all, she was just a kid, being bundled off in disgrace. He felt a vague regret that he meant so little to her. He wondered if she really loved any one. Then her search for "regular parents" came back to haunt him. Funny business this, having kids. Not so simple——

"All right, kid?" he asked her, as they waited for the train.

"Oh, yes," she said, with an effort at her old *insouciance*.

"Good-bye," he said jocosely, adding, as the train came in, with an effort to avoid any emotion: "Write if you need money."

He kissed her, and she clung to him.

"You're a good old thing, Wahy," she said, hoarsely; and then, silently, she followed Miss Watts into the train.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE little god of Chance must have sat smiling on his throne when Mrs. Wally Bryce decided upon Hill Top School as the spot to which her daughter should be banished. She felt that Christiansen's recommendation was enough, together with the list of girls who attended it, so she did not trouble to visit the place. The few necessary letters which passed between herself and Adam Benjamin, the head of the school, were formal business communications, in regard to terms, books, equipment, and such details. Mr. Benjamin's insistence upon the simplest clothes suited her exactly. The girl had to be put somewhere until she could be admitted to a fashionable New York finishing school where she had been entered as a baby. This Hill Top place would do as a stop gap.

As for Isabelle, in the bitterness of her spirit, her only thought was that, whatever the place proved to be, she would hate it.

She and Miss Watts arrived in the afternoon of a perfect autumn day. The train was late, so that Miss Watts was forced to hand over her charge to Mr. Benjamin, who met them at the station, with only a few minutes' wait for her train back to New York.

"I'm sorry not to have taken you to the school, and seen your room, Isabelle," she said.

"That's all right."

"We will look after her," Mr. Benjamin said with a genial smile.

Isabelle looked at him again. He was a big man, strong and bronzed, as if he lived in the open. When he smiled, his very blue eyes smiled too, and many little wrinkles appeared about them, as if his smile sent out rays, like the sun. He wore loose, snuff-coloured clothes, and a broad-brimmed hat.

Miss Watts's train thundered in. There was a moment of confusion, of exhortation to be a good girl, of farewell; and then the train was gone. The last member of Isabelle's world had deserted her, and she choked back a sob of loneliness, of rebellion. It was all mirrored in her tell-tale face. A big strong hand suddenly enclosed her own, and she looked up into Mr. Benjamin's wrinkly smile.

"Thee must not feel lonely, little girl," he said, gently. He led her away to a wide, low surrey, with two fat, dappled horses. Isabelle tried to snatch her hand away, but Mr. Benjamin seemed unaware of it.

"If thee will get into the front seat with me, we will put thy trunk in the back."

Without any reply she got in. Presently they were off at a good pace, through lovely country, mellow in the late afternoon sunshine. Mr. Benjamin talked to the horses in a friendly way, but he left Isabelle to herself. After a little they were among the hills. The sumac flamed

everywhere, and bronze oak trees smouldered in the sun. Once Mr. Benjamin drew up and pointed to a flower beside the road.

"Does thee see that flower, Isabelle?"

She nodded.

"It is very interesting," he mused, and he unfolded the tale of this plant. How exacting it was, how its seed germinated in only a certain soil, how it bloomed in only certain seasons under special weather conditions. Isabelle's quick imagination kindled at the tale. It was hard to hate this man, whom she had visualized as her jailer.

"Why do you say 'thee' instead of 'you'?" she asked as her first remark.

"Because I am a Quaker, and we use the Friends' speech."

"What are Quakers?"

He smiled, and explained to her, and as he talked they swung between gates into a long tree-bordered drive that climbed and climbed until it reached a hill top; and here a low, rambling, many-roomed house spread itself pleasantly upon the earth. Some girls were raking leaves and waved to them as they passed. The fat horses stopped at the house. Mr. Benjamin got out and lifted out the trunk and bag. Just then the door opened and Mrs. Benjamin appeared.

"Phoebe, my dear, this is our new child, Isabelle Bryce," he said.

Mrs. Benjamin bent and kissed her.

"Thee is very welcome, Isabelle," she said, taking her

hand and leading her indoors. A great, broad hall bisected the house. In the living room, to the right, a fire sparkled and crackled. The room gave out a feeling of friendliness. There were big chairs, student lamps, pleasant colours and shadows.

"I hope thee did not get chilled coming up the hill. There is a nip in the air these fall nights," Mrs. Benjamin remarked.

"No, I wasn't cold, thank you," Isabelle replied. The last two words dragged themselves out in spite of her.

It was as difficult to hate Mrs. Benjamin as it was to hate Mr. Benjamin. And the warm big room was nice. But no—she wasn't going to give in. She was a rebel and they should find her such!

Just then a girl came into the room. She was younger than Isabelle—ten years old, perhaps. She was fair and frail with a discontented little face.

"Peggy, this is Isabelle Bryce. This is Peggy Starr, Isabelle. I thought thee might show Isabelle her room, Peggy."

The two girls looked at each other.

"All right; come on," said the younger girl, ungraciously.

They mounted the wide stairs to the corridor above, with bedrooms opening off on each side. Peggy led the way into a huge room, with many windows. It had two beds, two bureaus, two closets.

"I s'pose you're my room mate," Peggy remarked, staring at her.

"Do you sleep here?"

"I slept in another girl's room last night, but I belong here."

"When did you come?"

"Yesterday."

"Like it?"

"No, hate it!"

"So do I," said Isabelle, firmly.

"I cried all night," boasted Peggy.

"I never cry," said Isabelle.

The other girl stared.

"Are there many girls here?"

"You make ten. The rest are raking for a bonfire. Sillies!"

"Didn't they invite you?"

"I can't do rough things like that. I'm delicate."

Isabelle heard shouts of laughter, and hurried to the window. Down below in the twilight a crowd of laughing girls was burying a prostrate victim under the leaves. They shrieked and cavorted about her. A yellow moon hung low over the hills. All at once, clear and high, a bugle call arose, and echoed far and near. It was a scene and impression she was never to forget.

"What is that?" she demanded of Peggy.

"Time to dress. Mr. Benjamin bugles whenever we have to do anything," complained Peggy.

There was a rush on the stairs, more laughter, questions called and answered, doors slammed. A poignant sense of loneliness, of homesickness, swept over Isabelle. She turned to Peggy, who sat by.

"I hate it!" she said fiercely.

"So do I. Going to change?"—languidly. "You needn't. Girls don't have to, their first night. Just wash and come on."

Isabelle followed her suggestion and presently the two girls went downstairs together. Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin sat together on a high backed settle by the fire. They were enjoying each other's conversation. Mrs. Benjamin's face shone as she listened to her husband. It was rather a plain face, surmounted by hair parted smoothly in the middle and drawn low into a diminutive knot at the back. She wore a queer dress, Isabelle thought, and a fine white kerchief was folded across her breast. This was her costume always, save on Sunday, when the dress was of silk.

"I hope thee found thy room pleasant, Isabelle," she said as the girls entered.

"Yes, thanks."

"Thee has a fine view over the hills," Mr. Benjamin said.

Then the other girls trooped in, and Isabelle was introduced to them. A servant announced supper. Mr. Benjamin gave his arm to Mrs. Benjamin, and they led the way, followed by the girls, two by two, arm in arm, across the hall to the dining room. There was an unexpected moment for Isabelle when everybody bowed the head and offered silent grace. The supper was plain, but how those girls did eat! Cold meats, baked potatoes and apple sauce, and cookies disappeared in quantities. Even the rice pudding had to be served twice all round.

There was talk and laughter. No sense of disorder or

noise, but it was just jolly. Mr. Benjamin at one end of the long table beamed at Mrs. Benjamin at the other end. They both played a part in the sprightly give-and-take of the children. It was like a happy family. Isabelle was silent, taking note of everything. Peggy was sullen.

After supper there was a rush for sweaters.

"Get your coat, Isabelle, and come out. We're going to have a bonfire to-night. No lessons until to-morrow," shouted a girl named Agnes.

Isabelle started up to get her coat, but on second thoughts she went back for Peggy.

"Oh, I can't do those things, I tell you. I'm too delicate," whined the girl.

"It won't hurt thee at all, my dear, if thee wraps up well," said Mrs. Benjamin.

"I'm never allowed out in the night air——"

"Get thy sweater and come out, little sister. Thee doesn't know this night air," laughed Mr. Benjamin.

So in the end Peggy allowed herself to be persuaded, and went along.

"Silly, spoiled little minx," commented Mr. Benjamin.

"Oh, we'll soon manage her, my dear, but what about this smouldering Isabelle with her old eyes?" sighed his wife.

He patted her hand.

"I leave her to thee, my Phoebe."

Outside the moon rode high, the air was crisp and sweet, the silence unbroken save for the shouts of the girls. The leaves were piled in a huge mound, in a cleared space

some distance from the house. They set a match to it, and the flames leapt hungry and fierce. The girls formed a circle and danced around it, singing. Mr. Benjamin stopped a second on his way to the barn, and called a warning about whirling skirts as he went on.

The circle broke into dancing pairs. Some one started leap frog. Isabelle forgot everything except that she was having a good time. There were friendliness and joy and freedom. She drank of them to the full. She played wildly, excitedly. She began to lead in the games. Even Peggy forgot her rôle and joined in.

The flames were lower now, and with a sudden running leap Isabelle jumped over them. Without hesitation the whole line followed—all except Peggy, who held back.

"Come on, Peggy, don't be a 'fraid-cat!" shouted Isabelle.

So Peggy made a half-hearted jump and landed in the fire. In a second her skirts were ablaze, and the silence of terror struck the girls dumb. Isabelle ran at Peggy and dragged her out, she threw her on the ground, tearing at her skirt with her bare hands.

"Pile sweaters on her!" she ordered the girls.

They obeyed, and Isabelle threw herself upon the smouldering heap, in an effort to quench the fire. Mr. Benjamin came upon them, and the girls explained in shrill unison. He lifted Isabelle off; picked Peggy up, half unconscious; cut away the still smoking skirt, and carried her into the house.

The girls followed, awed and weak from fright. They sat in silence in the living room awaiting the report from

upstairs. Both the Benjamins were up there. There had been no serious damage done. The heavy wool shirt had protected her legs, but the shock had played havoc with poor Peggy's nerves, and she screamed and cried long after she was rubbed, greased, bandaged, and comfortable.

When Mrs. Benjamin finally came downstairs to get some hot milk for her, she found the frightened girls still sitting there. She relieved their minds at once.

"How did it happen?" she inquired.

They explained how Isabelle jumped the blaze and urged timid Peggy to follow.

"Where is Isabelle?" demanded Mrs. Benjamin.

It appeared that nobody knew. In the excitement they had not noticed her absence. Should they go and look for her?

"No; I'll find her. Agnes, go to the kitchen and get a glass of hot milk and take it to Peggy. The rest of you go to bed as quietly as possible. I will find Isabelle," said Mrs. Benjamin.

They tiptoed away as silent as ghosts. Mrs. Benjamin put a heavy coat about her shoulders, and went out. The clearing where the bonfire had been, lay on a knoll above the house. As she approached it she saw silhouetted against the moon a small figure, head bent upon drawn-up knees, silent, "lonely as a cloud."

"My dear, thee will take thy death of cold," she said gently, leaning over the girl.

She lifted tragic, pitiful eyes to Mrs. Benjamin's.

"Have you come to send me home?"

"No, I've come to take thee to bed,"—simply.

She drew the girl to her feet, put her hand on her shoulder; and together, in silence, they approached the house. She led her to the fire and chaffed her cold hands.

"You ought to punish me," said Isabelle at last.

"My dear, when any one at Hill Top breaks the rules, or acts wilfully, we ask her to punish herself."

Isabelle could scarcely believe her ears.

"I think thee has been sufficiently punished, Isabelle, and now I shall give thee a hot lemonade to warm thee up before thee goes to bed," the kind voice went on.

Suddenly without warning, Isabelle threw herself on the couch and began to sob. Not like a child's easy tears, but like the tortured sobbing of a nature long pent up. Mrs. Benjamin said nothing. She sat down on the couch, drew the child's head into her lap, and let the spasm spend itself.

So it was that Isabelle, who never wept, spent her first evening at Hill Top School.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE period of adjustment to life at the Hill Top School was a very bewildering one to Isabelle. The excitement over Peggy's accident was soon past, to that heroine's intense regret. She prolonged her nervous prostration as long as possible, and was duly petted and made much of by the girls. Isabelle, full of remorse for the trouble she had brought upon her roommate, adopted her as her special charge.

The routine of the school, if you could call it that, began. Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin had strange ideas in regard to the training of the young. They kept the school small, so that they might not be hampered in their experiments, and strangely enough, they drew their pupils largely from the families of the rich. When he was asked about this once, Mr. Benjamin said:

"It seems to be our mission to teach these little richlings to

'Ride a cock horse,

To Banbury Cross,

To see what money can't buy'

"They get life so crookedly from servants and such," he added. "Phœbe and I just try to straighten them out."

The process by which these two rare souls accomplished this straightening out was quite their own. There was

only one extra teacher, a Frenchwoman who came from Boston twice a week. For the rest, Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin conducted the school, and did all the teaching.

During October and November, and again in late April and May, lessons were all out of doors. The whole school studied Botany and Zoology with Mr. Benjamin. They wandered over the hills, on the brisk autumn days, with their boxes and cases and bottles for specimens. These lessons were a series of enchanted tales to Isabelle, of how the life force persists in bugs and plants. The whole morning on certain days of the week would be devoted to this peripatetic grazing, then note books would be written up before lunch.

This function was also a lesson. Certain girls took charge of it each day—planned, ordered, prepared and cooked the meal, in the open, over a gypsy fire. The girls in charge were limited in expenditure, and there was great rivalry among them to find something new and toothsome to make in the skillet or the big kettle. Careful accounts were kept by each set of managers, and if, at the end of the school term, there was credit balance, a special party was given on the savings.

A second committee took charge of serving the meal; a third, of the clearing away and dishwashing. Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin were always treated as guests on these occasions.

Arithmetic was accompanied by instruction in banking. Allowances were deposited in a central bank, with elected officers. All money was drawn by check. Books were balanced weekly, and penalty imposed upon careless financiers.

Mrs. Benjamin conducted the classes in English Literature, and because she loved books truly, she led these girls step by step into the realm of the best. Shakespeare was studied and loved, and played under the trees. Wordsworth and Tennyson and Longfellow read in the open, are very different from Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Longfellow parsed indoors. Poetry was not a "study" to be pored over in the schoolroom; it was a natural beautiful expression of life, sung instead of spoken. So they came to our modern poets with interest and understanding, because these new poets, forsooth, spoke the language of these children of the present.

Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Victor Hugo, read aloud and discussed; these were a treat—no task—here. These great artists were considered not only as makers of romance, creators of literature, but also as historians of their times. Their books were studied along with the history of the countries and the peoples that they described. Then came the geography of the places wherein the stories were laid, then a study of the social conditions and customs of the periods to which they gave expression.

American history was taught by both the Benjamins. It was their hobby. Not the sort of history taught in most schools, "fixed up" for the young, but the true history of our country—its blunders, its stupidities, its triumphs.

So through the whole curriculum, acquiring knowledge was a pleasant thing. It was not a matter of being fed with little unrelated chunks of information, on this or on that. It was rather being led into a great field, where

now this part, now that, held your interest, but you never lost sight of the whole expanse.

As for play, there were nutting expeditions, hay rides, marshmallow roasts, any number of out-of-door joys. It was as nearly a normal life as can be reached in these days of ours.

To Isabelle it was unbelievable. Everything they did during the day interested her. Her old passion for leadership spurred her on, but now it was a spur to excel in legitimate things. Her sense of rebellion was laid away, because she liked nearly everything she had to do, and her days were so busy that there was no excess vitality to work itself off in pranks.

Not that she was a reformed soul—far from it! There were times when she balked the duties she liked least, and was gently called upon by Mrs. Benjamin to punish herself. After the first amusement of this novelty wore off, it became plain to her that the punishment she administered to herself was always more severe than any one else would have prescribed. Sometimes punishment was decided upon by the community as a whole. By degrees the girls all began to realize "the social spirit" for the first time in their self-centred, individualistic lives.

"Mrs. Benjamin," Isabelle said one day, bursting into the presence of that lady, "I feel full of the devil to-day!"

"Dost thou, Isabelle? Dear me! we must think of something to dispossess him."

"Better give me something *hard* to do."

"It is now half past eight. Suppose thee goes down to the big field to help Henry pitch hay until ten."

"All right," agreed Isabelle.

"Thee might speak to Mr. Benjamin on thy way out, about the seven devils that possess thee," smiled her teacher.

Another influence that was working in the development of the girl was the dependent devotion of Peggy Starr. Her young room-mate worshipped Isabelle. She began by following her through fire, and she would not have stopped at water. What Isabelle did and said and thought was Peggy's law.

Now Mrs. Benjamin took hold of the situation at once. She disapproved of the school girl "crush." She had a long talk with Isabelle and urged her to look after the younger girl, to help her forget her "claim" to invalidism, to influence her to normal activity. Isabelle accepted the responsibility and felt it deeply. She restrained herself from this and that because of Peggy. If she did things, Peggy would do them. So again, wise Mrs. Benjamin let her teach herself her first lessons in self-control.

"Isabelle," Mr. Benjamin said to her, when she had been at the school about two months, "I have a letter from thy father. He says thee does not write home."

"I've been busy," Isabelle said, frowning.

"But what does thee do on Sunday afternoons, when the other girls write home?"

"I'd rather not tell."

"But thee writes; I've seen thee."

She nodded.

"I want thee to write thy mother to-day, Isabelle," he said, sternly.

He told his wife of this conversation later.

"She writes volumes on Sunday," he said, "now what does she do with it?"

"She is one of the strangest children we've ever had, Adam," she answered.

"She is rather exhausting to me," he said.

"She's lived under abnormal conditions of some sort. I cannot seem to visualize her parents at all. She never speaks of them. She was so bitter and sullen when she came to us," Mrs. Benjamin mused. ["I must try to get her confidence about her parents, she may be needing help."

"She came to thee just in time, my Phoebe."

"Yes, that's true. A little more and she would have been a bitter cynic at eighteen. Even now when she just begins to respond, like a frost-bitten plant, I am not sure of the blossom."

"Hot-house growth, thee must remember."

"She interests me deeply, and I'm growing very fond of her."

"Lucky Isabelle," her husband smiled.

Later in the day when the other girls were out at play Mrs. Benjamin came upon Isabelle, pen in hand, gazing into the distance.

"What is troubling my child?"

"Mr. Benjamin told me to write to Max."

"Who is Max?"

"My mother."

"Thy mother, and thee calls her Max?"

"I always have."

"But it is not respectful, is it?"

"No, but I don't respect her much."

"Doesn't thee?"—calmly.

"No, you can't"—earnestly.

"And what does thee call thy father?"

"Wally."

Mrs. Benjamin smiled. Here was all the clue she needed to the kind of parents Isabelle possessed.

"It may have been considered precocious, when thee was little, to call them so. But if I were in thy place, I would not do it now. It gives the wrong impression of thy manners. I think thee has very pretty manners," she added.

Isabelle flushed with pleasure.

"You see, Max—my mother—doesn't really care where I am, or what I do, so long as I'm not in her way, so I don't know what to write her."

"Couldn't thee write thy father, then?"

"Well, it would be easier," she admitted. "Wally is a good sort, and understands more."

"Write to him then. That will do, I'm sure."

"All right. But nobody writes *me* letters. I never get any."

"To whom does thee write in the letter hour, my dear?"

Isabelle was on her guard at once.

"Oh, to somebody I like."

"Some friend of thine?"

"Um—yes."

"Couldn't thee tell me about this friend? Mr. Benjamin and I are especially interested in the friends of our girls. I have never seen thee post thy letters."

"I don't post them"—shamefacedly.

"Oh, they are to an imaginary friend," said Mrs. Benjamin, seizing an idea.

Isabelle nodded.

"That's delightful. I used to have an imaginary companion, too. Is thine a girl?"

"No."

Mrs. Benjamin ignored Isabelle's uncommunicativeness.

"Why wouldn't that be a good idea for the theme class, Isabelle? 'Letters to an imaginary chum'?"

"Mine isn't a chum."

"Would thee care to tell me?"

Isabelle rose.

"I'll show them to you," she said; and she ran upstairs, and brought a collection of letters to lay in Mrs. Benjamin's lap.

"Thank thee, dear. May I read them?"

The girl nodded. Mrs. Benjamin lifted the first one. It was addressed to: "My Regular Parents." Isabelle went and threw herself down by the fire, her face turned away, while Mrs. Benjamin read:

Oh my dear Parents:

I wish you could see this beautiful school I've come to. It has hills, and a large house, and Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin. Mr. Benjamin has a wrinkly smile, and Mrs. Benjamin is so understanding. They are Quakers and say "thee" and "thou" for "you." It is sweet. When I come home let us say "thee" and "thou" to each other, will you? It sounds so very special.

We study out of doors, and it is fun. We play lots of things, like basketball in the field, so we are healthy. My room-mate is Peggy Starr, a very young girl, often tiresome.

This is Sunday, and all the girls write home, so I write you, dear, dear, regular parents. I think of you a great deal. Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin are just like you, that is why I love them so dearly. I am glad we are poor and have only each other, aren't you? I know some people named Max and Wally, who are rich. They have so much golf, and parties that they can't ever bother with their child, except to scold her. But you care about me, don't you? And you like to hear what I do at school. I would be lonesome without you.

I will try hard to do good, because I love you so much.

Your loving daughter,

ISABELLE.

Mrs. Benjamin finished them, then looked at the girl, whose face was turned away, and her smile was very tender. She spoke simply, without a touch of sentimentality.

"Dear, they are very sweet and loving letters. I am glad thee thinks Mr. Benjamin and I are like thy 'regular parents.'"

Isabelle looked at her shyly.

"Suppose we make an agreement, Isabelle. Thee is to write a short letter to thy father every Sunday, and the rest of the letter hour can be devoted to thy 'regular parents.' This letter thee will post to me, and—since I have no 'regular daughter'—every Sunday afternoon I will post a letter to thee. Is that a bargain?"

"Oh, yes!" cried the girl, flaming to meet this suggestion—this understanding. "Oh, dear Mrs. Benjamin," she added, "you are so love-ful!"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE new relationship established between Mrs. Benjamin and Isabelle was so precious to the little girl that she abandoned her banner of revolt once for all, and gave herself up to the congenial atmosphere of Hill Top. It was the only home she had ever known, since home is a matter of love and people rather than bricks and stones.

The secret correspondence was a complete outlet for Isabelle's imagination, and she pored over the letters her "regular mother" wrote her with utter devotion. She put them away to keep for all her life. They were indeed wonderful letters, full of the fine idealism, the working philosophy that inspired the Benjamins. When there was some misdemeanour, or some fractured rule to be called to Isabelle's attention, it was delicately introduced into the weekly letter, instead of being talked out in the library.

Excess vitality got the girl into scrapes sometimes, but as the Benjamins came to understand her better and to love her, they found ways of appealing to her common sense, or her instinct for justice, to which she never failed to respond. Her quick mind had already put her at the head of her classes.

The out-of-door life and her enjoyment of everything

began to show in her whole bearing. Her face lost its sharp curves, she took on some flesh, her colour was high and her eyes were bright. At last she was coming into her birthright of happy, normal girlhood.

The letters home continued to be written to Wally, and once in a long while she had a brief note from him.

"What kind of a father have you got?" she inquired of Peggy, one day, after the perusal of one of these epistles.

"He is very nice, I think. He was sorry I wasn't a boy, but he always gives me five dollars whenever he sees me. What kind is yours?"

"Wally is the nicest person in our family," she said guardedly.

"Is your father handsome?"

Isabelle hesitated a second.

"Yes—very."

"Mine isn't. He's fat—awf'ly fat. His head blouses over his collar all round."

"You mean his neck."

"No, he hasn't any neck—it's the back of his head. Don't you wish your father looked like a Gibson man?"

"Mine does."

"Really?"

"Yes. Very tall and broad-shouldered, with wavy hair, grey eyes, and *wonderful* teeth! He's very smart looking—oh, very!"

"Oh, Isabelle, he must be grand!" ejaculated Peggy.

"You ought to see him on a horse. He's just superb," she answered, delighted with her fairy story.

"Who is?" asked one of the crowd of six girls who joined them at this moment.

"Isabelle's father. Tell them about him, Isabelle," urged Peggy, the adoring.

So Isabelle began to enlarge upon the theme of the magnificent being who was her father. When she had finished his portrait Wally was a cross between a Norse Viking and a Greek god, with a few lines by Charles Dana Gibson just to bring him into the realm of reality. The girls were thrilled to hear of this heroic being. They entreated Isabelle to have him visit her, but she assured them that it was out of the question. This superman, this leader of society and Wall Street, could never find time to visit so obscure a spot.

Isabelle's father became a legendary figure among them, beautiful and godlike. She shone in the reflected glory of him for weeks. His experiences and adventures were added to *ad infinitum*.

"And my father was riding on his black horse, Nero, when he saw this *very* beautiful girl, in distress. He asked her what was the matter; she told him that she was falsely accused—that the police were after her."

"Oh, what was she accused of, Isabelle?"—breathlessly.

"Murder," said Isabelle, promptly.

"Mercy! what *did* your father do?"

"He hesitated not a minute. With one sweep of his arm he lifted her to the saddle before him, and started Nero on a gallop."

"Did the girl scream?"

"Oh, no. She relaxed in his arms. She knew she could

trust my *father*. He rushed her to his shooting lodge in the forest and hid her there for several weeks."

"But, Isabelle, didn't he fall in love with her?"

"Certainly."

"But he was *married*."

"Well, a little thing like that wouldn't matter to a man like my father. He loved her but he told her he could not marry her because of Max and me."

"And did he leave her?"—disconsolately.

"Yes, he left her."

"Did the police find her?"

"Never. She went off to Europe and nobody ever knew a thing about it."

"How did you know about it?"—suspiciously.

"Oh, I am my father's *confidante*," boasted Isabelle.

"We tell each other everything."

"Does he still love her?"

"Oh, yes; he will bear the marks to his grave."

A sigh of sentimental satisfaction went around.

"I wish my father was interesting like that," sighed Peggy.

It was in the spring when romance was in the very air, that a motor honked up the hill, and Wally inquired for Isabelle. Mrs. Benjamin received him.

"I'm anxious about Isabelle," he said, early in their talk.

"Anxious?"

"Yes. You've never made any complaints about her, or threatened to send her home or anything."

"We have no complaints to make," Mrs. Benjamin smiled. "She is a very clever and delightful child."

"Delightful? Isabelle?"

"We find her so. Affectionate, easily managed, full of life, and a natural leader."

"How Isabelle must have changed!" said Wally, soulfully.

When at a summons from Mrs. Benjamin the girl came into the room, he saw that she had changed. She electrified the room with her health and vitality.

"Wally!" she exclaimed, and suddenly went white to the lips.

"Hello, Isabelle; thought I'd have a look at you, in passing."

He kissed her cold cheek awkwardly.

"Don't seem very pleased to see me," he added.

"Oh, but I am, Wally; I am," she said, with an anxious eye on the door.

"Thou may'st have a holiday, Isabelle, to visit with thy father. We'd be glad to have thee spend the night, Mr. Bryce."

"Just here for a few hours, thanks. Thought I'd look in on the kid. Very kind of you, I'm sure."

Mrs. Benjamin left them.

"Wally, do me a favour," said Isabelle, breathlessly.

"So soon?" he laughed.

"Take me off in the motor for the day."

"But I want to see the school, and meet your pals, and get acquainted with the Benjamins."

"Oh, Wally, it's just like any school, and I'm shut up here all the time. I'm just dying for a day in the country," she urged. "*P-l-e-a-s-e* Wally."

"All right, come on. You aren't taking me off for fear they'll give you away, are you?"

"Give me away?"—anxiously.

"Mrs. Benjamin says you're a prize pupil, but they can't get away with that, Isabelle; I know you."

"No, you don't," she laughed. "I'm all new."

She slipped her arm through his and urged him forth.

"Come on, Wally, be a dear."

So she managed to get him in the car and away from the house before the school trooped in. She had no plan beyond that, but she knew that she must never let Wally go back to that school. She looked at his little wizened face, muffled up in his coat collar, and his little pinched hands on the wheel. No; only over her dead body should the girls see Wally!

She set herself to his entertainment, and got him into a good humour in no time. He roared at her stories, her comments on the girls. He noted her fine colour.

"You're getting handsome, Isabelle."

"Beauty is but skin deep. I rely on my line of talk," she replied, and joined in his laughter.

"Look here, why did you railroad me out of that school so fast?"

"I thought it would be nicer to have you all to myself," she replied, innocently.

"Isabelle, Isabelle, what are you up to?" her father demanded.

"Nothing, Wally—honest. I'm a reformed character."

She induced him to take her to lunch at The Gay Dog Inn, and they were very merry over the meal.

"I quite like you, Isabelle," said Wally. "You used embarrass me to death."

"I've always rather liked you, Wally," she retorted to their mutual amusement.

"See here, I must be getting on, if I'm to make Boston for dinner," he said, consulting his watch.

"You needn't take me clear up to the school. You may drop me at what we call the cross roads."

"Oh, I'll get you back," he protested.

From the moment they were headed for the school she talked feverishly, and thought wildly. How could she keep him from going to Hill Top? They had some trouble with the engine and while Wally tinkered with it, she sat with her eyes screwed shut, praying that something would happen to save her face.

"No extra tires and a balky engine. I'll bounce that mechanic when I get back," he grumbled, as they started off again.

The short spring day was beginning to fade, when Isabelle laid her hand on his arm.

"This is the cross roads. I get out here," she said.

"I'll run you up," he answered, casually.

"But I'd rather walk, Wally. I need the exercise."

As she was beginning to get out, he had to stop.

"What's the plot?"

"No plot. You'll be terribly late now. It was *sweet* of you to come, Wally, and I'm obliged for the party," she said, kissing him, and dismounting.

"Isabelle, have you murdered anybody?" he asked, gravely.

"Not yet," she replied, equally gravely. Then with a wave and a shouted good-bye she ran up the hill, and disappeared into the underbrush.

"Well, I'm damned!" grumbled her father; and he turned back on his way to Boston.

Isabelle ran through the woods singing, whistling, praying. "Good Lord, I thank thee," she said, repeatedly. "You can rely on me not to lie again." Flushed and relieved from doom, happy as a cricket, she appeared at the school. She was greeted with howls of rage from the girls.

"Isabelle, you pig! To carry him off without letting us see him."

"How did he look? Is he handsomer than ever?" they chorused.

But Isabelle escaped their catechism. She had been saved once, and she dared not tamper with fate again. At every thought of Wally, speeding back to Boston, she drew a deep sigh of relief.

As they were all seated at supper Mr. Benjamin asked:

"Didst thou have a pleasant day with thy father, little girl?"

Ten pairs of envious eyes were upon her.

"Perfect," she sighed.

"Sorry we could not keep him overnight."

The maid entered to speak to Mrs. Benjamin, whereupon she rose and left the table. Isabelle was enlarging upon the delights of her holiday when her tongue suddenly clave to the roof of her mouth. She heard a voice saying:

"Engine wouldn't work—tire punctured."

She prayed violently for a fatal stroke of lightning paralysis, but in vain. Mrs. Benjamin entered, followed by an irritated dapper little man.

"Adam, my dear, we have a guest. This is Isabelle's father."

A gasp went round the table—audible, visible. Never in his life had Wally Bryce made such a sensation. He stared at these girls who turned such strange looks upon him. As for Isabelle, at the moment she would not have hesitated at patricide, but that being out of the question she burst into peal after peal of hysterical laughter.

Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin were perfectly aghast at the behaviour of the school, and Wally remarked irritably,—

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THAT supper proved to be a most difficult meal! Usually when there were guests, the girls talked and behaved very prettily, but on this occasion they sat like silent, accusing ghosts, eating in unbroken stillness. Mrs. Benjamin tried to lead them into conversation, but in vain. There were cross currents of feeling which she could not understand or cope with. Isabelle babbled on, with intermittent fits of hysterical laughter. Whenever she spoke, black looks were concentrated upon her; when Wally spoke, they were transferred to him. Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin did their best, but they were relieved when the ordeal was over and the girls went off to the study room.

Isabelle was excused, because of her guest. She was glad of every moment that postponed her hour of reckoning. Wally could be disposed of, but the girls must be met. The Benjamins had duties to attend to, so Wally and his daughter were left alone for a quarter of an hour, in the library.

"Look here!" he burst out at her. "What's the matter with those kids?"

"Matter?"—innocently.

"They glared at me as if I had murdered their mothers! Do they always eat in dead silence like that?"

Isabelle cast a glance over her shoulders to see that they were quite alone.

"This is what I tried to save you from," she whispered.

"You mean that's why you bundled me off this morning, and barred me out this evening?"

She nodded solemnly.

"The machine balked, the tire blew out, I had to come back," he apologized. "What's the matter with 'em anyhow?"

"You see we have a society for the Discouragement of Visiting Parents."

"What's the point?"

"You see, we endure a great deal from our parents, at home, but here we are free. The minute they begin visiting us, the trouble begins. So when they come, we are pledged to act like this, and they never come again."

"Nice hospitable lot of kids! And do the Benjamins stand for this?"

"They don't know about it; it's a secret."

"They can see, can't they? A blind man could have seen their outrageous manners," he remarked, hotly.

"Parents have outrageous manners, too, you know, and we have to put up with them"—calmly.

"Well, I'm——"

"Don't swear, Wally; Quakers don't like it."

"I never heard such nerve in my life! Lot of kids setting themselves up——"

"Try to put yourself in our place, Wally. When you were at school, did you long to have your mother visit you?"

"That was different——"

"No, that was the same," she said, finally. "I tried to save you, but you would come back. I've enjoyed your visit very much, but it's against our rules to act kindly to visiting parents, and if I do I'll be expelled."

"I suppose you'd like me to leave to-night?"—sarcastically.

"No, but get off as soon as you can in the morning, and let me manage things to-night."

The Benjamins joined them at this point, so conversation became general. Isabelle withdrew into her own mind, to think ahead how to avert the next crisis. When the girls came down for the hour of relaxation, there would be more embarrassment, unless she could manage. She strolled to the window and looked out.

There was a brilliant full moon, showering its largesse over the hills. They looked so calm, so remote—why did humans introduce such problems into the scheme of things? questioned Isabelle precociously. But the view gave her an idea.

"Mrs. Benjamin," she cried, "might we have a moonlight tramp and show my father some of our walks?"

"Would thy father like that? We often go for a walk in the moonlight, Mr. Bryce. The girls like it before they go to bed. Would thee enjoy it?"

Isabelle fixed him with a stern eye, and nodded.

"Why, yes, I think that would be nice," said Wally, who hated walking.

When the girls came down they silently accepted the plan. They put on their sweaters and boots, as the spring

was young and the ground soft. Mrs. Benjamin marvelled at their restraint, but laid it to their commendable desire to appear well before their guest. Two by two they marched dumbly behind the Benjamins and the Bryces. Up hill and down they went. Isabelle felt their eyes like javelins in her back, even while she kept up a lively stream of conversation.

"Girls, thee need not walk in line," protested Mr. Benjamin. "Show thy father the sowing game, Isabelle. Lead the girls out. This is a game thy daughter invented, Mr. Bryce, and which we love to play."

Isabelle, thus adjured, stepped forth, swept the enemy with a glance and took command. It was really a sort of a dance, whirling and circling and sowing seed in pantomime. Usually it was a wild, laughing happy affair—without antics and pranks extemporaneously introduced—but to-night it was as forced and funereal as a chorus of grave-diggers. Mr. Bryce murmured appreciation, Mrs. Benjamin looked her question to her husband, who shook his head.

After what seemed to Wally ages of torment and a hundred miles or so of action, they went back to the school and to bed. Reminded by Isabelle, he arranged for an early start, and then Wally's part in the episode was closed.

But Isabelle's troubles had just begun. Peggy was in bed when she entered their room, and Isabelle was sure she was awake although her face was toward the wall, and no answer to questions passed her lips. Isabelle hurried to put out the light, but when she was in bed, whispers

seemed to surround her, fingers to point at her, out of the dark. She turned the situation over and over in her mind. She had spared Wally the truth, but she herself must face it. Unless she could think of a way to explain her fairy stories to the girls, her position as leader in that school was lost. She invented this explanation and that, only to discard them. It seemed as if only her death could solve the problem, and she felt that to be extreme, in the circumstances.

She turned and tossed and agonized for hours, to fall, finally, into a troubled sleep, beset by dreams of herself, as a sort of pariah, wandering through her school days, on the edge of things.

The next day brought no soothing surprise. Cold nods of good-morning greeted her, groups of whispering critics edged away from her contaminating presence. Even Peggy, the faithful, had gone over to the enemy. The nervous strain of the day told on her, and when she made a bad mistake in a recitation the class tittered.

"Why, girls," said Mr. Benjamin in surprise, "it is not courteous to laugh at a mistake."

Evening brought Isabelle to a state of complete despair. The heavens had not opened to save her this time. She was to expiate in full. . . . Then she rose to new heights. She determined to make full confession and demand a public sentence. She would make herself suffer to the full extent.

True to instinct, even in despair, she waited until the girls had gathered for recreation hour before bedtime. Then she rose up, and as it were, laid her head upon the block.

"Mrs. Benjamin, I have to be punished," she said.

"Hast thou, Isabelle?"

"I want the girls to pronounce my sentence."

Mr. Benjamin smiled at his wife.

"I hope thy friends will temper justice with mercy," he remarked with the wrinkly smile threatening Isabelle.

"What is thy crime?"

"It's about my father," began the culprit.

"Yes, what about thy father?"

The girls eyed her hostilely, where she stood, by the fireplace, dominating the scene.

"I've always loved beautiful people so . . ." she began intensely.

"That is no sin," encouraged Mrs. Benjamin.

"I admire big, handsome men . . ."

One of the girls sniffed. This sound let loose the flood of Isabelle's histrionic remorse.

"Oh, you must listen to me," she cried, "you cannot condemn me until I have told it all."

"That is fair," said the calm voice of Mrs. Benjamin.

"It was always a disappointment to me that my father was so little and queer."

"But, Isabelle," interrupted Mrs. Benjamin, quickly.

"Please, I have to say what I think or it isn't a true story. Wally is much the nicest person in our family, but somehow he never seemed to count with anybody."

This daring focussed their attention. Mrs. Benjamin shook her head at her husband, who was about to interrupt this performance.

"I wanted a big kind of father, who blustered at you and made you feel respectful. I wanted him to have adventures, like Don Quixote, and make you thrilly all up and down your spine!"

"Didst thou want him to wear a sword and scabbard?" interrupted Mr. Benjamin, who disapproved of these heroics. But Isabelle was warmed to her subject now, and she did not hear him.

"Imagine what it meant to me to want that kind of a father, and to get Wally! You all know how I felt. It was just what you felt last night when you saw him first," she accused them. "When I was a lonely little girl I used to make up stories about the kind of parent I wanted. The made-up one got all mixed up with the real one. So when Peggy asked me if my father was handsome, I didn't stop to think which one she meant, I just said yes because the make-believe one was awf'ly good looking."

"But you only have one father, *le*," Peggy defended herself.

"I know I really have only one, but don't you see, I didn't *mean* to tell a lie, even if it did turn out to be one."

"What did thee tell, Isabelle?" inquired Mrs. Benjamin.

"I told Peggy that my father was handsome, meaning my make-believe one. The girls asked me about him, and I told them a lot of stories about him. They were always asking me to tell more."

"They were all about rescuing beautiful girls, and catching burglars, and saving children. You ought to

have heard what she told us about him!" exclaimed Agnes Pollock.

"Why, Isabelle!"

"But they were true! They did happen to the other one!"

"There isn't any other one!" retorted Peggy.

"Yes, there is. I believe in him, and so do you, even one of you!" countered Isabelle. "He was just as real as Mr. Benjamin. You said so yourselves."

"But he's only made up."

"Oh, can't you see that the things you make up are lo realer than the things that are?" cried Isabelle with such conviction that they were all silenced.

"The matter comes to this, doesn't it? Isabelle, not intending to lie, misled all of ye about her father," said Mr. Benjamin, gravely.

"Yes, and we adored him so! When that little wizened man came in, we almost died!" blurted out Peggy.

The light broke upon the Benjamins, but they tried not to smile at each other.

"Isabelle's imagination can prove a gift or a curse," Mr. Benjamin continued. "Its possession lays a great obligation upon her. If it is used to mislead, or to obscure the truth, it is a dangerous power. Whatever the extenuating circumstances, it comes to this, that Isabelle lied to her friends. Phœbe, what does thee think about this situation?"

"I think thee is right in saying that this is a very serious matter. I agree with Isabelle, that she should be punished,

if only to remind her that such misuse of a talent is a very ugly thing."

"I have been punished by the way the girls have treated me! I am punished when Mr. Benjamin says I have told a lie! But I want you to do something to hurt me! I wish Mr. Benjamin would beat me, or put me on bread and water. I hate myself. I'm just a common, mean liar! Whatever you decide to do to me is all right, and I deserve it!"

As she denounced herself, she fairly glowed with indignation; she was radiant with humility. The girls were hypnotized by her!

"I think Isabelle should miss the recreation hour for a month," said Mr. Benjamin.

The girls gasped, for this was the extreme penalty, but Isabelle never flinched.

"I will, Mr. Benjamin. I'll go to bed alone, in the dark, for a month and pray the Lord not to let me be a liar."

"I think thee must not rely too much upon divine power, Isabelle. Set a watch upon thy tongue thyself," he said—very severely for the gentle Adam. "Thee may go to bed now."

Condemned, abased, like a prisoner en route to the gallows, Isabelle walked from among them. She was disgraced, but, Isabelle-like, she wore her shame like a rose in her hair!

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ISABELLE was not forced to abrogate her reign after all. Somehow her cleverness and her oddities always kept the spotlight focussed upon her. Needless to state Wally did not repeat his visit, and the spring term came to its end.

With its expiration came a letter from Mrs. Bryce asking whether the Benjamins would keep Isabelle at Hill Top until the end of August, as the Bryces were going to Europe and did not wish to take her with them. It never occurred to Mrs. Bryce to consult the girl's pleasure in the matter, but Mrs. Benjamin carried the letter to her at once.

"Would thee like to stay, Isabelle?"

"Like it? I'd adore it!" cried that young person, with the explosive over-emphasis of youth.

Mrs. Benjamin smiled and patted her hand.

"We would like it, too. I will write thy mother."

So it was arranged, and Isabelle stayed on. Two other girls were to remain also. By special petition to Wally Isabelle was permitted to have the Peruvian horse to spend the summer with her.

It was a never-to-be-forgotten holiday for those three girls. They took part in all the activities of the farm. They picked fruit and helped Mrs. Benjamin and the cook

to can the big supplies of jam and jelly for the school. They helped in the garden with the vegetables or worked and weeded Mrs. Benjamin's beloved flowers. They pitched hay, they drove the rake and the grass cutter. They were busy in the open from morning until night and as happy as field larks.

Lessons had stopped, but education went on. They read aloud with Mrs. Benjamin; they studied and learned, first hand, of Nature's prodigality or niggardliness. Always there was the cultivation of the spirit. Love and fair dealing made the foundation upon which these simple Quaker folk had builded their lives, and no one could live in the home of their making without feeling that these were as essential to life as breathing.

Isabelle had long, wild gallops over the hills on her horse, during which she pondered "the long, long thoughts of youth" and brought the resulting problems to Mrs. Benjamin in the weekly letters, or in some of their intimate talks.

"It is hard to believe that this is the freakish sullen child who came to us less than a year ago," Mrs. Benjamin commented as the girls went off to bed one night.

"No, it is wonderful. Thou hast made a new being of her."

"Thou hast done it as much as I have. It is evidently her first experience of being understood and loved."

"What strange excrescences do grow up on our so-called civilization," he said.

"Is thee calling the rich an excrescence?" she smiled.

"I know that they are just human beings like ourselves,

but how do they get things so awry? They put such slight upon parenthood, with their servant-made children."

She nodded, and he went on developing his thought.

"It is ominous when the basic relationships are so abused—marriage held so lightly, children disdaining their own parents, as our Isabelle does. Where is it leading us, Phoebe?"

"Dear knows—dear knows!" she sighed, shaking her head.

It was a well-worn theme with them. They had to ponder deeply these tendencies, for it was their work to try to counteract these destructive forces—to build up in the hearts of these servant-made children, as Mr. Benjamin called them, a respect for God and man and the holy things that grow out of their relationship.

The summer passed almost without event. The three girls, hard and brown as Indians, were beginning to plan for the fall, when the others would return.

It was in early September that the blow fell upon Isabelle. A telegram from Wally had appraised his daughter of their arrival in New York. They were to spend the fall at the Club house near The Beeches. He hoped she was well. Did she want him to come and see her?

She answered this briefly, also a note from her mother. As Mrs. Bryce rarely troubled to write letters to any one, Isabelle pondered the reason for this amiable epistle. It was soon to be explained. Mrs. Benjamin received a letter from Mrs. Bryce saying that notification had arrived

that Isabelle would be admitted this October to Miss Vantine's Finishing School, where her name had been entered for years. She wished the girl sent directly to this address in New York on the last day of September, as she was to board at the school for the present until it was decided whether the Bryces would open their town house.

Mr. Benjamin shook his head sadly over this letter, and carried it to his wife.

"Adam—Adam, we cannot let her go to *that* school! It will be her ruination," she exclaimed.

"My dear, it is the most fashionable school in New York," he replied, with a sigh.

"It is shoddy, and artificial and false!" she protested in unwonted heat. "My poor, dear Isabelle! Adam, couldn't we make a plea for her?—tell her mother how she improves here, how fast she progresses?"

"Phoebe dear, dost thou think that that would interest this lady?"

"But we can't let her go without one effort to save her. I think it is as serious as that, at this stage of the girl's development."

"Suppose thee writes a letter to Mrs. Bryce."

"I will. Let us not speak of it to Isabelle until I have her mother's answer."

"Very well, dear heart."

Mrs. Benjamin wrote and re-wrote the letter. Finally one was despatched and she anxiously awaited the reply. It was long in coming, and it fell like a blow on her heart. Mrs. Bryce was glad to have such a good report of Isabelle,

but her plan had always been that the girl should spend at Miss Vantine's school, the two years previous to her début, as she herself had done. All the girls of her daughter's set went there, and she wished Isabelle to be with them. Thanking Mrs. Benjamin for her interest, etc., etc.

The Benjamins had a conference of disappointment over it, and it was decided that Isabelle must be told. Mrs. Benjamin's face was so rueful over it that her husband offered to do the telling. He and Isabelle were going off on an expedition together, which would give him an opportunity, and Mrs. Benjamin could provide the comfort that must follow.

He found it no easy task. As he looked at his sturdy young companion, listened to her picturesque talk, he felt that he was called upon to tell a young vestal virgin that she was to be sacrificed to the god of mammon.

"This is good air, isn't it!" she said, breathing deeply. "How do people live in cities, do you suppose?"

Mr. Benjamin longed to shirk, but he took himself in hand.

"I have had a letter from thy mother, Isabelle."

She glanced at him suspiciously.

"What does she want?"

"She wants thee to go to a school in New York this winter."

She stopped and faced him in alarm.

"To leave Hill Top?"

"I'm afraid so, little sister."

"But I won't! I won't go away from here. I love it here, I love you and Mrs. Benjamin. Oh, why does Max

always interfere with me? I hate her!" she cried, passionately.

Mr. Benjamin laid a steady hand on her shoulder, and walked beside her.

"I understand what a blow this is to thee, and how unhappy it makes thee. But one of the things that we want our girls to learn is to honour and respect their parents," he said gently.

"But how can I respect Max, Mr. Benjamin? She never respects me."

He saw the justice of her remark and strove not to play the moralist.

"Thee can put a curb on thy lips, my dear. I wish that thee might show Mrs. Benjamin and me that thy life here with us has meant something to thee, by obeying thy mother as cheerfully and willingly as thee can."

He felt the young body under his hand shudder with the effort for control. She lifted stricken eyes to him, as he said afterward, and nodded without a word. He helped her as well as he could, by talking of other things, but he felt her suffering as keenly as if it had been his own.

When they came back to the house, she went to her room, and he carried the report to his wife.

"Sorrow goes so deep with them, at this age," he said, tenderly.

"Poor, passionate child; she will always be torn by life," sighed Mrs. Benjamin. "I will not go to her yet. I'll let her try solitude first."

She did not appear at lunch, so Mrs. Benjamin carried a tray to her. The girl was not crying, she was sitting by

the window, looking out over the hills, in a sort of dumb agony.

"I want thee to eat some lunch, my Isabelle."

A white face turned toward her. The very sun-brown seemed to have been seared off by suffering.

"I can't eat, dear Mrs. Benjamin," she said.

"I've been thinking that we might make a plan, dear," the older woman said, setting the tray aside and dismissing it. She drew a chair beside the girl and took her cold hands. "Thou wilt go to this school, as thy mother wishes, but when thou hast finished—it is only two years—if thee thinks the kind of life thy mother plans for thee too uncongenial, thee must come back to us, and help us with the school. There will always be a place for thee here, my child."

"But two years in that loathsome school!"

"Thee dost not know that it's loathsome. I've no doubt that if thee will take the right spirit with thee, it may be very good for thee. There are opportunities in that great city which Hill Top cannot offer."

"But there won't be any Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin! Oh, Mrs. Benjamin, why couldn't you have been my mother?"

"I should have been proud to be, Isabelle," she answered simply. "Thou art as dear to me as a daughter."

Isabelle bent and kissed the kind hands that held her own, but she shed no tears.

"We all have bitter, disappointing things to meet. I shall expect my daughter to meet them with a fine courage," she smiled.

"I'll try," said Isabelle; "but I'd rather die than leave here."

"Thee has met life very squarely, so far as I have known thee. This is a test of thy quality, and I know thee will meet it like my true daughter."

The girl's eyes brimmed at that, but she looked off over the hills and merely nodded. Presently she rose and leaned her cheek for a second against Mrs. Benjamin's hair.

"It's all right, mother Benjamin," she said, with the old ring in her voice.

The subject was not mentioned again. Save for a somewhat closer affection, a tenderer devotion on Isabelle's part, no one would have known that they were facing a separation, which was an agony of dread to the girl. As Mr. Benjamin had said, of his wisdom: "Sorrow strikes so deep at that age."

She took her part in the duties and pleasures of the days. But the Benjamins' loving eyes marked a change. She brought no yeoman's appetite to the table, she had to be urged to eat. The morning often brought her downstairs with dark circles about her eyes.

"Did thee sleep, dear child?"

"Oh, yes, thanks," was the invariable answer.

"She's getting all eyes again," grumbled Mr. Benjamin.

Not until the very last day were the two other girls told of her coming departure. The last days were packed to the brim with duties, so that she might have no leisure to be sad. She put up a plucky fight; not a tear had she shed. But on the last day, when the clear bugle call

roused her, she sprang from her bed, and ran to the window. Nature was at her painting again; splashes of red and yellow and russet brown streaked the hills. A sort of delicate mist enfolded them. Was it only a year ago that she had looked at these blessed hills for the first time? Ah, in father Benjamin's salute to the day rang out. She leaned her head against the window, and her body shook with sobs, though no tears came.

When Mr. Benjamin drove up to the door in the wide surrey behind the fat, dappled horses, she kissed the girls smilingly, she clung to Mrs. Benjamin for a long second, then she took her seat beside her friend. She looked up at them, in the doorway, waving their good-byes.

"If I didn't know that I was coming back in two years to stay, I couldn't bear it, mother Benjamin," she called back. Then the fat horses started off briskly, down the road.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MISS VANTINE'S School for Girls was probably no better and no worse than schools of its kind. It bestowed a superficial training upon its pupils, with an accent upon the social graces. Its graduates were always easily identified by their English a's, their good diction, their charming manners, and their intensely conventional point of view. Any departure from the Vantine "norm" in the way of investigation or conclusion was discouraged as not nice.

Miss Vantine truly believed in herself as an educator and since her school had held its prestige for thirty years, she had reason to think that other people agreed with her. Her mark on a girl was absolutely guaranteed.

Into this conventional atmosphere Isabelle came from the simple, friendly life of Hill Top; and she found it hateful. It was the spirit rather than the letter which had prevailed in the Benjamin school, but here only the letter counted. The outward forms, correct manners, were emphasized every day; but in the process, the courteous heart was neglected and left out.

The teachers were the custodians of information, and of the law. They bore a perfectly formal relationship to the pupils. Education consisted in pouring facts into the upturned cups—the minds of the pupils. When Isabelle

began to question, to dig deeper into the root of things, the why of things—if instead of the usual “Yes, Miss Vantine,” or “No, Miss Vantine,” she demanded basic reasons—the explanation was always repeated, patiently in the same words, and the lesson went on.

Isabelle’s “rough ways” were deplored, and she was reproved every hour in the day. Restraints were imposed on her mind and her body. She was like a healthy, curious young animal, all tied with bonds that she could neither loose nor fight.

As for the girls, there were some old acquaintances among them—Margie Hunter for one. But their talk was of boys, of beaux, and for ever of males! They spent hours conversing about their clothes, or commenting on the manners of their parents and the morals of their parents’ friends. They were deeply interested in the discussion of sex, and there were some phases of the subject dwelt upon which would have sent Miss Vantine down to her grave with the shock, could she have heard their talk.

Now the Benjamins had handled the subject of sex hygiene in their school as a vitally important subject. The girls had been led through the study of botany and zoology, to procreation and the sex relation in human society. Mrs. Benjamin had talked the matter out with her girls with fearless frankness. She had encouraged their questions, she had touched on the pathology of sex, and she had made for them a high ideal of motherhood.

Isabelle realized that the talk of these girls was false and ugly. She said so; and the result was that she was excluded from the intimacy of the leading group. In her

letters to Mrs. Benjamin she poured out her whole heart. Protest, misery, loneliness; Mrs. Benjamin sensed them all in the poignant letters the girl sent her. She replied with long, intimate chapters of encouragement and understanding. It was her counsel which kept Isabelle going the first six months of this experience.

She tried with all her might to carry into her daily life the ideals taught and lived at Hill Top. But she seemed to be speaking a language that nobody understood. Her teachers bored her. She found she could keep ahead in her classes with only the most perfunctory study, so the ideal of a high standard for work was the first to go. What was the use? There was not enough to occupy her, so the old restlessness came upon her, with mischievous uses for her excess vitality. She gained a reputation as a law breaker, and she was watched and punished with increasing frequency. Her old leadership in misbehaviour was once more established. The precocious cynicism of her associates began to impress her as clever. She outdid them at it. Mrs. Benjamin's friendship was her only hope of salvation now. And then, in January, after a brief spell of pneumonia, dear Mrs. Benjamin left the world she had so graced, leaving an aching vacancy behind for her husband and her friends.

To Isabelle it came as her first real sorrow. For weeks after, the girl retired into herself as into a locked room. She could not eat; she did not sleep; she grew thin, and haggard, and pale. Worse than that; in her rebellion at this loss, she grew bitter. She threw this suffering at the feet of God with a threat. She felt herself the victim of

eternal injustice. Just as she achieved happiness, or friendship, it was always snatched from her. Always, before, Max had cheated her of things; now it was God.

She came out of it the Isabelle of her early childhood—*révoltée*, enemy to authority, defier of God and the universe. Her wit against them all. She would take what she wanted now, and let them look out for her!

From that time on, she was the acknowledged school "terror." She put her entire mind upon misbehaving, and she was as ingenious as a monkey. Never a week passed that she was not shut up for an hour in the library with Miss Vantine, who always felt, poor lady, that she was dealing with a manifestation of the devil.

"Did you, or did you not throw an electric lamp on the floor during the algebra lesson, Isabelle?"

"I *dropped* one on the floor."

"Don't equivocate! You *threw* it"—sternly.

"All right; I threw it"—defiantly.

"Why did you do it?"

"To wake up the class. If you knew how dull that hour is you wouldn't blame me."

"Don't be impertinent!"

"Miss Marshall is a fool. If you ask her a question outside the lesson she has to look it up in the book."

"You are not here to criticize your teachers, you are here to account for your misbehaviour."

"I am telling you why I misbehave. I can't listen to her. Nobody does. She sets us all wild. Everybody was half asleep so I bounced the lamp on the floor. She

ought to have been grateful to me for getting their attention."

"This is the second time this week that you have been reported for insubordination. This conduct cannot continue. I am writing your parents to-day that unless you mend your ways, they must take you away from here. You are contaminating the entire school."

"They can't take me away too quickly."

Miss Vantine thought best to ignore this impertinence.

"You will take twenty demerits, and miss your walk in the park for a week. You may go now."

The girl sauntered insolently out of the room, leaving Miss Vantine white with rage. She wrote a very firm letter to Mrs. Walter Bryce, who in turn wrote a denunciatory letter to her daughter, and there the matter rested.

One disgrace followed another, and finally the school year dragged to a close. Isabelle went to The Beeches for the summer. There were four months of war to the knife with her mother, the usual number of scrapes, and a violent love affair with Herbert Hunter, home from St. George's.

"What became of your reformed character?" inquired Wally one day. "I thought the Benjamins had made a human being of you."

"They nearly did. But Max dragged me off and sent me to that fool Vantine, and I got over being human. What's the use?"

The Bryces were glad when fall came and she was sent back to the school. As for Isabelle she did not much care where she went. There was a certain satisfaction—an *esprit de diablerie*—which amused her. Sharp of tongue

and of wit, she knew she had a real gift for making herself a nuisance, and she took pride in it.

Miss Vantine warned her at the beginning of the term that she was a marked character, and that unless she behaved herself she could not stay. She tempered her behaviour somewhat during the first term, but it was no use. Like every dog with a bad name, all the mischief in the school was attributed to her. According to school-girl canons of loyalty it was an unforgivable sin to tell tales or "give people away," so Isabelle shouldered the iniquity of the whole school. The teachers hated and feared her.

Miss Vantine bore with her like a martyr—for two reasons. One was that she liked Mrs. Bryce, who had been her pupil; and the other was that she had never yet expelled a girl, and she disliked the idea intensely.

But there came a day in early February of Isabelle's second year of residence when the end was reached. Herbert Hunter had smuggled a note to her that he was coming to New York to have his tonsils out and he wanted to see her before he went to the hospital. She answered by special delivery and agreed to meet him on Sunday, in the Park. When the girls were entering church on that day, Isabelle was taken with a violent fit of coughing, and was left in the vestibule to quiet herself. She fled to her tryst. But she miscalculated the length of the sermon, and met the school coming out, on the church steps. She was questioned, led home in disgrace. She was accused of truancy; she admitted it, even confessed her rendezvous in the Park.

Miss Vantine had to act this time. She sent a final letter to the Bryces with a sentence of suspension for their daughter, who was packed off home at once, in disgrace. Mrs. Bryce was furious because she and Wally were going off with the Abercrombie Brendons on their yacht. She explained their dilemma to their hostess and she was decent enough to include the girl, but it was a nuisance to have her along.

No time was lost in letting Isabelle feel her disgrace. After a perfunctory greeting, her mother remarked:

"You've made a nice record for yourself, haven't you?"

Isabelle made no reply.

"Why don't you answer me?"

"Foolish question, Number One. Yes, I have made a nice record for myself."

"If you make yourself a nuisance around here, I shall find a way to punish you," she threatened her.

"Go ahead. Get it all off your chest at once and then drop it."

Mrs. Bryce decided upon injured dignity, as her best rôle.

"Where's Wally?" demanded Isabelle.

"I don't know."

"What's doing around here? I expect to enjoy myself on this little vacation. I hope you don't intend to be too disagreeable."

Later at dinner Wally remarked to his wife—

"Tell her about the trip?"

"No."

"What trip?" demanded their daughter.

"We are going off on the Abercrombie Brendons' yacht, and your unfortunate return has forced Mrs. Brendon to include you in the party."

"I hope you said 'No, thanks' for me."

"We said 'yes' for you," replied Wally.

"But I won't go. Shut up on a boat with you two and the Brendons? Not much."

"You're not being consulted," remarked her mother, coolly.

"You'll have to drag me aboard."

Mrs. Bryce's temper flared.

"You will walk aboard and you will behave like a decent individual while we are on this cruise, or there will be the most serious consequences you have ever met yet. Nobody wants you on this party, you understand, and the less conspicuous you make yourself, the better."

Isabelle beamed upon them.

"Thank you so much for your charming invitation, my dear, doting parents. I accept with pleasure, and I think I can promise you that your little outing will be a complete success, so far as I am concerned."

She laughed lightly, and Mr. and Mrs. Bryce exchanged uneasy glances. Something in that laugh did not promise well for their holiday.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE motor boat from the *Empress* was at the pier when the three Bryces made their appearance on the day of the departure. They were taken out to the yacht at once, where Mr. Abercrombie Brendon was already ensconced. He was a pompous, red-faced little man, with a great deal of stomach and a great deal of manner. He was in high good humour with the weather and the world in general. He greeted Isabelle by singing a line from a light opera success of his younger days—

"Isabella, Isabella, the love-e-ly queen of Spain."

"Silly ass!" said she to herself, and she went to lean over the rail and watch for the coming of the others. They arrived shortly and she took inventory. First Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon ascended the steps. She was a big, arrogant, impressive woman whom Isabelle immediately named "Hecuba." She was followed by a lovely, blonde creature, with deep-blue eyes and a short upper lip.

Isabelle fixed her attention upon the last comer, who certainly was an attention-fixing young man. He was extremely handsome. Here was the one and only hope of this party, so far as she was concerned.

There was a great clatter of greetings.

"Come here, Isabelle, and make your manners," ordered her mother. She obeyed, reluctantly.

"So glad to have a young thing with us, my dear," boomed Mrs. Brendon in her big voice. "Althea, this is Isabelle Bryce. Miss Morton, Isabelle."

The lovely vision smiled faintly and nodded.

"This is Mr. Jerry Paxton," Mrs. Brendon continued.

Isabelle shot a glance at him, but he failed to get it.

"How do you do?" he said, absently, turning to help Althea adjust her veil.

There followed the ceremony of apportioning the state-rooms, getting into deck hats, and the other preliminaries, while the boat was steaming down the harbour. Isabelle stayed on deck and made friends with the captain and the sailors. It was fun to watch them padding about so swiftly, coiling ropes, and doing their tasks so featly.

The first few days were clear and beautiful. They spent the time on deck. Isabelle appraised the situation the first day out. Mrs. Brendon intended that the handsome Paxton man should be permanently annexed to the blonde beauty, who entirely concurred in the idea. The Paxton man was not yet entirely won over to the plan; therefore, he was restless and on his guard. Max flirted with old Brendon, and Wally was at loose ends. He occasionally donated his society to his daughter.

"I'll make a bet with you, Wally, that Madame Hecuba Brendon won't put it through."

"Put what through?"

"Marry Jerry Paxton to the lady with the short lip." Wally laughed.

"You don't miss anything, do you?"

"I do not."

"You're too young to notice such things."

"Lord! but parents are a bore!" quoth Isabelle at that.

For the most part she kept out of their way those first days. Max noticed it, and warned Wally that she was probably cooking up some mischief to explode on them.

It would have surprised them could they have peeped into the girl's mind. She liked being alone, being still. There had been considerable strain to keeping up a reputation as a school terror. It had meant being constantly on the alert for an opportunity to misbehave; it meant thinking up plots, living up to an exacting standard of wickedness. The reaction had come with these idle days and she enjoyed it.

Then, too, she loved the vastness of the sea and the sky, between which they made their way. She sat for hours watching white gulls that followed in their wake. She wondered if they were not the souls of the departed, and she conceived one friendly one, which flew quite near them for days, to be the soul of Mrs. Benjamin. Sometimes when she was sure that no one was near she stood in the stern and called out to it.

"Dear Mrs. Benjamin, I know you're there. Don't leave me, will you? I love so to watch you circling up there. Is it nice in Heaven?"

She pondered about death a good deal, and about heaven. She had not been able to bear such thoughts since Mrs. Benjamin died, so bitter had been her grief.

But there was soothing in the silent vastness, and she came to think of heaven as a sublimated Hill Top with Mrs. Benjamin still teaching the young.

She watched Jerry and Althea pacing the deck together. She noted the way she looked at him—the half-playful wholly tender way she appropriated him. It led the girl to ponder upon love also. Here were two beautiful people who, according to all the rules of play and story, should be making love every minute, in this paradise. Why did the beautiful young man hesitate?

She decided to interview Althea and see what sort of creature she might be. It was not so simple, because Althea was barely aware of Isabelle's existence, also she was never without Jerry at her side, if either she or Mrs. Brendon could manage it. But there came a chance, when she was alone on deck, and Isabelle hastily took the vacated seat beside her. Althea glanced at her, faintly surprised.

"Are you having a good time on this cruise?" Isabelle opened fire.

"Oh, yes—very. Aren't you?"

"Not especially. But then I haven't any handsome young man to play with."

Althea frowned and made her first mistake.

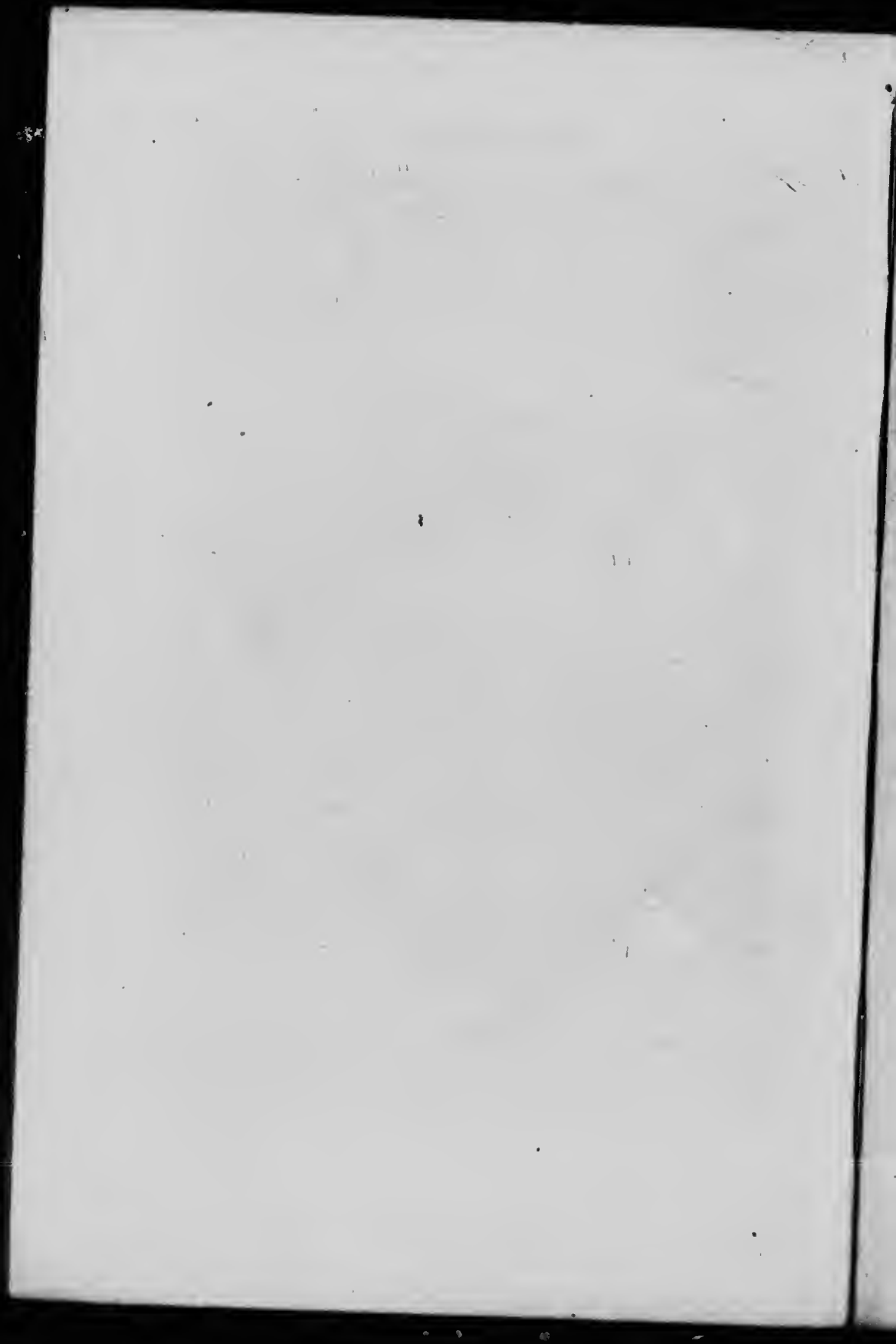
"You're quite too young for any such ideas," she said.

"I'm out of the cradle, you know!"—hotly. "I'm old enough to know that I could handle a handsome young man better than you do, for all your age."

"I think you're extremely impertinent!"



*She watched Jerry and Althea pacing the deck together. . . . It led the girl to
ponder upon love also*



"You ought to make a friend of me. I can tell you a thing or two. For one thing, he's too sure of you."

Althea rose, white with fury.

"I shall certainly report this impudence to your mother," she said, haughtily, moving away. But Isabelle fired the last shot.

"Oh, Max will agree with me. You ought to watch her. She's got some technique herself."

After that encounter Althea looked over and through Isabelle, as if she were thin air. It amused the girl immensely, and in her wise head she made a fair judgment of Miss Morton's mind and disposition. She decided that she was entirely unworthy of the god-like Jerry, and she was glad he hesitated.

She began to watch him with increased interest. She made romances about him, with herself as heroine. She played scenes in which she outwitted the haughty beauty, and fled with the hero. She began to pity Jerry. He was the unwilling victim of Althea and Mrs. Brendon. How could she, Isabelle Bryce, rescue him from their clutches?

In the process of her dreaming she wrecked the yacht, Jerry saved her, and as soon as they reached shore they were married. In one version, Althea, seeing that he loved Isabelle, threw herself overboard and perished. There were many stories, but they always had one ending—Isabelle won and wed the handsome young man.

One windy morning when the other "stuffies" (as she called them to herself) were playing bridge inside, Isabelle squatted on deck, her chin on her knees, watching the big breakers, listening to the scream of the petrels, and as

usual building air castles about herself and Jerry, when lo! her hero came striding down the deck and all at once he stopped before her.

"Hello! Aren't you afraid you'll blow overboard?" he inquired.

"No, I'm not. You've waked up, have you?"

"Have I been asleep?"

"You haven't seen me before," she retorted.

"Well, I see you now. Do you know what you look like?" He smiled down at her.

"Yes. I look like a ripe olive."

"No, you look like a cricket. Are you always so silent? Don't you ever chirp?"

"Me, silent? I've given the Wallys the blow of their lives. They think I'm sick, I've been so good on this rotten cruise."

"What caused the reform—good company?"

"No, I'm getting ready to break it to them, that I may not be taken back at that school. I got into the devil of a row."

"Did you? And they expelled you?"

"Suspended me, until they decide. That's why I had to come on this jolly party."

"You don't like it?"

"Of course, I don't like it. How'd I know whether you'd wake up or not?"

"Did you want me to wake up?" he asked, curiously.

"But, *oui*, aye, *ja*, yes, of course. You don't suppose I want to play with fat old Brendon, do you? Wally is a fearful bore, so there is only you."

"Poor little cricket, she wanted a playmate," he teased.

"She did. I can't rub my knees together and make a 'crick,' you know, so I had to wait until you came to. I'd have pushed you overboard if it hadn't happened to-day. I'm so full of unused pep, I'm ready to pop!"

"Come on. I'm awake. Now what?"

"Let's warm up," she said, and was up and off down the deck in one spring. Jerry pursued. She raced around the whole deck twice, then waited for him to catch up with her.

"Puffing, Jerry? You're getting fat," she jeered.

"You impudent little beggar, I'd like to shake you."

"Try it!"

This might have been called Isabelle's entrance on the scene, because from that moment on, she took the stage and exerted herself to hold it. She tantalized Jerry every minute. She took all the privileges of youthful sixteen, and made frank, outspoken love to him. She never left him alone with Althea for a moment. She roused in the breast of that blonde young woman such a fierce hatred that murder would have been a mild expression of her desires.

Even Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon took a hand, trying first hauteur and disapproval, descending finally to bribery and entreaty. Max and Wally laboured with their offspring. She only turned big eyes upon them and entreated them to tell her what displeased them. She was trying to be a credit to them, to save them all from complete dissolution through the boredom that had settled down upon them like a cloud.

"You let Jerry Paxton alone," ordered her mother.

THE CRICKET

"But he adores me, and he is so bored."

"Conceited jackanapes!" said Mrs. Bryce.

"He'd jump overboard if it wasn't for me. I'm his only salvation from the wax doll."

Wally laughed and the fight was lost. Mrs. Brendon ordered the captain to Palm Beach at once, all steam on. As soon as they landed Jerry prepared for flight. He produced a fictitious telegram calling him at once to New York.

"Jerry, how can you leave me, in the house of the enemy?" Isabelle demanded, when she got him alone.

"Hard lines, kid, but I'm off," he laughed.

"If you loved me you'd take me too."

"You're crazy!"

"But you like me crazy, Jerry."

He grinned and made no reply.

But Isabelle had seen a way. She asked Wally for some money to buy a souvenir. The treasure she bought was a ticket to New York on the night train. When she was ordered to bed because she was too young for hotel hops, she bade Jerry farewell, and went off without protest. From that moment on, she worked fast. She pinned a note to Max's pincushion, in the most approved fashion. She packed a bag, took a cab to the station, went to bed, and what is more, to sleep, in the calm satisfaction, that the story was to have a happy ending!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE romantic adventure of running off with Jerry proved a dismal failure. She had failed to study the psychology of her *particeps criminis* in the fascination of analyzing her own. Far from being pleased with her company, he was greatly annoyed thereat. He wired her father the facts, begged him to follow to Jacksonville and take her off his hands. When Wally stepped from under, as it were, directing Jerry to hand the pest over to a teacher in New York, the young man's irritation became excessive and he was at no trouble to conceal it.

Isabelle confessed that she had informed her mother "in a pin-cushion note" that she had eloped with Jerry. She pointed out to him that, after this public announcement of her intentions, it would be necessary for him to marry her, "to save her honour" as she phrased it. He laughed, brutally. He inquired her age, and when she boasted that she was "going on seventeen"—that many girls were "wooded and married and a'," by that time—he laughed again.

When, however, she persisted in the idea, and declared her love for him, he talked to her like a disagreeable elder brother, casting reflections upon her breeding and her manners. He told her that she was a silly little thing,

that she did not amuse him in the least, and that it was high time she began to conduct herself like a lady. He began to address her, coldly, as Miss Bryce.

She appealed to him, coquetted with him, abused him; all to no effect. He remained formal and distant during the entire journey. She was deeply hurt and humiliated by his actions, but on the whole she got considerable satisfaction out of the rôle of blighted being.

They both concentrated upon the end of the trip. Jerry longed to be rid of his unwelcome responsibility, and Isabelle was interested because she had arranged a coup for the moment.

Wally had assured Jerry, by wire, that a teacher from the school would meet Isabelle at the station. Isabelle, in the meantime, had wired Miss Vantine that a change of plans made it unnecessary for the teacher to meet the train. She signed the telegram with her father's name. She awaited the moment when Jerry realized that he was not to be rid of her, with considerable excitement.

Arrived in New York at ten o'clock, she preserved a demure silence while he stormed up and down the station looking for the teacher. He was finally convinced that there was no one to meet them.

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked.

"Come along," he replied, ungraciously, bundling her into a cab.

They went to a studio building and Jerry pounded on somebody's door for ten minutes, in vain. Then he tried another.

"None of your friends care to see us, Jerry," grinned

Isabelle. Finally he unlocked a door and turned on a light.

"This is your place, Jerry," she cried; and she began a swift inspection.

"You can turn in here for the night, and in the morning I will take you to the school."

"Where will you sleep?"

"At a club."

"And leave me in this spooky place alone? I won't stay."

"Don't you see that I cannot take you around town at this hour of the night looking for lodgings?"

"I'll go in the bedroom, and you can sleep on the couch. I won't stay here alone."

Eventually he telephoned a friend of his, named Miss Jane Judd. He invited her to stay with Isabelle. He even went and brought her and explained to her that he would call for Isabelle in the morning.

"Oh, Jerry, don't leave me," cried Isabelle, clinging to him. "I don't want to stay with this strange woman. I want to go with you—always, Jerry—because I love you so. Won't you take me, Jerry?"

"Don't be a little goose, Isabelle."

"Please don't hate me, Jerry," she sobbed.

"I don't hate you when you're sensible."

"Won't you call me Cr-Cricket, just once, Jerry?"

"If you'll be a good girl and go to bed."

"Kiss me good-night."

"I'll do nothing of the kind. Miss Judd, take charge of this crazy kid. I'll be back in the morning," he said, desperately, as he escaped.

Isabelle wept, more from weariness and chagrin than anything else, but a sort of amused patience on Miss Judd's part caused her to cut short any histrionic display. As they prepared for bed she began to regale Miss Judd with spicy descriptions of the yachting party. Jane Judd laughed heartily.

"You're very naughty, but you are funny," she said to the girl.

"I don't suppose Mrs. Brendon and Althea think I'm funny. Poor old baby-doll Althea! She must be furious. She was so sure of Jerry."

"You hop into bed and forget all about Altheas and Jerrys. Sleep is what you need," said Miss Judd, putting out the light.

But the flow of Isabelle's talk was not to be stayed. She was excited and keyed up high. There was a simplicity and directness about this Judd woman that made her think of Mrs. Benjamin, so she told all about Hill Top and her life there, her love of it, her despair at Mrs. Benjamin's death.

Jane Judd listened with patience and understanding. Here was laid out before her the bared heart of the "poor little rich girl." She pieced the bits together until she had the whole picture of this odd, unnatural, hothouse child—antagonistic to her parents, to her school, yet full of feeling, and coming into the age when the emotions play such havoc. No wonder she had settled her youthful affections upon Jerry. He was so preëminently the type one loves at sixteen, Jane smiled to herself.

"Do you think he will marry me?"

"I doubt it."

"Don't you think he loves me?"

"Lots of other women are in love with Mr. Paxton, too," said Jane.

"You just say that to scare me!" cried Isabelle.

So the self-revelation of this young egotist went on and on until sleep laid a finger on her lips.

Long after she was silent the older woman lay awake, and thought about her, about the conditions in our world that produced her. She was so sorry for the child, even while she laughed at the memory of Jerry's furious embarrassment, at the mercy of her jejune affections.

Jerry arrived early, and Jane and Isabelle parted like old friends.

"Miss Judd is very understanding," remarked Isabelle, en route to the school.

"Yes, isn't she?"

"She's not at all snippy like so many people. It's ridiculous to act as if it were so clever just to be grown up. It isn't clever; it's only luck."

"The luck lies in being young, Isabelle."

"Can't you even *remember* how you hated being squelched by elders?" she inquired.

"Do they ever squelch you, Cricket?"

"You ought to know. You've done enough of it."

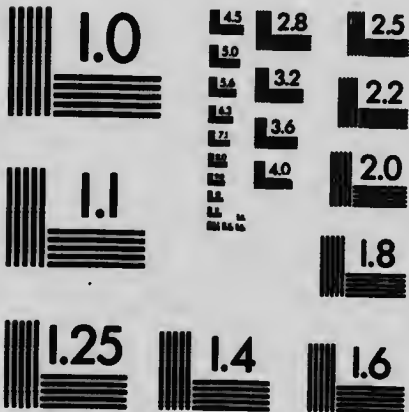
"Let's make a new compact. Let's be good pals," he said, heartily.

"I do not want your *friendship*," she answered, coldly.

"O good Lord, you wretched baby!"—irritably.



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"It is all right, Jerry. I see that it can never be, but I shall always care for you deeply," she said with nobility.

When they came to the school Jerry left her with a deep sigh of relief. She certainly was too much for him. He was no longer surprised that Max and Wally avoided the problem.

There certainly was no fatted calf killed for the return of the prodigal in Miss Vantine's school. At her reappearance an air of chastened endurance settled upon all the teachers from Miss Vantine down to the elocution teacher. But their fears were doomed to disappointment, because Isabelle was for the time being absorbed in her unrequited love affair.

She walked through her lessons like one in a trance; she devoted all her leisure, and some of her study hours, to a series of daily letters to the object of her passion. Most of these raptures were never to meet his eye, but they furnished an outlet for the girl's over-full heart, and to the psychologist they would have proved interesting. To her schoolmates she was, as ever, an enigma.

"What is the matter with you, Isabelle? Trying to get one hundred in deportment?" they teased her.

"I have larger things to think of, than deportment," she answered, airily.

"She's in love again," scoffed Margie Hunter.

This was greeted with a deep sigh.

"Who is he, Isabelle?" they demanded.

"He is a great artist whose name is sacred to me."

"Do you know him?"

"Intimately."

"And does he care for you?"

"I cannot betray his confidence"—nobly.

"Is he handsome?"

"He is wonderful."

"Not so handsome as Shelley Hull, or Jack Barrymore," they protested.

"Oh, heaps handsomer!"

"Do have him come here. Couldn't we ask Miss Vantine to get him to lecture on art?"

"He hasn't time. He goes from function to function. Many women love him, he's a great social favourite," boasted Isabelle.

This distinction set her apart as never before. She went among them as one baptized with greatness. When in the course of their daily walks with a teacher, they encountered a personable young man, Isabelle's eyes would never swerve in his direction. When there were midnight spreads, Isabelle did not care for food, or she had her letter to write.

"Isabelle, will you marry him as soon as you graduate from here?" Margie inquired.

"Oh, no. I expect to spend years at work in the arts before I am worthy of him."

"What arts?"

"It is not decided. I may paint, or sing, or act."

"But you haven't any talent for painting or singing."

"You never can tell, Margie. I've had no chance to show what I can do. Besides, I *can* act."

"I think you're too plain to go on the stage, myself," was the withering reply, but it did not wither Isabelle.

"Beauty, my dear, is nothing; Art is everything," was her unassailable reply.

So upon the wings of romance Isabelle floated through the spring term. She was to spend the summer at an inn in the mountains, as *The Beeches* was not to be opened. Her parents and teachers, encouraged by three months of good behaviour, believed that a permanent change of heart had taken place in the girl. On the day of her departure, Miss Vantine congratulated her upon her improvement, and alluded to the coming year as the crown of her achievements. Isabelle smiled politely, for she had thoroughly decided in her own mind that this was her farewell to school.

CHAPTER TWENTY

IF MAX and Wally had ever shown one grain of intelligence in regard to Isabelle they never would have taken her to this big, fashionable mountain inn where her field of adventure was so greatly enlarged. But they never had shown any discrimination in regard to her, so nothing could be expected of them at this stage.

Isabelle was a marked figure wherever she went now. She had forcibly taken over the matter of her own wardrobe in the spring of this year. Max had never made a success of it because she never gave any study to the girl's points; she dismissed her as plain, and bought her things with indifference.

Now Isabelle had a flair for the odd, and she understood her own limitations and her own style. She was small, and slim as a reed, without being bony. She had what she called "hair-coloured" hair, and an odd face—wide between the eyes, but a perfect oval in shape. Her eyes were her only beauty.

Fluffy, young-girl clothes merely accentuated her lack of youthful prettiness. With unerring instinct as a child, she had chosen her riding clothes to show off in. Now these same clothes formed the basis of her system. By day she was always in tailored frocks of the strictest simplicity. They were linen, or silk, or wool, made after

the same model. Slim, tight skirt; slim, fitted coat; sailor hat, and strange boots, which she had made to order after her own design. They were like short riding boots, pulled on and crumpled over the instep like a glove. She was striking, *chic*, a personality.

"By Jove! Isabelle gets herself up smartly, Max," commented Wally, soon after their arrival at the inn. Their daughter walked toward them, with every eye on the long piazza following in her wake.

"It is too *outrée*, but it is effective. She knows everybody looks at her, she intends they shall, but look how the monkey carries it off," laughed Max, struck into a sort of admiration.

"What's doing with you to-day, my noble parents?"

"Oh, I don't know. What are *you* doing?" Wally answered.

"I'm going to ride. I can't stand this clack-clatter," she said, indicating the groups on the veranda. "Dull lot, don't you think?"

"Have you met any one yet?" inquired her mother.

"Don't have to. I know what they are by just looking at them."

"L'enfant prodige!" jeered Max.

A tall, very fine-looking man in riding togs passed them, with a swift look at Isabelle.

"That's Cartel, isn't it?" Wally asked.

"The actor man?" said Max, looking after him.

"Actor-manager he calls himself now. Good-looking brute, isn't he?" answered Wally, idly.

Isabelle seemed oblivious to the whole incident but

privately she marked Sidney Cartel as her own. She went off, shortly, to change.

"Why don't you ride with her, Wally? She oughtn't to go off around these mountains alone."

"Too hot. She can take care of herself."

"Which way did Mr. Cartel go?" Isabelle inquired of the stable groom who mounted her.

"Sunrise Trail, Miss," he answered.

Isabelle started off for Sunrise Trail, with the directness of purpose which marked all her actions. It was some time before she caught sight of him, and to her annoyance she saw he was with a party of friends. Whenever the trail permitted he rode beside a certain woman—leaning toward her with marked devotion. Isabelle brought up the rear of the procession. The others became aware of her, evidently commented on her. Mr. Cartel looked back frequently.

When Isabelle came to a place wide enough to turn she retraced her steps. She went back to the inn determined to discover who Mr. Cartel's special companion was. The groom furnished it, for a price:

"Mrs. Andrews was with him, Miss. She mostly is."

Saturday night was the weekly hop, the most festive occasion of the week. Max had given Isabelle orders that she could not sit up for dances, as she was still a schoolgirl. The girl made no protest.

"Hops don't interest me," she said, indifferently.

After dinner she took a few turns on the piazza with Wally before she went to bed. She wore an odd, white

crêpe frock, which hung very close. Her hair was bound round her head like a cap.

"Let's sneak in and have the first dance together," said Wally; "Max has a beau."

"All right; then I'll skip," agreed Isabelle.

With the first strains of music they swung into a waltz. They danced well, and enjoyed it.

"Go to bed," ordered Max as she passed them.

Isabelle saw Mr. Cartel idly glance in, then at sight of her he came to the door and watched them.

"Some dance, Miss Bryce. Much obliged. Sorry you have to leave us," said Wally as the dance was over.

Cartel strolled off down the hall, and a few seconds later she followed him. She saw him saunter into one of the many little rooms used for cards, or tea. She noticed it was not lighted and, on the impulse of the moment, she stepped in after him.

In a second she was caught and lifted in strong arms. She was kissed again and again, while he said laughingly:

"You little devil, you came after all."

"I wonder who you are," said Isabelle sweetly, "and who you think I am."

"Thunder!" said Mr. Cartel, holding her off, and trying to peer at her.

"There must be some mistake," Isabelle suggested. "I will ask you to stand just where you are, until I have time to get into the elevator. That will save us both any embarrassment."

"But I don't understand," he mumbled. "I do beg your pardon, I thought——"

"Give me three minutes; and I rely on you not to peep into the hall," she said, with a chuckle. And was gone, leaving the actor-manager more at a loss than such events usually found him.

Now whether Mr. Cartel peeped or not, the next day he recalled a previous meeting with Wally, and asked to be presented to his daughter.

"Haven't we met before, Miss Bryce?" he asked, giving her a very special look.

"No," she replied, with the faintest suspicion of a taint in her tone.

"I was under the impression that we had."

"I'm sure I couldn't forget."

"Are you enjoying yourself here?"

"Not especially."

"What do you enjoy, Miss Bryce?"

"Excitement."

"Couldn't we find you some?"

"You might," with the slightest accent on the pronoun.

"Let's try," he countered.

From that moment he devoted himself to the "little Bryce girl." He rode with her, walked with her, talked with her, roared with amusement over her *diablerie*, until all tongues clacked about it. Mrs. Andrews left, in a huff.

"You've got to stop it, Wally," Max ordered. "Every one is talking."

"How can I stop it? You never should have brought her here."

"Well, I'm not going to leave because she makes a fool of herself, so you can just take a hand."

About this time a group of enthusiasts decided to get up an entertainment. With fear and trembling they asked the great actor to take part.

"How would you like to act a play with me, Cricket?" he asked her, in the tone of a god condescending to mortal.

"It would amuse me," she replied.

He laughed.

"This to the great Cartel!" said he, modestly. "Do you know that the finest actresses in America esteem it a privilege to act with me?"

She grinned.

"There are women in this hotel who would give their eyes for the chance," he added.

"I need my eyes for seeing my way about," she drawled.

Well as she managed him she was greatly excited at the prospect of acting with him. She had a dreadful row with Max and Wally on the subject, but she won out, and the announcement was made that the great man would put on a Shaw playlet, assisted by the "little Bryce girl."

There followed days of rehearsal and preparation, during which Mr. Cartel tried to impress his amateur leading lady, and succeeded not at all.

"That's not the way to do it!" he thundered at her repeatedly.

"All right. But that's the way *I* have to do it. If I'm going to be this woman, I have to be her *my* way, not yours."

So the impudent little baggage faced him out, on his

own ground; and he was forced to admit to himself that, crude as she was, she managed effects.

"You might be able to act some day," he said to her on an occasion.

"Give me a job, and let me try."

"You mean it?"

"Certainly."

"But your parents?"

"They'd howl—and give in. They always do."

"H'm—well, we'll see."

The great night came. Needless to say that the Shaw playlet and the brilliant Cartel were the events of the occasion. Isabelle was by no means obliterated in his shadow. She made a very considerable impression. There was a sort of fire about her. Her lines were read, not recited; and Shaw is the acid test for the amateur. The performance received an ovation.

"You were quite interesting," Cartel said, sparingly—inspecting her with half-closed, speculative eyes.

"Do I get my job?" she inquired.

Later, he spoke to her parents about her talent.

"For goodness' sake, don't tell her," urged her mother.

"You wouldn't let me take her for a season?" he inquired.

"I should say not!" replied Mrs. Bryce, with emphasis.

The fuss that was made over the girl was enough to turn her head completely.

"We've got to take her away, that's all," said Wally, a day or two later.

"Where?" inquired Max, irritated to brevity.

"I don't know. She gets into trouble wherever she goes. We might open The Beeches."

"Well, we won't."

In the meantime Isabelle asked Cartel daily about job in his company.

"Nothing doing without your parents' consent."

"If I make them consent, do I get it?"

"Possibly; but they won't," he teased her.

"You don't know me," she warned him.

The end of August came, and with it the great man's departure, for rehearsals in town. Isabelle was desolated. Her god, her idol, was leaving her behind, and only because of those eternal drawbacks—her parents. She said her farewell to him demurely, and echoed his hope that they would meet soon in town.

"You've made my summer for me, little witch," he said in an aside.

He left. There passed three days of utter misery and boredom. Wally went to New York on business, and refused to take her along; Max was cross; the devil of revolt entered Isabelle.

She wired Cartel:

Terrible row. Disinherited by parents. Will apply at theatre tomorrow, at ten, for promised job.

ISABELLE.

She sneaked two dress-suit cases on to the hotel baggage bus, and she took a morning train to New York. Arrived there she wired Max:

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ABELLE.

baggage
Arrived



"You've made my summer for me, little witch," Cartel said

THE CRICKET

183

Am going on stage. Useless to try to stop me. Am determined on a career.

ISABELLE.

Max received this message at tea time, as she sat with a group of merry idlers on the piazza. She read it—frowned. With an exclamation of annoyance she summoned a boy, and wrote as follows to Wally:

Isabelle has joined Cartel. Catch her and bring her back.

MAX.

"Is anything wrong, dear Max?" inquired her best beau, noting her expression.

Yes," she replied, "but it's chronic in our family!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

ISABELLE went directly to their town house and demanded a bed of the caretaker, who was an old family servant. At ten in the morning she presented herself at the stage door of the New York Theatre, and sent in a card to Mr. Cartel. Word came out that he had not arrived. She was not permitted to go in, and to her great indignation she had to march up and down the alley for an hour until the great one came.

At sight of him she felt that all her troubles were at an end. She hurried forward with a confident smile, as he stepped from his motor. No gleam of delight at the sight of her overspread his features, however. He saw her; he bowed.

"Ah—I got your message," he said, absently. "I don't think that there is anything for you."

"There's got to be something for me," said Isabelle with promptness and vigour. "You let me desert my family for a career, and you've got to help me."

"But, my dear girl, I urged you not to break with your family, you know."

"It's too late to talk about that. Here I am. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

"Well, come in," he said, curtly; and they went into the theatre.

It was Isabelle's first view of the hindside of the mysteries. It was a hot day, and rehearsal was in progress. A group of people sat listlessly about the stage, on kitchen chairs, while a man in a *négligé* shirt and no coat urged them to get a little "pep" into the scene "for the love of God!" Cartel's arrival caused a ripple. All the actors sat up, as if electrified. The stage manager advanced at once to speak with him. He glanced at Isabelle, but Cartel made no move to introduce them. In fact he seemed to have forgotten about her. He issued brief orders, asked a few questions, turned to go. Then, as if on an afterthought, he added:

"By the way, Jenkins, this is Miss Isabelle Bryce. Try her out in the maid's part, will you?"

Mr. Jenkins nodded to Isabelle, who was furious at her hero for this casual treatment of her career.

"Come over here," ordered Jenkins, indicating a chair and offering her a script. "Read 'Mary,'" he added, briefly, and went on with the rehearsal.

Isabelle was dazed. It was so different from her idea of it. She had supposed Cartel would introduce her to the company and the manager as a genius he had discovered this summer. She thought she would be made much of, as his protégée. Instead of which she was set upon a kitchen chair, like a strange kitten, and told to read "Mary." Nobody paid any attention to her. They did not even look at her. They went on, indifferently, reading their parts, moving here and there on orders from Jenkins. Suddenly her name was rapped out:

"Your cue, Miss Bryce."

She fumbled her script, blushed furiously, found the place, and read stupidly, beginning with the cue.

" . . . Where is she? Mrs. Horton telephoned she would be here at five, sir."

"Well, get up," ordered Jenkins, testily. "You enter R., upper door. Come front and answer Horton, who stands L. C. Then you exit L., up stage."

They all looked at her now. She felt their impatience, their supercilious smiles. She knew she was that leper in the theatre—an amateur. She did not know what Jenkins was talking about with his down R's, and his up L's. He entered as Mary and showed her the business. She caught the idea at once, and he grunted something which might have been approval or a curse. The rest of the time she spent in fevered attention to the script, looking for the signal, "Mary," but it came no more in that act. They went all over it again, and she managed it without a hitch. Then they were dismissed until two o'clock, and every one hurried off for lunch.

Isabelle waited, thinking that of course Cartel would ask her to lunch with him. But there were no signs of him. She inquired where his office was, and ascended the stairs with the intention of expressing her dissatisfaction with her part. She stopped outside the door at the sound of voices—Cartel's and Wally's. She went in.

"Well!" exploded her father, "so there you are!"

"Good morning, Wally. Max wired you?"

"She did. You will come home with me at once."

"There is no need of our boring Mr. Cartel with our family rows," she said, sweetly. "I have no intention

of going anywhere with you. I've decided upon a stage career, and I'm rehearsing with Mr. Cartel now."

The manager stifled a smile.

"You're not of age, young woman, and you can be *made* to do things!" said Wally.

"Take it to law, you mean? Jail and all that? Public announcement that you and Max can't manage me? Stupid, Wally, very stupid."

"You're not through with your education. It will be time enough to decide on a career when you finish school."

"I have finished school. That I am determined upon. You may as well face it, Wally. I am on the stage, and I intend to stay on it."

"Look here, Bryce, take a word of advice from me. I meet this every day. Girls get this germ, and my experience is that it's better to let the disease run its course. If you force her to go back to school, she has a grievance for life. If she goes back of her own accord, she's cured."

"It's ridiculous! We'd be the laughing stock of the town!"

"Oh, no; it happens in the best families. Believe me, it is not such bad training for young women who have never been disciplined—like your daughter. She'll get it, in this business. She'll learn to obey orders and to respect authority."

"But she's struck on herself now, and if she goes on the stage——"

"Don't bother; we'll take that out of her," remarked Cartel.

Wally looked from Isabelle's set face to the manager's smiling one.

"What is your idea?" he asked.

"Let her try it. Let her live at home. Send her back and forth in your car; protect her, of course. But let her have her fling; it won't take long," said Cartel, with a wise nod at Wally.

"Try it, Wally, just give me a chance," cried the near actress.

"Your mother will raise the roof!" he began.

"She'll come round, if you back me up."

"I don't know," he said, miserably.

Isabelle flew at him and hugged him wildly.

"Oh, Wally, you're a dear," she cried, thus committing him to partnership.

"We needn't treat Cartel to our family reconciliations," he said.

"Come take me to lunch, then. I have to be back at two. That isn't much of a part," she added to Cartel.

"No? Well, we all must begin, you know. That is the first blow to young ladies of your proclivities."

He rose, and bowed them out, as sign of dismissal. Wally and Isabelle went to lunch, and it took them so long to work out their plans—where Isabelle was to stay at present, how the matter was to be presented to Max, and such weighty subjects—that Isabelle was late to rehearsal, and was sharply reprimanded.

She felt this to be very unjust as her line did not come for a long time. At the end of a long, tedious day, she went home to dine in lonely state with the caretaker

as cook, and to crawl into bed immediately thereafter.

Wally managed the situation very well. He made Max see the futility of fighting their child; he assured her that Cartel promised that the seizure would be brief. He looked up old Miss Watts, and engaged her to act as companion to the girl, accompanying her to all rehearsals. They were to live in a suite of rooms, opened for them in the house, with the caretaker providing their meals.

It was all satisfactory to Isabelle. She remembered Miss Watts with pleasure, and she proved an unobjectionable companion. She took a book and read during rehearsals. She seemed interested in Isabelle's future.

The career was not exciting so far. The first real event was the day Cartel came to rehearsal. Everybody was on tiptoe with excitement. The stupid, mumbling thing they called the play suddenly took shape, and point, and brilliancy. It infuriated Isabelle that her only chance lay in a vagrant, unimportant line here and there, when she knew she could play the lead, Mrs. Horton, with a dash and distinction totally lacking in the performance of the actress who was to play it.

She told Cartel so, on one of the infrequent occasions when she saw him to talk to. He laughed.

"The nerve of you kids!" he said. "You think the Lord has made you an actress, don't you? All you need is a chance at a leading part, in order to startle New York!"

Isabelle tried to reply, but he swept on.

"This is an Art; you want to desecrate a great, impor-

tant Art! It takes long years of preparation, hard labour, infinite patience, aching disappointment; it takes brain, and passion, and intelligence to make an actor. Now where do you come in?"

"Well, but you thought this summer——"

"I thought you were a clever little girl doing a sleight-of-hand performance," was his crushing answer.

"But——"

"Can you dance? Can you fence? Can you run? Is your body as mobile and lithe as an animal's? Do you breathe properly? Can you sing? Is your voice a cultivated instrument with an octave and a half of tones, or have you five tones at your command? Do you know how to fill a theatre with a whisper? Can you carry your body with distinction? Can you sit and rise with grace? Is your speech perfect?" He hurled the questions at her.

"No," she admitted.

"Then you don't know the a-b-c's of this art. When you can say 'yes' to all these questions, then you are ready to begin, and not until then. Mind you—to *begin!*"

"But everybody on the stage cannot say 'yes' to all those things."

"No, worse luck! Because soft-hearted fools like me permit crude little girls like you to speak a line without any excuse for so doing. We'll have no great acting in America until we shut the door upon every boy and girl who thinks he can act, by the grace of God."

With this finale, the great man walked away, leaving Isabelle feeling very young and very flat. But she rallied presently. Of course, he had exaggerated it. It might

be that the majority of people had to go that long, hard road of preparation, but always there would be some who would leap to the top without the ladder. In her deepest, secret heart she knew herself to be of that few.

She took up the subject again that very night, after dinner, with Miss Watts.

"What do you think is the most necessary thing for success, Miss Watts?"

"Work."

"But in something like the stage, I mean."

"It doesn't make any difference what it is, true success is the result of hard work and nothing else," that lady persisted, bromidically enough.

"Don't you think it is ever an accident?"

"If it is, it's the worst accident that can happen to you."

"Why?"

"Because then you have to live up to something you haven't earned. You don't know what to do, and in most cases you slump back into mediocrity."

"But there must be some people who don't grind——"

"Geniuses, maybe; but they usually do."

"How do you suppose geniuses recognize themselves?"

"They don't, in most cases."

"But if you felt that you had a great gift, that you were going to do wonderful things, mightn't it be that you were a genius?"

"I should say that it meant that you were merely young," smiled Miss Watts.

Isabelle decided that doubtless all geniuses met with this lack of recognition in those about them. She pinned

her faith to herself! In spite of Cartel and Miss Watts—who, after all, were *old*—she rather thought that on the opening night, when she spoke her lines, few as they were, the critics would say simply, in large-type headlines:

"CARTEL HAS FOUND A GENIUS!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

OCTOBER came, dragged by, with the opening night of the play coming nearer. Wally induced Max to come to town and open the house. It was a cold autumn and nearly all of their friends returned early, too.

"I had hoped that nobody would be in town when this idiot child of ours makes her ridiculous début, but now everybody on earth is home. Even the weather favours Isabelle's plans," complained Max to her spouse.

"No one need know about it, if we can keep it out of the papers."

"Yes, if!"

"Better make the best of it. Ask a lot of people to dinner, take all the boxes, and make a joke of it."

"Isabelle may make a joke of us," commented her mother.

"She gets away with things," Wally encouraged her.

As for Isabelle, she was bored to the point of despair with her career. Day in, day out, she said her stupid lines. If she varied one inflection from yesterday's inflection she was reprimanded by Jenkins. Mary and her lines were as standardized as Webster's Dictionary, and no original turns were to be permitted. Cartel continued distant, every inch a star, wrapped in his greatness.

The other members of the company paid scant attention to her, so she made no friends.

It was all very dull and mechanical. The play started off and ground itself through as automatically as a machine. Jenkins ruled like the boss of the shop. There was no room for genius.

Just to help herself endure the tedium of eternal rehearsal, Isabelle invented an absorbing game. She rewrote the play, in innumerable ways, with the plot revolving around Mary as the central figure. Mary was now the friend and adviser of Mrs. Horton, now the trusted confidante of Mr. Horton. But whichever she was, she was a noble, sublimated creature—no possible relation to Mary, the automatic servant. She had long, beautiful speeches, interesting and unusual stage business; she wore a striking maid's costume, designed by Isabelle. This Mary managed to keep Isabelle's imagination awake during the weary weeks in which the other Mary walked on and off, with her "Yes, Mrs. Horton," and her "No, Mr. Horton."

Suddenly a Sunday Supplement blossomed out with a full-page drawing of Isabelle, and the announcement of her coming début on the stage, in Sidney Cartel's new production to open on such-and-such a date. Thereafter every paper in town blared forth the news of this event. There were full columns of talk about the Bryces, their money, their position, Mrs. Bryce's beauty, Isabelle's eccentricities. The originality and daring of their only child were dwelt upon at great length.

The performance with Cartel at the mountain inn was

described. The hungry public was told how Cartel had seen her genius at a glance and persuaded her parents to let him have the training of her talent. Isabelle was snapped leaving the theatre, or riding in the Park. She was not safe a moment from reporters and camera men.

There was unanimous disapproval of this state of affairs on the part of her parents and her manager. It was difficult to tell which was the angrier. The Bryces accused Isabelle, but for once she was innocent. She had no idea how the reports started. She had talked to nobody. Miss Watts corroborated this statement. Neither of them knew when the artist made the sketch of her, and they never supposed that the photographers were taking her picture.

Cartel was furious. It was not in his plans at all to let this youngster take the middle of his stage on the occasion of his New York opening. He would have dismissed her at once, had the newspaper talk not gone so far. As it was he joined her parents heartily in a determined effort to shut them off. But it couldn't be done. Isabelle had caught the public eye; she was a marked personality, and editors played her up big.

Secretly she triumphed. It was only the beginning in the inevitable recognition of her greatness. It strengthened her belief that she was of the elect, and she rarely ever thought of the "Mary" part with which she was actually to prove herself, but she hurled herself into the development of the other Mary, which should have been hers, by all the laws of right. The two creatures merged—were one. Once or twice at rehearsal, aroused by her cue

from some wonderful scene where Mary held the spotlight, she faltered for a second for those barren lines of the real Mary.

"What's the matter with you, Miss Bryce? Keep your mind on what you're doing," warned Jenkins.

She smiled at him. Poor fool! In a few weeks he would be bragging that he stage-managed her first appearance. She could afford to be patient with his bad temper, now.

Dress rehearsal was called and became a fevered memory. The day of the opening Isabelle spent quietly at home, except for a ride in the Park. She was to rest, and have her supper in her sitting room. Wally came in, in the midst of her repast, and fussed about her room.

"Aren't you nervous?" he inquired.

"Oh, no."

"I am. I'm so nervous I could scream!" he exploded. "I hate all this notoriety. They say the house will be packed."

"We always like a full house," she said, serenely.

"Suppose you flunk it!"

"But I won't!"—promptly.

He looked at her uncomprehendingly.

"If you could only be kept in a cage, in the cellar!"

She laughed gaily at that.

"Poor old Wally! Don't fret. You'll be very proud of me some day."

Max floated in.

"I thought I heard laughter."

"You did," Isabelle replied.

"Are you cool enough to laugh?"

"Quite. Wally is the only nervous one. Who is coming to dinner, Max?"

"Eighteen people. Christiansen for one."

"Oh, good!"

"When do you go to the theatre?"

"Seven."

"Come along, Wally, she ought to rest. For all our sakes, Isabelle, keep your head and don't make a fool of yourself."

"Much obliged," said Isabelle. "I take it you are wishing me luck."

Wally kissed her cheek, and they went out.

"Poor dears," mused Isabelle, "it will be hard for them to accommodate themselves to my importance."

Then she gave herself up to dreams of triumph until it was time to go. There was excitement in the air at the theatre. Voices were high, and eyes were bright. She was greeted loudly from open doors, as she went to her dressing room. Since the papers had boomed her, her position in the company had changed. Every one was dressed early and little knots of people discussed the big house, the critics, the chances of success for the play. It was a "strong" play, and, so far, the season had offered only trifles. It was too soon to know yet what the public appetite craved.

"You got to change its meat. When it's fed up on crooks, ye got to give it sex; when it turns against that, ye got to try comedy. *My* opinion is, this is a comedy season," said the gentleman who played the butler—a part

even more inconspicuous than Isabelle's. They all inquired the state of her pulse, and marvelled at her calm.

"She'll be a hit, or she'll be rotten," was the butler gentleman's comment.

"She can't do much in that maid's part."

"*Can't* she? Remember the time they tried to bury Ethel Barrymore in a maid's part, when she was a kid? Took the show right away from John Drew!" said the authority.

Finally the curtain was up, and the play was on. Isabelle's initial appearance was late in the first act, when Cartel was building carefully the foundations of plot for the subsequent superstructure. Isabelle entered with a visitor's card in the middle of an important speech by Cartel. She had one line. To his intense fury, at sight of her the house burst into applause, and he had to halt his oration until she disappeared.

The play was a domestic drama, with the popular old-fashioned man, wed to the popular-new-fashioned woman who wants to "live her life." In the first act, the husband's point of view and character are expounded and contrasted with the woman's.

In a daring second act, the husband—on the casual invitation of an acquaintance to come along to a supper party in a certain man's rooms—finds his own wife acting as hostess. After the modern manner he breaks no furniture, makes no scene; but in tense tones, aside, he demands an explanation from her. She promises him an interview at their home, the following day, at five. He

refuses to wait; she insists. He leaves. Events follow rapidly. The host has a stroke of apoplexy and dies. A muddle-headed guest summons a police ambulance instead of a hospital one. Police arrive, murder is suspected, every one is arrested. There is a strong finale, with hints of astounding revelations to come—in act three, of course.

The third act opens with a very tense atmosphere. Horton (Cartel), the husband—unaware that his wife is under arrest, suspected of murder—comes to his home, from the club, where he has spent a sleepless night. It is nearly five o'clock, the hour of the interview. Business of excitement, pacing, looking at watch. He rings for Mary, who enters.

"Where is Mrs. Horton, Mary?" he asks.

"Mrs. Horton telephoned she would be here at five o'clock, sir," answers Mary, who, according to the playwright, then goes out. But Mary did not exit.

"She hasn't been home all night, sir," she added suddenly, unexpectedly, "and it may be that she is in some trouble."

Cartel turned a fierce frown upon her.

"That will do, Mary," he said, threateningly.

Mary threw herself at his feet.

"Oh, Mr. Horton, don't be hard on her! She may have been misled by this man; but at heart she is a good woman—I could swear it."

Cartel was shaking with fury. He leaned over and grasped the prostrate Mary by the arm, so hard that he nearly cracked her bones. "Ouch!" she cried, "you're hurting me."

The audience slowly grasped the fact that this scene was a surprise to Cartel. It was so still you could have heard a sigh. Mary resisted any attempt to get her on her feet, and this side of carrying her off Cartel was helpless.

"If you'd only make a confidante of me, Mr. Horton, I could be a help to you in your hour of need," she cried passionately.

"Get out!" hissed Cartel, *sotto voce*.

"It looks as if she committed that murder, but I have facts to prove that she did not."

The rest of the act was devoted to breaking the news of the murder to Horton. In one fell line this demon had demolished the play. The audience began to titter, to laugh, to roar! Cartel dragged Isabelle to the door, and literally flung her forth. But at the expression on her face the audience actually shouted with delight, they applauded deafeningly.

Cartel acted quickly. He went up stage, turned his back, and looked out of a prop. window, for what seemed a lifetime, till the hysterics out in front subsided. Finally it was still enough for him to take up the scene again. But at the dramatic entrance of his wife, fresh from a night in jail, they were off again. Cartel glared at them, and in a shamefaced sort of way, they subsided, and the play creaked on, as dead as last year's news.

Mary had a later entrance, which Cartel cut, but it necessitated the mention of her name, whereupon the monster mirth was loosed again.

Finally the curtain descended upon the tragedy. Mrs.

Horton went into hysterics, and Mr. Horton, bathed in sweat, went to look for Isabelle.

The company stood about in frightened groups, but he did not see them. He threw open her door without so much as a knock upon it, and he shouted so you could have heard him in Harlem.

"You little beast! You—you hell-cat! What d'ye mean by spoiling my scene like that?"

"Oh, I am so sorry," said Isabelle, "I didn't mean to do it, but I got the two Marys all mixed up."

"You're crazy—you're a mad woman! What do you think this will mean to me? It means failure—complete failure! I never could get through the scene again. It means thousands of dollars, that's what it means. Because I let a stage-struck fool like you speak a line! Talk about gratitude! You turn and ruin me!"

"But I didn't know——"

"Don't pull that baby stuff!" he shrieked. "You *did* know. You *intended* to do it all the time. You're so crazy about yourself, that you'd murder your own mother to get the spotlight! Get out of here! Don't you ever let me see your face again! Don't you ever step in this theatre, you dirty spy! Take her away! Take her away!" he raved, now entirely beside himself.

Isabelle for once was dumb. Poor, terrified Miss Watts seized her by the arm, and dragged her out the stage door, and down the alley.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

ISABELLE walked Miss Watts for miles. She would not answer questions, nor discuss the events leading up to Cartel's outburst.

"Of course, he isn't a gentleman," was her only remark during the entire walk. Poor Miss Watts was utterly in the dark over the whole situation. She was sitting quietly in the dressing room, reading the *Atlantic Monthly*, under the impression that the play was going nicely, when the terrible outbreak of Cartel occurred. One thing she grasped, and that was that the girl was suffering, so she let her alone and trudged along beside her, as well as she could.

Suddenly Isabelle called a taxi, and ordered the driver to hurry them home.

"I won't see the Wallys to-night," she said, as they reached the house. "If they're home, you tell them whatever you like."

But the Bryces were not in yet, so Matthews told them. Isabelle rushed upstairs, and went to bed, with a brief good-night to Miss Watts. An hour later Max snapped on the light in Isabelle's room, and evidently spoke to Wally.

"The little beast is asleep!" she said. "Did you ever hear anything equal to that?"

Isabelle heard him laugh; the light was turned off, and her parents went on their way. They never had any part in her crises. They thought this terrible, wracking fiasco was funny! She covered her ears to shut out the hideous wild laughing of that audience. She could never forget it as long ~~as~~ she lived—that gust of laughter, as if the solid earth had begun to rock and roll.

She tried to think back to the beginning of the disaster, but it was all hazy in her mind—a chaos of lights, people, applause, excitement—a mixture of the rôle she was playing and the one she had made up for herself. She could not remember when it was that she began on the wrong Mary.

She viewed the ruins of her hopes, lying all about her. She heard Cartel's shrieks of rage, and that awful laughing! It was terrible—terrible! And nobody would understand. There was nothing for her to do, but die.

She thought back to another time when she had wanted to die, and dear Mrs. Benjamin had comforted her. If only she were here now she would understand, and help her to face her disgrace. What was she to do? How could she live it down? She must hide somewhere. Maybe she ought to disappear in the morning, before her parents were awake. That would let her out of the much-dreaded interview with them. So with this idea in her mind, she fell into troubled sleep, at dawn.

When she woke, it was to broad daylight, and the presence of her father and mother.

"Oh!" sighed Isabelle, as her eyes fell on them.

"You've been asleep all day," said her mother. "We thought maybe you'd taken something."

"Taken something?"

"Drug, or something."

"Is it late?"

"Four o'clock in the afternoon."

"Oh, and I intended to get away early this morning."

"Get away where?" inquired Wally.

"Anywhere out of sight"—desperately.

He sat on the edge of her bed.

"Look here, kid, just what did happen?"

"You'll never understand, and I'm not going to talk about it," she said, sullenly.

"You needn't take that tone," said her mother, sharply.

"You've made an utter fool of yourself, and of us, too."

"Now, Max, let her alone to-day," Wally protested.

"It's always 'Let her do it her own way,' with you. You backed her up in this foolishness. We've had all the publicity I intend to have through Isabelle. She will go back to school, and stay in retirement, until we are ready to bring her out," said Mrs. Bryce, firmly.

"All I say is that to-morrow is soon enough to take it up with her. The kid's had a bad fall, and she needs to get together."

"Yes, she has! She comes home and goes to sleep for sixteen hours, while we read the newspapers."

"Newspapers?"

"Column after column of what you did to Cartel's opening. If he doesn't sue Wally for a fat sum, I miss my guess."

"What did they say?"

"You can read them for yourself. I intend that you

shall. If there is any way to cure your conceit, I'd like to see it done," Mrs. Bryce continued.

"Plenty of time later," urged Wally, distressed at his daughter's white, tragic face. "Did Cartel say anything to you last night?"

Isabelle nodded.

"Dismissed you?"

Again she inclined her head.

"I should hope so," laughed Max, shortly. "Paper says he has gone to Atlantic City with a nervous collapse."

"And the play?" Isabelle said.

"Closed. That's what you did. Must have endeared yourself to the company."

With a groan, Isabelle turned her face to the wall, and Wally dragged Max out of the room.

Later Miss Watts came in to offer tea. The girl refused it, but she begged her companion to bring her all the morning papers.

"Wait until to-morrow, my dear," Miss Watts begged, alarmed at the change in her.

"No. I want to get it over."

So the papers were brought.

After propping her up on pillows and seeing that she was bodily comfortable at least, Miss Watts withdrew. Isabelle began at the beginning and read every word about that unhappy opening. The articles were written with a jocularity hard to bear. Most of them had graduated out of the regular dramatic review columns on to the first page. "HILARIOUS OPENING AT THE NEW YORK THEA-

TRE!" "CARTEL'S FIND!" "IMPROMPTU ARTIST MAKES Bow." These were some of the captions.

They all developed the story for what it was worth: Cartel's discovery of Isabelle at the inn; a few paragraphs about her family; mention of the wonderful publicity provided for her; a description of the brilliant first-night audience, with the Bryces' distinguished guests in all the boxes; Isabelle's reception as the maid. Then followed the plot of the play, up to the awful moment when Cartel's "discovery" forgot her lines and began to improvise. They painted the star's astonishment and subsequent fury. They added speculation as to the real climax of the evening which must have taken place back on the stage after the dropping of the final curtain. Every article made you hear the uncontrollable laughter of the audience.

Isabelle agonized over each one. She raged at the opinion of one dramatic critic who said that no doubt Cartel would release Miss Bryce on the morrow, but that a dozen managers would step forward to capture a young woman of such marked personality, and such a talent for publicity.

Max was right; they were all ruined. She had made the whole family ridiculous. She wasn't surprised that Max hated her for it. She deserved anything from them now. She lay in bed for several days, scarcely touching food, brooding upon her disgrace until she was really ill.

Wally hovered about her, deeply concerned, but not knowing how to comfort her. He kept Max out of the room as much as he could. Finally he sent for a doctor.

"Perfectly unnecessary," said his wife. "She isn't

sick. She's made a fool of herself and lost the middle of the stage, so now she goes on a hunger strike to work up a little sympathy."

"The kid is suffering, I tell you. She is all broken up over this. I think we ought to take her away somewhere."

"You can count me out. I've been dragged home to open this house for her convenience. I'm not going off to some empty resort place because she needs a change."

The doctor had a talk with Isabelle, told her to cheer up, gave her a tonic, agreed with Wally that she needed a change, and went on his way.

Martin Christiansen asked Max about Isabelle and was informed that she had the sulks. He asked permission to see her, and he was the first visitor admitted to her room. He was shocked at the change in her. She was thin, and haggard, and old. Her eyes hurt him. She was sitting up, in a big chair, wearing a bizarre Chinese coat, all orange and black and gold. She looked any age, an exotic little creature. The hand she offered was thin as a bird's claw.

"I've been thinking that you might understand," she said to him, before he could speak.

"Thank you."

He drew a chair beside hers and waited.

"You didn't think I forgot my lines, did you?"

"It wasn't like you."

"I didn't. I was bored at rehearsals, and so I made up a wonderful Mary-part for myself, a noble character whom every one trusted."

Her eyes were upon his face, and he nodded slowly,

hoping that his amusement did not leak through his expression.

"Every day, all those hours, I used to be this made-up Mary, and just toward the last I got a little wobbly as to which Mary was which," she admitted.

"Naturally."

"I knew you would see that. Well, the night of the opening I was so excited that I mixed them all up."

She said this with such tragic emphasis that he did not even want to laugh.

"How unfortunate!" he exclaimed.

"No, it wasn't unfortunate," she cried; "it was stupid, stupid, stupid!"

"Yes, it was, a trifle," he admitted.

"I thought I was going to be such a success. I just knew I could act. Cartel said it would take me years of hard work even to begin to be an artist, and I thought I could just show him."

"I think you may be said to have shown him!" Christiansen remarked.

"Yes, I did. I showed him I was a fool. I don't wonder that he nearly killed me for it."

"No doubt it was real agony for a man as highly strung as he is. For months he had been building a fine house, and in three blows you sent it crumbling."

"Oh, don't!" groaned Isabelle.

"I didn't come to reproach you. I came to help. I want to be sure that we both understand that you have been to blame in this affair. That settled, we'll go on to the next step."

"There isn't any next step. I've disgraced us all."

"Oh, come, it isn't so bad as that. You have given a great many people a good laugh, and no doubt they are very grateful to you for it. Now, do you want to go on with the stage?—really to study the fine art of acting?"

"No! *no!* NO!"

"What are your plans?"

"I haven't any."

"You cannot spend the rest of your life in this room, my child."

"I'd like to."

"There's always something to be made of our tragedies, Isabelle. The first thing is to get yourself well again. You're all eyes. It won't do. You must go away and get together, and when you come back we will have a talk about your work. I'm sure you have talent of some sort, if we can just direct it properly."

"I'll never believe in myself again."

He laughed and patted her hand.

"Europe is out of the question. How about Bermuda? Ever been there?"

"No"—indifferently.

"Just the place. Lots doing. Soldiers recuperating, people to watch, people to play with. Fine place for you. I'll suggest it to your parents."

He rose and took her two small hands.

"You promise me to get well, and to come back your old vivid self?"

"I'll try. You *are* a comfort. You helped that other

time, too, when the guillotine nearly broke Tommy Page's neck."

He threw back his head and laughed so heartily at the memory, that she laughed too.

"I've always been rather ridiculous, haven't I?" she asked him.

"My child, that is an elderly remark," he said, and he left her—on the whole, cheered.

He promptly made his suggestion to the Bryces. It was discussed pro and con and then finally it was decided to ship the girl off, in Miss Watts's care, for it was evident that she was making herself ill with the humiliation of her failure.

So, one day in November Wally saw them off.

"You look like a Brownie," he said, as he kissed Isabelle good-bye. "For goodness' sake, get some flesh on your bones."

"Don't worry, old thing," she answered. "I'll come back fat, and chastened in spirit."

He grinned, and ran for the gangway, and stood waving and smiling as the steamer slipped from the pier.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE two travellers settled themselves and took stock of the passengers in the casual way of those who go down to the sea in ships. Miss Watts was prepared to have Isabelle throw herself into the activities of the brief voyage, in order that she might forget her troubles. She did just the opposite. She lay in her chair, reading or contemplating the sea; she marched the deck in absent-minded solitude. Miss Watts was the only person she spoke to, or permitted to speak to her.

But her odd face, her unusual clothes, and her great *hauteur* marked her at once in the eyes of the idlers who sat on deck and gossiped. She was soon identified as the heroine of the Cartel opening. Speculation and much interest followed her.

The second day out the chair to the right of Isabelle was occupied for the first time. A cursory glance was enough to assure her of the following facts: he was handsome "as an army with banners"; he wore an English officer's uniform; and he was very pale. She decided to have another look in a moment.

She settled herself comfortably—aware that his eyes were upon her—and opened her book, with an air of great detachment. Miss Watts was not on deck at the mo-

ment. It was some time before she got another chance to look at him unobserved. She saw that he had crinkly hair and a ridiculous little moustache, twisted at the tips. He had his eyes closed. He certainly was white, but one strong, lean, brown hand lay on his lap, giving her a feeling of relaxed power. His eyes opened unexpectedly, and she had to return to her book in haste. His eyes were very blue and she thought there was a smile in them.

Miss Watts's arrival interrupted this interchange, if it was an interchange. But in a few minutes another officer came to chat with the invalid.

"Hello, Larry, old man, how are ye?" he inquired.

"I'm fairly fit to-day, thanks."

"Glad you can be on deck."

"Rather. I thought I'd croak in that hole of a stateroom."

"Lot of people aboard we know. Mrs. Darlington, for one. Remember her in London?"

"Rather."

"She's dying to see 'dear old Larry.' Sit tight, she's on her way now," he added, in a lower voice.

Isabelle permitted herself a look. A tall, handsome woman was coming down the deck, with a swaying sort of walk that was fascinating. She was very smartly turned out. A rather fat man, with prominent eyes, accompanied her. They stopped beside Larry's chair, and she exclaimed enthusiastically:

"How are you, old dear? They would not let me into your stateroom, or I should have been holding your hand, and giving Mrs. Grundy a treat."

"Larry" got to his feet and accomplished a gallant bow.

"Awf'ly good of ye," he said, smiling, holding her hand in his.

"You know Monty Haven, don't you? Captain Larry O'Leary, Monty, and Major O'Dell."

So his name was Larry O'Leary, mused Isabelle. She liked its softness on the tongue.

"Does your wound trouble you, you brave thing?" Mrs. Darlington purred.

"Oh, no. Coming all right. It's nothing."

"Nothing? Do you know what this wonderful creature did, under fire and all, Monty?" she demanded.

"O kind and beautiful lady, spare me blushes. I'm after being Irish and susceptible to flattery," he cried.

"Larry, you old heart-breaker, don't look at me in that wistful Celtic way," she commanded.

"Mrs. Darlington, dear, ye may as well resign yersilf to bein' looked at," he retorted.

"It is good to hear your blarney and your brogue, Larry. By the way, old Mrs. Van Dyke is aboard and demands a sight of you."

"Does she now? Come along and let's pay our respects to the old lady."

She put her hand through his arm, and they sauntered off, with the other two men in their wake.

"Handsome woman, wasn't she?" Miss Watts remarked.

"No. I don't like that type. She struck me as *bold*."

Captain Larry O'Leary was the spoiled and petted darling of the boat. The tale of his gallant action under

fire, of his wounds, of his decoration for valour, was passed from mouth to mouth, and lost nothing in the retelling.

The men liked him because he was a simple, modest chap, in spite of it all. The women followed him around like a cloud of gnats. He jollied them all from old Madam Van Dyke, who was seventy, to the smallest girl child on the boat.

He looked like a hero out of a fairy book. He had a rollicking, contagious laugh, and a courteous heart toward every one. At the ship concert for the benefit of wounded soldiers, he sang the songs of the trenches, and the marching songs of the Irish troops, the English and the French, in a clear baritone voice. There is no hope of disguising the fact that Larry O'Leary was too good to be true. Like the star in the melodrama, he was 99 per cent. hero.

His only rival for the centre of the stage on the brief voyage was Isabelle. At first she kept to herself, because she was ill, and wanted to be alone. But after a bit she grasped the fact that her aloofness was a sensation, and she was not too ill to enjoy that. Her perambulations about the deck were watched with undiminished interest. Everybody knew everybody else. There were dances, and games and knitting contests, but to all invitations Isabelle replied in the negative.

"Why don't you talk to some of these people, Isabelle? They seem very pleasant," Miss Watts said.

"Oh," sighed the girl, "they bore me."

Captain O'Leary had made several attempts to get an opening to speak to her in the afternoon, but she had

successfully evaded them. Mrs. Darlington in search of the bonny Captain spoke to her.

"Your handsome neighbour isn't on deck?"

"Isn't he?" said Isabelle. "I hadn't noticed."

Mrs. Darlington stared, laughed, retreated and the story went the rounds. It amused O'Leary, and it also piqued him. He was used to being noticed by ladies in his vicinity. He made up his mind that he would make that girl look at him. He intended to lay siege to Miss Watts, but he came upon Isabelle unattended, in deep contemplation of the sea, and he promptly sat down beside her.

"I beg pardon, Miss Bryce, but are you Irish?" he said deliberately.

She turned big, enquiring eyes upon him.

"No. Why?"

"I thought nobody could be as sad as you look except an Irishman."

"I'm not Irish," she said, and returned her gaze to the sea.

"I am," he exclaimed.

No answer.

"We're very sensitive to—to rebuffs."

"I suppose so. You were shot in a rebuff, weren't you?" she said, politely.

His laugh rang out at that.

"Yes, but we're not so sensitive to a rebuff from guns as we are to a rebuff from ladies."

"No?"

"Have ye taken an unconquerable dislike to me, Miss Bryce?" he begged.

"I think you're very--pleasant," admitted Isabelle.

"Couldn't ye take a lesson from me?"

"You think I'm unpleasant?"

"I think your heart is as hard as the rocks in Flodden Field," he exclaimed.

"Being pleasant hasn't anything to do with your heart," was her calm reply.

"Hasn't it? Ye think I can be as pleasant as I am, and still have a hard, black heart?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"So you don't like me?" he persisted.

"Yes, rather. But I'm a little tired of heroes just now," was her reply.

"I'm afraid I don't qualify," he said curtly, "but as a possible nuisance I'll take mesilf off."

He rose. He stopped behind her chair and leaned over her to say:

"That rebuff, ye spoke of, in France. After all, it was an amateur affair, as rebuffs go."

With which he marched off down the deck, his head very high in the air. Miss Watts sat down beside Isabelle with a quick glance at her.

"Weren't you talking to Captain O'Leary?"

"He talked to me."

"Isn't he charming? All the women are so excited about him."

"That's what's the matter with him."

"Is he conceited?"

"Fearfully!" quoth Isabelle.

She went over that interview dozens of times. Of course

he would never look at her again. She remembered how Mrs. Darlington purred over him—how Madam Van Dyke patted him. That was the way to make him like you, but she had scratched and spit at him, like an angry kitten. She couldn't imagine why she had acted like that. She admired him immensely. He was more attractive than Jerry Paxton or Sidney Cartel or any man she had ever loved, and yet—she had deliberately made him hate her. Well, anyhow, she liked the idea of her heart being as hard as the rocks in Flodden Field. It had an important sound. He could never say that to the gushing Mrs. Darlington, or any of the other women who ran around after him.

So she closed the chapter of their acquaintance on the boat, but she worked out a scene or two at Bermuda, including an aeroplane flight in which he and she were lost in the clouds. On the whole she preferred the things she made up to the things that happened.

As they neared the Islands the weather grew warmer. White clothes appeared on deck. Captain O'Leary appeared in an undress uniform that caused a flutter in feminine hearts. The night of the day of her encounter with her hero was stuffy and very hot.

Isabelle was restless and wakeful. She tossed and turned and tried to banish all thoughts of the Irishman, but it was no use. She leaned out of her upper berth to gaze down upon the sleeping features of Miss Watts.

"How wonderful to be so old that you don't care about handsome Irishmen!" mused Isabelle.

A few minutes later she decided that, unless she had

some air, she would perish. She made a most careful descent from her perch, without waking her companion. She opened the door cautiously, and put her head out. It was a trifle cooler in the passageway. Her watch reported three o'clock. There would be no one awake at that hour.

She put on her slippers, and the tight little orange-and-black Chinese cloak. She left the door open, and went into the corridor. She walked up and down, up and down, trying to believe that she was cooler. It was rather spooky! Several stateroom doors stood open, and the sound of sleepers—breathing evenly, or snoring—came to her as she passed.

Finally she turned in at her own door, slipped off the Chinese coat, and laid it across the chair. She moved very quietly not to disturb Miss Watts. She put her foot on the extreme edge of the lower berth to mount, when the boat rolled and threw her off her balance. To save herself from falling, she put out her hand; it descended upon the upturned face—it should have been the face of Miss Watts, but it was not. Her hand fell upon a moustache! With one bound Isabelle was out of the door, into the passageway, and into the next open door.

"Miss Watts!" she gasped.

"Yes, what is it?"—sleepily.

"Oh, nothing. I went out to get a breath of air. I left the door open, but I wasn't just sure——"

She was climbing up into her berth during this explanation. Suddenly a hideous thought caused her to collapse on the edge of her bed—she had left her Chinese coat behind!

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE day after the loss of her Chinese coat was the last day at sea. They were to land sometime in the morning. When she woke from her troubled dreams, Isabelle's thought was that she would stay in her stateroom until it was time to disembark. She could not decide whether to tell Miss Watts the story of her mistake and ask her advice, or whether it was sufficiently disgraceful to be kept a secret.

She reviewed it for the thousandth time,—the open doors, all alike, the entrance into the wrong one, her leisurely disposal of her coat, and then her hand planted firmly in the middle of that strange face—that moustached face! Could he have seen her and recognized her in the moment she stood before him? It was dark in the room, except for a dim light from the corridor. Was there anything about the coat which could identify her? Should she give the stewardess twenty-five dollars and tell her to get it, and answer no questions? But how would she explain its being in that room? It was simple enough to her, how it got there, but you never could tell how other people would take a thing. She decided to let the coat remain, and tell no one of the incident.

But granted that there was no way for the man to identify her, why need she hide? It was a beautiful warm

day and the cabin was stuffy. No, she would go forth and count the number of men aboard who wore moustaches.

He wore one!!!

It flashed into her mind in italics! Captain Larry O'Leary wore one! Suppose . . . ! She blushed at the thought, and began hurriedly to dress. Miss Watts had already gone forth for a promenade before breakfast. Arrayed in one of her white linen suits and a close boyish white hat, Isabelle fared forth to join her companion. But half way down the deck, she hesitated, for her companion was already companioned. None other than the gallant Captain O'Leary strode the deck by her side. Before Isabelle could flee, they turned suddenly and saw her. They came toward her. Two feet from where she stood, the Captain halted, bowed, said audibly:

"Thus far, and no farther, Miss Watts. Here lies the safety line." He indicated an imaginary line with an immaculate boot.

Miss Watts looked her surprise.

"You know Captain O'Leary, Isabelle? Surely I saw you talking. Miss Bryce, Captain O'Leary."

He bowed gravely.

"Miss Bryce," he said, formally.

"Captain O'Leary," she replied, looking intently at his moustache.

He passed his hand over his face slowly with inquiry in his eyes.

"I beg your pardon," mumbled Isabelle, blushing.

"I know. I remind ye of somebody. I always remind

everybody of somebody," he added, with his pleasant suggestion of brogue.

Isabelle seized upon the opportunity.

"You do, rather. Isn't he like Patsy Reilly, the gardener's boy at The Beeches, Miss Watts?"

"Why no!" exploded Miss Watts. "Certainly not."

The Captain laughed.

"I told ye so. Mine is the universal physiognomy! Stuffy night, wasn't it?" he added, changing the subject abruptly.

Isabelle glanced at him quickly.

"I didn't find it so," she said. "Coming to breakfast, Miss Watts?"

"Yes. Walk round the deck with us once, as an appetizer?"

"No, thanks. I'm famished."

"Miss Bryce would rather devour an Irishman as an appetizer before breakfast. 'Fee, fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an Irishman'."

"I'd prefer an Englishman, or a German!" retorted Isabelle, as she nodded and led the way to breakfast.

She pondered his remark about the stuffy night with a fluttering heart. Did he know? Did he suspect her? She watched men with moustaches, and tried to listen to their conversation. There were a good many English officers aboard with the regulation hirsute adornment of the upper lip. True to our custom of following English fashions, more than half the American men aboard had diminutive twisted affairs on the upper lip. There was no use trying to identify "the man" by the mous-

tache. She listened for conversation verging upon the Far East—incidentally Chinese embroideries—but in vain.

She watched her chance when no one was about, to consult the ship register to see what men were in that corridor. She discovered five English officers were in that tier. In short they arrived, and disembarked without Isabelle finding a single clue to the gentleman who had her treasured coat.

Captain O'Leary was civil about their baggage, and getting them a vehicle to go to the hotel.

"Are ye sure that ye have everything that belongs to ye?" he inquired, his eyes on Isabelle.

What did he mean? Did he mean anything except what he said?

"Yes, thanks," replied Miss Watts. "So glad you are staying at our hotel. We'll see you later," she added, and they rode off, leaving him smiling after them, bare-headed in the sunlight.

"Most charming man I ever met!" exclaimed Miss Watts.

"Umm-m," said Isabelle.

It was like a miracle to step out on to the terrace of the hotel, after dinner that night. To have left New York on a cold, raw fall day, and in two days to find oneself in this warm, odorous night air. The band played, and white-clad figures walked, danced, sat in groups over coffee. Everywhere relaxed, happy, laughing people.

It was not the season on the island but so many English officers came to recuperate here, so many Americans, shut

out of Europe, came down from New York for a week or so, that it was unusually gay.

Mrs. Darlington and Captain O'Leary were dancing when Miss Watts and Isabelle entered the large gallery at the edge of the platform. Mrs. Darlington was regal in evening dress, and the pair attracted much attention as they danced. The Captain bowed as he passed and evidently spoke to his partner about them, for she glanced back at them. She shrugged her shoulders, and he led her in their direction.

"Lovely night, isn't it? Mrs. Darlington, Miss Watts and Miss Bryce," he said.

"I tried to meet Miss Bryce on the boat, but she snubbed me," laughed Mrs. Darlington, making Isabelle feel very young and crude.

Isabelle frowned and made no denial, so Captain O'Leary remarked:

"Do you disdain the dance, Miss Bryce?"

"No."

"Would you honour me?"

Isabelle glanced at Miss Watts, who looked uncomfortable.

"Isabelle is not out yet. Her mother wishes her to be inconspicuous here," she began.

"Imagine Isabelle inconspicuous," laughed Mrs. Darlington again.

Isabelle decided that she hated her!

"But it's different out here—it's not a ball room, ye know. It's just dancin' round," said the Irishman.

"Yes, that's true. Oh, I think it would be all right,"

agreed Miss Watts, unable to deny him the moon, if he asked for it.

"The next then, Miss Bryce?"

"Thank you," she said.

He went away with his partner, who was decidedly bored with the conversation.

"Surly little thing," she remarked, audibly.

"She is certainly a beautiful woman," Miss Watts remarked, looking after them.

"Beautiful? Oh, yes, if you like a vamp."

"A what?"

"Vampire; you see them in movies."

"Isabelle!" protested the older woman.

They strolled about, drank in the rich tropical perfume of the night, and looked off to where the sea lay—huge, mysterious, and musical—lipping the beach. There was a moon and the stars hung low and yellow in a deep blue velvet sky.

The band swung into a waltz, and the dancers began to revolve. Isabelle's heart beat an extra tap or two. She saw Captain O'Leary's closely cropped head in the distance. He caught sight of her, and hurried toward them with that swinging, marching gait of his. He bowed and offered his arm. Isabelle took it in silence and they went to the dancing floor.

She looked like a little girl in her straight white gown, and the top of her head came well below his shoulder. They glided off without a word. The Captain was an accomplished dancer, also he danced because he loved it. In the same way it was speech to Isabelle; it expressed

her, it was a natural gift. They were like one person, moved by one will. Encore followed encore. Only once was a word exchanged between them; and then, as they waited for the music to begin again, she lifted shining eyes to his, and he leaned toward her quickly:

"Ye little moonbeam!" he said, softly.

Then they went on again. Time and space were not, for Isabelle. She was a part of elemental Nature—a part of sea and sky and deep bosomed tropical night. Even as Larry O'Leary had said, she was a child of the lady moon, a beam of her silver light.

When, finally, it was over, they found Miss Watts waiting for them, a few steps away.

"Here I am," she said, in her usual voice, as if the whole world had not changed its face. "You had a nice long dance, didn't you?"

"Wonderful!" said the Irishman, in a voice that thrilled. "Now we're getting acquainted," he added, bending down to Isabelle. "I thank you, Miss Moonbeam," he whispered.

Isabelle smiled at him. She had not said one word since he led her forth. She felt a little dizzy with everything. Speech was unnecessary. He left them, then, and Miss Watts smiled at her.

"Did you enjoy it, Isabelle?" she asked pleasantly.

"No!" flashed the girl, unexpectedly. "I am going to bed."

"That's sensible. We will enjoy our sleep to-night in a real bed."

But Isabelle was not thinking of sleep!

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE next morning floated in upon Isabelle's senses, warm and fragrant. She felt that this was to be one of the most important days of her life. She loved and she was loved at last! It never entered her head that there could be any doubt of Captain O'Leary's feelings for her. He had called her, tenderly, "little moonbeam," and in one long rapturous dance it had come to them that the meaning of life was love.

She dressed in a daze of happiness, in the knowledge that presently she was to see him again. How would they meet? Where? What would the odious Darlington woman say when she knew that "the surly little thing" had captured her captain?

She took great pains with her toilet, stared at herself long in the glass. She wished she were beautiful, like Mrs. Darlington, or Max. He deserved the most radiant creature in the world! How could he care for a plain mite like herself? *Did* he?

In a sudden collapse into deep depression she sought Miss Watts and hurried her downstairs. No signs of him in the breakfast room. Later she led Miss Watts up and down every veranda, but a complete survey of the grounds brought no results.

"We ought not to exercise so violently right after

breakfast, Isabelle. Let us sit down in the shade for a little."

Isabelle agreed; it did not matter to her what they did just now, and these seats gave a view of every one who came out of the hotel.

"What shall we do to-day?" inquired Miss Watts.

"Oh—I don't know"—indifferently.

Some people were coming out now. A tall woman, a girl, and a boy. The girl stared at Isabelle and then advanced.

"Aren't you Isabelle Bryce?" she asked.

"Why, Agnes Pollock!" exclaimed Isabelle.

Introductions and explanations followed. The girls had known each other at Hill Top School. Agnes was convalescing from an appendicitis operation. She was with her mother and her brother, who greeted Isabelle cordially.

"Heard a lot about you!" said Percy Pollock, who was a beautiful blond person, slightly older than the girls.

"You were the terror at Hill Top, weren't you?"

"I didn't have much chance. I was only there one year," laughed Isabelle.

"I hope you'll wake up this dull isle," said he.

"Dull?" cried Isabelle, blushing furiously at her tone.

They all sat down together, in the aimless way of holiday makers, but Isabelle's eyes were ever on the door. Where was the man? Did he lie abed all morning? And such a morning!

"Isabelle, let's go for a walk down the beach. I've such heaps to tell you about Hill Top."

"Good idea," said Percy, promptly.

"Not you. Just Isabelle and me. We want to talk."

"I—think I won't this morning. I—I'd rather not," began Isabelle.

Then she stopped short. He, the Son of the Morning, was coming forth. She scarcely noticed that Mrs. Darlington was with him. Her face was suddenly so radiant that the others turned to look. He saw them. Now he would come to her—show them how it was between them!

But he did no such thing. He bowed, a trifle absently, and passed within a few feet of them—near enough for them to hear him say:

"Paula, ever young and ever fair!"

They also saw the ravishing look she threw him.

"What a handsome man!" exclaimed Agnes.

"Lady-killer, I bet you," jeered Percy.

"Come on, Agnes, let's go for that walk on the beach," cried Isabelle.

She started off almost before any one understood her purpose.

"Hi there! are you trailing me behind?" called Percy.

"No," said Isabelle, shortly.

Agnes hurried after her, and when they had tramped the beach for a while, they sat down in the sand. Agnes remembered that Isabelle was "queer," but there was something passionate about the way she threw herself into their reminiscences, that struck her as unnecessary. They spoke of Mrs. Benjamin, with tears on Agnes's part. She told of Mr. Benjamin's pitiful efforts to go on with the school. He had been forced to give up the

struggle, and Agnes lamented the necessity of going to a new school when she returned to New York.

"Now tell me about you," she demanded. "Why are you out of school?"

"I hated the school they sent me to last year, so this year I struck and went on the stage for a while."

"Why, Isabelle Bryce!" cried her friend, thrilled to the bone.

"But I didn't like it; it made me sick. So I, too came down here to get well."

She evaded questions on the subject of her stage career, and after some desultory talk they went back to the hotel. People were strolling to the beach for the bathing hour.

"Let's find Percy and go in," said Agnes.

Isabelle, having agreed to meet them on the beach, hurried off to change. Miss Watts went down to the sea with her; she did not wait for Agnes and Percy. She struck out for the farther raft. There was one a hundred feet from shore, and one farther out, for expert swimmers. She had just passed the former when she became aware of some one in her wake, some one coming with speed. She slowed up a little.

"What do ye mean by swimmin' off alone like this?" demanded a well-known voice. She made no answer, but she did not increase her speed. He came up beside her. "This is plain childish folly, that's what it is," he blustered.

Isabelle rolled on her back and smiled faintly at the sky.

"Ye ought to be spanked, ye little devil."

"Some people are good at calling names," she remarked to the sky.

"I'm tellin' ye it's dangerous for you to start off for that far raft alone."

"Well, I'm asking you what business it is of yours?"

"Do ye want me to stand by and see ye drown yerself?"

"It's my privilege to drown myself if I like," she replied, as she struck off for the raft again. They swam to it in silence, and she pulled her slim satin body, like a shining eel, up onto the platform. He followed.

"You're a very disturbin' young person!" he said, sternly.

She lifted her eyebrows at him, with a baby stare. He looked away with a frown.

"Where is 'Paula! ever young and ever fair'?" she inquired. "Is she displaying herself on the beach?"

He grinned.

"Not she. Paula is a very clever woman—she knows her own limitations," he replied. "Hello! here comes somebody."

It proved to be Major O'Dell, the man who had looked after Larry on shipboard. He glared at them and climbed aboard the raft.

"Larry, ye fool, what do ye mean by takin' such a swim as this on yer first day?" he demanded, hotly.

"I came to rescue this young mermaid," he answered.

"It's damfoolishness—that's what it is. I beg yer pardon, Miss—Miss——"

"Bryce" from Larry.

"This man is here convalescing, and it is folly for him to over-exert himself in any such manner," he scolded her.

"I didn't invite him to come," said she. "He forced his society on me. Now that you're here to tow him in, I'll leave him to you," she added; and with that she dived off.

"Wait a minute. Major O'Dell wants to rest," cried the Captain.

"Let him. Let him rest a month," came back the answer, as the shining head turned toward the distant shore.

"I've got to go after her, O'Dell. It isn't safe," protested Larry.

"Who appointed you her nurse?"

"Damn it! man, the child might drown."

He went overboard and started after Isabelle. O'Dell, with a far-from-pretty word, followed. In some such procession they finally arrived at the beach. Isabelle stepped forth, shook her slim black self, ran up the beach and back like a colt, and joined Miss Watts, sedate as a débutante. Captain O'Leary approached them.

"Miss Watts," said he, "it is none of my affair, of course, but if you have any authority over this young woman, you will forbid her to swim alone to the farther raft."

Isabelle grinned at him, but he frowned and walked away without another word.

Isabelle spent the rest of the day near the hotel that she might be at hand if he came out, but there were no signs of him. Percy Pollock had introduced two boys,

who urged the girls on all sorts of expeditions, but Isabelle was adamant. She could not bother with boys if there was any chance of another encounter.

Major O'Dell came out on the terrace, saw her, and strolled over.

"May I speak to you, Miss Bryce?"

She joined him and they walked over to a seat by a wall.

"I wish to apologize for being so short-tempered this morning," he began.

"Yes, you were," she replied.

"Captain O'Leary has been in bed since that junket you took him on this morning."

"I didn't take him," said she, "he came."

"He is in no condition to endure such a strain. I ask you not to let him do such a thing again."

"I'm not his mother," she burst out. "He is old enough to take care of himself and I do not intend to act as his trained nurse."

She looked—and sounded—so young that Major O'Dell laughed.

"All right. I'll tell him. You were on our boat, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"Do you travel much, Miss Bryce?"

"Oh, not much. Why?"

"Have you ever been in the Far East?"

She glanced at him quickly. He was twisting the ends of his little moustache and gazing off to sea. Heavens! was this the man? She had almost forgotten the

Chinese coat in the emotions which had swept her since landing.

"The Far East?" she managed to repeat with a semblance of indifference.

"Yes, the Philippines, Japan, or China."

"No, I've never been there."

"Um. You should go. Full of treasures, jewels, embroideries, brocades—all the things that women like"—he continued, looking directly at her.

"So?" queried Isabelle, obviously bored.

"I'm afraid I am keeping you from your friends. So I'm to look elsewhere for a nurse for Captain O'Leary?"

"Why don't you try Mrs. Darlington?" she inquired. Then with a nod, she went back to her playmates.

An hour or so later a group of people, Mrs. Darlington among them, took a near-by table for tea. Major O'Dell and Captain O'Leary, the latter looking very white, came out and joined them. They did not look in her direction until she heard Mrs. Darlington remark:

"Larry, just see what a collection of little boys your ugly duckling has made."

At this they all looked. Isabelle glanced at her little boys, and said something that made them shout with laughter. But it was not so loud but that the wind carried her his reply:

"She's not *my* ugly duckling. She's a wicked little leprechaun, born under a mushroom, on a black night, but she swims like a fish, and dances like a pixie. I tell ye she's not human at all at all!"

She heard their laughter, and her eyes smarted. What

a fool he had made of her! How she despised herself. There was only one way to square it, to get back her self-respect. She would find out what a leprechaun meant, and she would bedevil the honourable Captain O'Leary, like the pixie that he named her!

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

BRIGHT-coloured days followed, like beads slipping along a thread. Isabelle did not formulate any plan of bedevilment for the Captain, but she watched for opportunities with lynx-eyed attention.

She and Agnes were very intimate, and while Isabelle was not given to confidences, she allowed her friend to see that there was something between her and the handsome O'Leary—a sort of flirtatious feud. Agnes adored him from afar, and envied the other girl her power to attract him. She did not understand just what Isabelle wanted of him, but she stood ready to help her get it.

Early in their friendship Agnes had fired Isabelle with a new zeal. She told her about the wonderful patriotic work to be done by writing letters to soldiers, who had no relatives, and to keep them cheered up. She, Agnes, had become *marraine* to half a dozen Frenchmen; she considered them more exciting than plain English "Tommies" or American "Sammies." Besides, it was good practice for your French. You made them presents, sent cigarettes and candy, and they sent you back the most thrilling letters.

Agnes displayed some of hers, in confidence, and at once Isabelle felt the call of duty to rescue a French

soldier. She could not wait to go through with the formality of applying to the organization in charge of this work, for names of the letter-needy; instead, she borrowed two from Agnes. She chose the two who wrote the most picturesque letters and "adopted" them at once.

Together they worked out her first letters, telling the gentlemen in question of the transfer of god-mothers. After much consideration she adopted the tone of maternal concern for their comfort and welfare, with a cheerful optimism intended to be elderly.

"Jean" and "Edouard" were told of life in Bermuda; pictures (cut from society weeklies) of the island and the people there were enclosed for their entertainment. Cigarettes and candy were promised at once and the letters despatched with much excitement.

The other patriotic offering which grew out of this beginning was the preparation of gift boxes for the soldiers. Not knitted things, but things intended to amuse them. The girls searched every gift shop and delighted in the discovery of some new trinket for "their sons."

In the meantime an earnest contest for Isabelle's favour was going on between Percy and one of his friends, Jack Porter. She accepted their attentions indifferently, played with them when it was convenient, and disposed of them cruelly when it was not. She loved to dance and, as they both danced well, they were useful after dinner; unless, of course, Captain O'Leary danced with her more than once, which sometimes happened.

Major O'Dell had shown signs of appreciating her talents since her brief encounter with him on the raft

and later. She decided to cultivate him, and—eventually—to ask him for her Chinese coat.

Major O'Dell asked her to take tea with him one day. Mrs. Darlington, and a Miss Devoe, who made eyes at O'Leary, were also his guests. The Captain, and the fat little man, named Monty Haven, who had been on the ship, were there.

"I've captured a charming recruit," said the host as he presented Isabelle.

"I didn't know that you could be captured, Miss Bryce," said Mrs. Darlington, insolently.

"It takes the military!" retorted Isabelle.

"That's right. Plain civilians haven't a chance with you girls any more, have we?" Haven asked Isabelle.

"Not much," she agreed.

"What could a nice fellow like me do to get into the running, Miss Bryce?"

"Why don't you train down?" she answered, literally.

"Oh, Miss Bryce! you're stepping on Haven's toes," laughed Captain O'Leary.

"Am I?" she said, peering under the table.

"The dear, ingenuous little thing," said Mrs. Darlington, tartly.

She turned and deliberately engaged the men next her in an aside. She had no intention of letting this impertinent miss occupy the entire attention during tea.

Captain O'Leary turned to the protection of Isabelle.

"Haven't seen much of you lately," he began.

"No?"

"I see you are always followed by a retinue of boys. No chance for an old fellow like me."

"The young ones *are* more diverting."

"Who is the blond Adonis, me chief rival?"

"You refer to Percy?"

"Percy? Am I to be cut out by a youth named Percy?" he cried.

"You are—if you don't look out."

"Never! What can I do to reinstate myself?"

"You can't expect me to think up ways."

"What does Percy do?"

"Ask him."

"Give me two dances to-night, and take a walk with me in the morning," he demanded.

"I make no promises. You will have to take your chances"—airily.

Miss Devoe, on O'Leary's other side, said audibly:

"Giver her a spoon to play with, Larry, and pay some attention to me."

Isabelle leaned across to her.

"I'm using him now," she said.

"Do you know what Captain O'Leary calls you?" retorted Miss Devoe.

"No"—with great interest.

"A leprechaun."

"It *sounds* naughty," said Isabelle, turning reproachful eyes upon him; "is it?"

"Very," he admitted.

"That is just his pet name for me. What does he call you?" she inquired of Miss Devoe.

Miss Devoe ignored the rejoinder, by whispering to Larry. Isabelle turned to Major O'Dell.

"You'd better talk to me about something. I don't seem to be a popular favourite."

"Yours is the unforgivable sin."

"What?"

"Youth."

"But they are much prettier than I am, every one of them."

"I'll take your eyes and your tongue, thanks," he laughed. "Let's take a look at the sunset."

They rose.

"Where are ye going, you two?" inquired O'Leary.

"Sunsetting," replied Isabelle.

Then, turning to the ladies, she made a curtsy.

"Good afternoon," said she.

"Lord, that was wonderful!" exclaimed the Major.

"What?"—innocently.

"You know what, ye clever little rascal."

Captain O'Leary got only one of his dances that night, but he announced his intention of taking her to walk on the beach at ten the following morning. When, at that hour, he presented himself to Miss Watts, she looked distressed—thought Isabelle must have misunderstood, for she had gone off to walk with Percy Pollock.

The Captain thanked her and set off in pursuit. He was annoyed at himself for being annoyed with this chit of a girl. But she should not play tricks with him!

In due course of time he spied them ahead of him. He increased his speed and caught up.

"Good morning," he said, briefly.

"Oh, good morning, Captain O'Leary," said she.

"Miss Watts gave me your message."

"Message?"

"That you would meet me here. By the way, Pollock, your mother asked me to say that something important came for ye in the morning mails. She wants ye at once."

With a firm and masterly hand he detached Percy and sent him off. Then he turned to Isabelle.

"Ye can play tricks on Percy and your other youngsters, but not on me."

"I haven't the slightest interest in playing tricks on you," she answered. She sat down, opened a parasol, and planted it in the sand. He threw himself down beside her.

"You are a very interesting little girl," he remarked, "but you have a great deal to learn."

"Teach me!" she exclaimed, with such ingenuous enthusiasm that he was at a loss to know whether she was making fun of him or not.

"I will. First, you mustn't be so prickly."

"It's the only way to protect yourself."

"Against what?"

"People."

"Ye start on the basis that people are your enemies?"

"I think they are."

"Look here, tell me about yourself. What shall I call you? Do I have to say 'Miss Bryce'?"

"My name is Isabelle."



*"Ye're a comfortable cricket, when ye want to be. I'd like to capture ye,
to sing on my hearth!"*

"Doesn't suit ye. Have ye no pet name?"

"Somebody I liked once called me 'the cricket'."

"That's it—Cricket—may I call ye that?"

"Yes."

"Now, Cricket, tell me all about yourself."

She looked at him intently for a moment. He lay stretched out on the sand, his elbow crooked to support his head. He looked frankly back at her.

"Go on, as friend to friend," he urged.

And she did. She did not touch it up a bit. She made him see her life, her people, the Benjamins, her experience at Miss Vantine's—all—through the eyes of her youth, her wistful youth. She told him about Martin Christiansen; she even confessed the fearful catastrophe with Cartel; and she did not mind when he rolled on his back and sent gusts of laughter up to the clouds.

"O ye delicious, crickety Cricket!" he groaned. "Go on."

"There isn't any 'on'. That's up to now. Tell me about you."

And he did. He told her about his people, his young life near Dub'in. How he went to an English University, how he enlisted in the war. He told her about his life in the trenches, about his wounds, about his decoration. He talked as he had talked to no one else about the whole experience of war.

She sat tense and still, concentrated on his every word. When he had finished, they sat in silence for several seconds.

"And that's up to now, for me."

"You've got to go back?—there?"

"When I'm well again."

Her tell-tale face registered her distress. He laid his hand over her little brown one.

"Not for a while. I shall often think of this place and this day," he said, gazing off over the sea. "Ye're a comfortable cricket, when ye want to be. I'd like to capture ye, to sing on my hearth!"

She sprang up.

"Well, I'm not ready to settle yet, so your hearth must go bare."

"Like Mother Hubbard's cupboard! Where are ye hoppin' off to?"

"Hotel, for lunch."

"Is it time?"

She nodded. He fell in step beside her

"Ye haven't missed Percy?"

"I wonder what Percy's mother wanted with him," she evaded.

"So does Percy's mother," he retorted.

She looked up at him.

"You didn't——?"

"I did, Cricket; I jumped a longer jump than you did," he boasted.

"Why, you old grasshopper!" she exploded.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

MISS WATTS found Isabelle more reasonable, more amenable than ever before in their association, and as she had made some pleasant acquaintances, she was thoroughly enjoying herself. She hoped their stay would be long. In her reports to the Bryces she conscientiously mentioned Isabelle's good behaviour and her improvement in health.

She watched the career of her charge with interest and some concern. She saw with surprise that the girl had hit upon the only possible way of intriguing the interest of a spoiled darling like Captain O'Leary. She flitted like a will-o'-the-wisp before him.

Larry thought that their talk on the beach had established a new relation, but he soon found that he could not rely on it. When she was particularly annoying he reminded her how sweet she had been that day, but all she could recall of it was that he had cut Percy out! If he ignored her completely, suddenly she was like a soft little rabbit in his hands, all heart-beat. She puzzled and annoyed him.

These were busy days for Isabelle. Percy and Jack were always under foot. They furnished comic relief when her military intrigue threatened to become serious. Then her "god-son," Jean Jacques Petard, who was wounded

and in a hospital, replied to her maternal solicitude with prolonged and passionate devotion. Isabelle shared the treasure with Agnes, who protested that none of her godsons wrote to her like that; and she asked to have Jean back. Isabelle stoutly refused. A gift was a gift. Agnes had given her Jean and she intended to keep him.

"But you took my two best ones."

"You gave me my choice, didn't you?"

"Yes, and I was a silly to do it. I might have known you'd take the best ones"—hotly.

"But you had letters from him. You say yourself he never wrote to you like that. It's *me* he's writing to, not you."

"Well, of all the conceited things!" cried Agnes.

"I'm glad I am. I'll give you Edouard back, if you're going to make such a row."

"I don't want him."

"All right, that settles it. It wouldn't be fair to Jean to give him back to you."

"Fair! Lots you care about fair."

"Do you think it's fair to pass a soldier of France—one of our allies—back and forth between mothers, like a bean-bag?"

"I have nothing more to say. I have found you out, Isabelle Bryce. I give to you generously, and you prove a false friend."

Agnes walked away with her face flushed and her head high. It was too bad to be treated like this when you were doing your patriotic duty. She brooded on the

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matter for several days, avoiding her false friend, and then an idea of revenge took possession of her.

Chance played into her hands at the moment, by putting into her lap a copy of a fashionable magazine. It had two pages of pictures of the idlers at Bermuda. An enlarged snapshot of Isabelle coming out of the sea, was featured with a brief biographic sketch of her meteoric career as actress, of her family, and her wealth. Agnes cut this out, enclosing it with an anonymous letter to Petard. She told of the miserable trick played upon him. Isabelle was only seventeen and a half, and in no way fit to be a god-mother to him. She was infatuated with him, and pretended to be old, so she would have an excuse to write him.

This malicious mischief mailed and headed for France, Agnes felt better, and awaited results. She would make up with Isabelle in time to hear what Jean Jacques Petard would say now. She hoped he would denounce her as a traitor!

So far as Isabelle was concerned, Agnes and her injured feelings were of no moment. It was a trifle awkward when Percy and Jack arranged a foursome, but by strict formality of intercourse, they managed the situation. The boys were soon aware of it, and found much amusement in urging the combatants to battle. Percy tried to pump Agnes as to the cause of the rupture, but nothing could unseal her lips on the secret. She could imagine what those boys would do if they knew the truth. So poor Agnes suffered in silence, nursed her secret triumph, and staged the moment of Isabelle's downfall.

Major O'Dell, whom by this time Isabelle counted a friend, approached one day as she dallied with her two admirers.

"I impersonate Mercury, bearing an invitation," he said.

"I'll do anything with you, Major O'Dell, but I don't want to play with your crowd."

"Why not?"

"I don't like the women. They pick on me."

"Larry and I will protect you."

"Humph!"

"I have the permission of the amiable Miss Watts. It is all arranged."

"What is it?"

"Monty Haven's yacht is at anchor and he wants you to come for a sail and lunch aboard."

"Sorry. I'm engaged to-day with Percy."

"May I add that a certain gentleman, not at the moment in your good graces, entreats you to come?"

"Sorry. You wouldn't let me off, would you, Percy?"

"No"—firmly.

"Alas! This is final?" asked the Major.

"Convey my thanks to Mr. Haven, please, dear Major O'Dell, and mention——"

"Percy'," he interrupted with a smile, and left.

"What did you put it on me for?" complained Percy.

"Come down on the beach and watch them go," ordered Isabelle, leading the way.

They sat them down and watched preparations on the

yacht. A motor boat came ashore and carried off the guests.

"Now aren't you sorry?" said Percy.

"Nope."

The motor boat presently put off again—in their direction. It came as near shore as it dared, and stopped. Captain O'Leary stepped overboard into the shallow water, and advanced upon the puzzled three. He bowed, leaned over, picked up Miss Isabelle Bryce in his arms, and marched into the sea and toward the boat.

"Hi there! what are you doing?" cried Percy.

"Come and get me, you big idiots!" called Isabelle over O'Leary's shoulder.

The two boys plunged in. O'Leary laughed and ran. He set her in the boat, jumped in himself, and they were off, leaving the two swains hip deep and helpless.

Isabelle turned smouldering eyes on the Captain.

"Cricket, my dear," said he, "I feel that there is an excess of Percy!"

She blazed in silent fury.

"Cricket, don't be cross. It was only a joke to tease your beaux. They were funny, standin' there in their neat white flannels, weren't they now?"

No answer.

They were received with a shout of delight from the boat. Haven met them at the rail and greeted Isabelle.

"Larry, you win!" he shouted, and they all shook hands with the Captain and beat him on the back.

"Win?" inquired Isabelle.

"Major O'Dell bet Larry that he couldn't get you aboard and Larry took him."

"Major O'Dell, that wasn't fair," cried Isabelle.

They all stared at him, and she added with a chuckle:

"It happened just as we planned it, didn't it?"

"Did you put something up on me, O'Dell?" cried Larry. "Ye cheat—ye old pirate!"

He fell upon him, and a rough-and-tumble inaugurated the party. When O'Dell found a chance he joined Isabelle.

"You little witch!" he said. "Ye certainly made a booby of ole Larry. But don't you be coming between me and my best friend."

"I won't if he keeps out of my way," she blazed, "but I'm mad!"

"'Twas only a joke. We wanted ye to come. For my sake, be nice and funny, an' like yourself."

"All right," she answered amiably. "But you owe me something, if I am."

"Name it, and it's yours."

"It's mine already. I want my Chinese coat back."

He stared at her for a full second.

"It is yours, then?"

"Yes."

"I told him it was——"

"Told him?"

"It wasn't my room ye left it in."

"No? How did you know, then?"—in alarm.

"The man who found it asked every woman aboard

and never thought of you, because—well—you're such a baby," he added, staring.

"What's that got to do with it? I went out in the corridor to get some air, and I went in the wrong door, by mistake. I took off my coat, and started to climb up to my berth, when the boat joggled, and I put my hand on a *moustache*! I was so scared that I ran off without my coat."

The Major began to laugh.

"What's the joke?" inquired Larry, joining them.

"It's a secret between Major O'Dell and me. On your sacred honour, Major, you won't tell," said Isabelle.

"On my sacred honour."

"Go away, O'Dell, and let me make my peace with the Cricket."

"Major O'Dell, you will stay, if you please."

True to her promise to O'Dell, she played up and kept them all amused, but she never so much as looked at Larry. Thoroughly annoyed, he devoted himself conspicuously to Mrs. Darlington and Miss Devoe. But he might have been in China for all the impression his flirtation made on Isabelle. They landed late in the afternoon, with the Bryce-O'Leary feud still on.

Isabelle told the story of her capture to Miss Watts, but with that lady's perverted English sense of humour, she thought O'Leary's prank was funny. Sue knew that she ought to disapprove of it, but she only laughed.

Isabelle went off to read a letter which she found awaiting her, from her god-son Jean. It proved rather a surprise. She read it twice. It was undeniably a love-letter. In

it he told her—that he adored her in a great many ways and a great many times. He had known all along that she was not old, and now that he saw how young she was, how lovely . . . it went on and on. He wished to address her father at once, and ask her hand in marriage. He enclosed a photograph of himself; he was quite good looking. It was a thrilling letter, but it took her breath away. How could he know she was young and lovely?

She answered it instantly, tearing up many sheets of paper in the process. She assured him that he was mistaken, that she was too old to think of marriage, even if she loved him—which she could not say she did, because she didn't know him. Her father was long since dead, so he could not address him, etc., etc. In short, unless he could think of her as his devoted *marraine* they must end the correspondence, there and then.

She despatched it at once, with a resolve to handle "her son Jean" with more restraint in the future. Needless to say she did not mention the letter to Agnes, whose overtures to peace she had finally accepted.

Life went on its interesting way. Captain O'Leary made his peace with her, too, and lost it again. Major O'Dell acted as intermediary in their battles. He was delightful, in this capacity, but he would not tell any more about the coat. He said he would see that it was returned to her, but that it might take some time.

The next letter from Jean Jacques Petard was a flaming torch of passion. She might as well drop her disguise. He knew her for her true self. He loved her madly;

he read her love, in the cold lines she forced her pen to write. One word of love from her and he would come. He was on convalescent leave and at her service.

She was really alarmed now. Nothing but the impossibility of getting a cable sent kept her from that extravagance. She wrote him at length. It was all a mistake. She admitted that she was young. She told him that she did not love him, and that—deeply grateful though she was for his beautiful devotion—she felt that this must be her last communication to him. She added, in the hope of putting an end to his letters, that she was about to leave Bermuda. With a sigh of relief she posted this dismissal, and at that moment she ceased to be *marraine* to Jean and Edouard. It was too bad that duty should carry so amiss!

Two weeks later, with no explanation or excuse, a cable came from Wally to Miss Watts:

"Come home by next boat."

It was a blow to them both, they were having such a good time. But it was "theirs not to question why"—so they packed hastily, to catch the steamer leaving on the morrow.

It happened that hostilities were on at the moment, between Isabelle and the Captain. She did not want to leave him without a farewell, nor did she want to make overtures toward peace. He was off on Haven's yacht when the news of the approaching sudden departure spread about. It happened that on his return no one spoke to him about it. Isabelle saw him after dinner on the terrace. He lit a cigarette and strolled off alone toward

the gardens. She followed him. He wandered into a sort of kiosk, where the view was fine, and she darted in after him, and straight into his arms.

"Good-bye," she said, "good-bye. I hope it isn't for ever."

He held her to him in complete surprise, and laid his cheek upon her hair.

"Cricket," he said softly, "little old crickety-Cricket! Good-bye for what?"

She started back and looked up at him.

"You! You!" she cried. "Oh! But I thought you were——"

"Not Percy!" he exploded.

But she ran away fast, through the garden, and he heard her laughter.

This was the memory that Isabelle carried with her on the way home. It was sweet and warm. She was content with it for a while.

Wally met them at the pier. It was plain that he was excited. After hasty greetings, he turned to his daughter.

"Who in thunder is this Frenchman you're engaged to?"

"What?" she demanded, startled.

"Jean Jacques Petard visits me; Jean Jacques Petard patrols our house; Jean Jacques Petard shadows your mother——"

"But I—but he isn't——"

"None of your tricks!" ordered Wally. "What we want to know is who is this Jean Jacques Petard, who demands your hand in marriage?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

ON THE way home from the pier Isabelle demanded explanations about the Frenchman, but Wally refused to talk.

"Your mother has something to say on the subject. Wait until we get home."

She and Miss Watts were summoned before the bar of judgment as soon as they reached the house. Max met them in the library and after a perfunctory greeting opened fire.

"Miss Watts, what does this mean?"

"I am sorry, Mrs. Bryce, but I must ask you to be more explicit."

"Explicit? I send my daughter away in your charge and you bring her back engaged to some unknown poilu. Then you ask me to be explicit!"

"But I know nothing of this affair, Mrs. Bryce. It is as much a surprise to me as it is to you."

Mrs. Bryce turned an exasperated look to the girl.

"It's true," said Isabelle, "she doesn't know anything about it."

"But how could you get engaged to him without her knowing it? She could see him around, couldn't she?"

"But he wasn't around. We met no Frenchman in Bermuda," protested Miss Watts, utterly at sea.

"Will you kindly explain this mystery?" inquired Mrs. Bryce, hotly.

"Yes, if you'll keep your temper and let me. In the first place, I'm not engaged to him."

"He says you are practically engaged and that you love him," contributed Wally.

"But I've never seen him."

"What?"—in chorus from both parents.

"It's true."

"You'd better have a look at him," said Wally, going to the window.

Isabelle followed him hastily. A man in French uniform gazed up at the windows.

"Is that Jean Jacques?" inquired Isabelle with interest.

"He isn't bad looking, is he?"

"He patrols the block day and night. But get ahead with the plot. What hold has he got on you?"

"None," said she, promptly. "I merely adopted him as my son."

"Are you crazy?" inquired her mother.

Even Miss Watts looked alarmed.

"No, I'm a patriot. Down at Bermuda I met a girl I knew at school, Agnes Pollock. She told me about being patriotic, and how she wrote cheerful letters to soldiers in the trenches. So I borrowed two from her, Jean and Edouard. I wrote them nice motherly letters, about keeping their feet dry——"

Wally burst into laughter, but Mrs. Bryce hushed him with a violent gesture.

"They called me '*Ma chère marraine*,' and wrote long

letters back. It was splendid practice for my French," she added.

"But this man wouldn't be wanting to marry his '*chère marraine*,'" challenged Mrs. Bryce.

"No. He wrote rather warm letters from the first, but Agnes and I decided that he had a warm, appreciative nature."

"Little fools! Then what?"

"I wrote a very cooling letter, but it didn't work. He was worse than ever; he said he knew I was beautiful and young; that he loved me madly—wanted to ask Wally for my hand in marriage, and a lot of stuff like that."

"And you accepted him?—this man you've never seen?"

"Of course I didn't accept him. I told him that I was old; that I didn't love him; that Wally was dead, so he couldn't address him; and that that was my last letter."

Again Wally laughed.

"But Isabelle, why didn't you tell me something of all this?" begged Miss Watts.

"Why should I boast of doing my bit?"

"Rubbish!" exploded her mother. "You've got yourself into a nice scrape. How do we know what she said in these letters?" she asked Wally.

"But I've told you what I said."

"You didn't keep copies of them, did you?" asked Wally.

"No, of course not."

"Have you got his letters?" from her mother.

"Yes, in my trunk."

"There's nothing to be done until we see them," said Mrs. Bryce, impatiently.

"They are private letters, and I must say . . ." began Isabelle, hotly.

"You be quiet," ordered her mother, angrily. "I can't see that you were much use, Miss Watts."

"Mrs. Bryce, I had no idea that this was going on. I knew she wrote letters, but I supposed they were to you or to school friends. I did not feel it necessary to censor her mail."

"You ought to know her well enough by now to know that when she seems to be behaving she is doing her worst."

Mrs. Bryce summoned a maid and ordered Isabelle's trunk to be reported the moment it arrived. While they waited Mrs. Bryce interrogated Miss Watts as to whom Isabelle had met in Bermuda. Isabelle was at the window, gazing from behind the curtain at her admirer, but she noticed that Captain O'Leary's name was merely mentioned in a list of the English officers they had met.

"Look here, Isabelle, how about Edouard?" whispered Wally, at her elbow. "Does he think he is engaged to you, too?"

She felt the laugh behind his words, so she answered gravely:

"No, Wally, Edouard was a dutiful son."

He chuckled. Max turned at the sound.

"Don't encourage her, Wally."

"I can't. It's too late."

"Don't worry. I disinherited them both," Isabelle assured him.

"Did she have any violent love affairs?" inquired Mrs. Bryce.

"There were two very devoted young men, Percy Pollock and Jack Porter. But I thought Isabelle handled them very well," replied Miss Watts.

"Are you engaged to them?" whispered Wally again.

"Wally, I'm not engaged to anybody," answered his child.

The maid announced the trunks and Isabelle went in search of her treasures. When she returned she carried in each hand a bundle of letters tied with ribbons.

"Son Jean's," she said, offering one bundle to Max.

"We need not go over Son Edouard's."

Mrs. Bryce began to read. As she finished a page, she handed it to Wally, and he in turn passed it to Miss Watts. The two women read solemnly, but Wally laughed occasionally. Isabelle sat by, now and then taking a peek at the author of this new trouble.

"Well!" remarked Mrs. Bryce when the last tender words had been read.

"Going some, Isabelle!" added Wally.

"We'll have him in," said Max.

"Oh, no; now, I wouldn't do that."

"I would. Matthews will go across the street and tell him to come."

"For Heaven's sake, Max, what are you going to do?"

"Get her letters back, of course."

"Isabelle, you and Miss Watts go somewhere else and wait," Wally urged, as his wife gave the butler instructions.

"No. I shall stay here."

"You'll do no such thing. You've done your part, now you leave the rest of it to us," ordered her mother.

"It is my hand he is asking for; those are my letters, and this is my affair. I shall stay right here and see it through," Isabelle asserted with firm determination.

Max saw that, except by force, there was no way to eject her, and it was too late for that, as Matthews was approaching with the Frenchman.

The hero entered with a ceremonious bow. He was good-looking in a dare-devil way, with a somewhat dissipated face. His eyes went from one to another until they came to Isabelle.

"*Ah! mon adree, c'est toi!*" he cried, and before any one could stop him, he seized her hands and covered them with kisses.

"None of that!" shouted Wally, jerking Isabelle away.

Max took command. She spoke, curtly, in French.

"Monsieur Petard, we have read your letters to our daughter, and heard her story of her correspondence with you. She is, as you see, a mere child. I appeal to you as a soldier and a gentleman, to return her letters to us, and to close this painful incident."

He turned to the girl.

"I ask you one question. Do you love me?"

"Why, no," she said, simply, "I told you I didn't."

"I did not believe. Your friend, the Mademoiselle Pollock, she say you are infatuate wiz me; she send ze picture; she tell me you are crazy about me."

"Agnes Pollock? Why, the dirty little liar!" cried Isabelle.

"My daughter is a schoolgirl, she knows nothing about love. Will you or will you not, give us those letters?"

He considered a second.

"I have come all ze way to zese countree, because of ze lettaires of your schoolgirl!"

"That does not interest us"—firmly.

"No-o? It ees an expenseef voyage."

Max looked at Wally.

"Now, we're getting to the point," she said. "How much do you want for those letters?"

"Oh, Madame, you——"

"Hurry up! What is your price?"

"Ver' good. I say five sousand dollaires."

"Nonsense! I'll give you \$1,000."

"But I cannot accept zese."

"That or nothing."

"I have already an offaire of five sousand dollaires."

"From whom?"

"Ze editor of what you call *Chit-Chat*."

"So, you threaten us, do you?"

"I would not say zat. I geef you a chance Madame, to regain ze indiscretions of ze schoolgirl daughter. But five sousand dollaires is five sousand dollaires."

"What is your address?"

He gave it.

"Our lawyer will call on you at ten in the morning at this hotel, with our offer. Good morning."

He bowed.

"Five sousand dollaires is my price, Madame."

Wally started to speak, but she stopped him.

"You will hear from us to-morrow," she said.

He bowed again, most formally.

"*Ma petite marraine*, vous êtes très charmante," he sighed as he left.

"Why didn't you give him what he asked? We don't want the thing hashed up in *Chit-Chat*," objected Wally.

"You are going right now to the editor of *Chit-Chat* and make a bargain with him. Get your lawyer, Clifford, on the 'phone and have him meet us there."

"You needn't come, Max. It may be nasty."

"I'll come," said she.

Mrs. Bryce went hastily out of the room, without a look at Isabelle. Miss Watts followed her.

"Well, Isabelle?"

"Wally; I'm sorry!" she said, earnestly.

He looked at her speculatively.

"It may cost a pretty penny to get rid of him. Are you sure Edouard knows that he is disinherited?"

"I hope so," she said, solemnly. "Wally, it does discourage you with being patriotic, or having children or anything!"

"Wally, are you coming?" called Mrs. Bryce, sharply.

He hurried away, trying his best to cover a smile with a befitting dignity.

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE negotiations between Monsieur Petard, the editor of *Chit-Chat*, and the Bryces were neither so brief nor so simple as Mrs. Bryce had supposed that they would be. She did not have to be told that, after the notoriety of the Cartel incident, the name of Isabelle Bryce was one for editors to conjure with. This wily editor, who made his living by scandal, obligingly outlined the advertising campaign he would follow, to lead up to the publication of the letters.

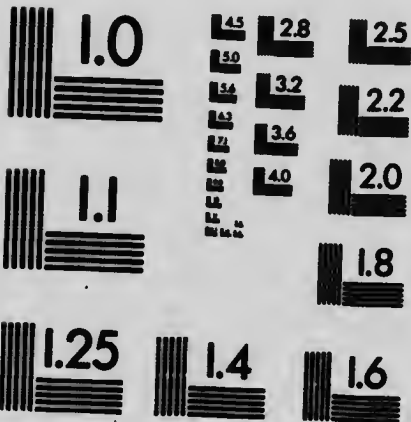
Anxious as Mrs. Bryce was to have the scandal suppressed, she was unwilling that Wally should pay the price which these rascals demanded. So lengthy and irritating meetings followed—discussion and bargaining. Wally insisted upon paying anything they asked, and putting a period to the affair. But Mrs. Bryce was upheld by Clifford, in the idea that they would beat them down to a much lower figure, if they persisted.

During this period Max was so furious at both Isabelle and Miss Watts that it seemed wise for them to keep out of her way. They were like two conspirators slipping in and out of the house. But the most annoying detail was the espionage of Jean Jacques Petard. They soon discovered that he lay in wait for them, near the house, and on all occasions save when he was closeted



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with Bryce *père et mère*, he was at the heels of Bryce *fillo*.

He made Miss Watts so nervous that she could hardly be induced to go out. Isabelle was all for having a talk with the man, and speaking her mind, but Miss Watts prevented this. She repeatedly said that she must tell Mr. Bryce of his behaviour, but Isabelle begged her not to do that as it would only result in their being ordered to stay indoors. After-all, he did not speak to them, his presence could not hurt them. Let him follow!

These were the most difficult days Isabelle had ever known. Usually, before, she had rescued herself with a high hand, from her escapades. But this thing had descended upon her head, like an avalanche, and for once, she saw no way of extricating herself.

Then, too, she was so homesick for Bermuda that she could scarcely bear the thought of it. The long, happy days, with Percy and Jack at heel, and Captain Larry O'Leary somewhere on the horizon, they haunted her. It was ten whole days since they left them, and not a word from any of them. To come from that paradise into this prison—from that atmosphere of devotion to this one of reproach—from that freedom—to this—tagged by the horrid little Frenchman!

The strain was telling upon poor Miss Watts, too. She was thinner than ever, and she looked haunted. Isabelle begged her to leave her, but she always replied: "My dear, we will face this together."

But in her innermost heart Miss Watts lamented that Isabelle had not tried harder to interest Captain O'Leary.

He was the right man for her, she knew it; and they certainly did need a man on their side. Wally might be there in spirit, but Mrs. Bryce did not allow him to express it.

The twelfth day since their return was a dark one for everybody. Max and Wally had to meet the enemy at eleven, in the lawyer's office. The air was electric with Mrs. Bryce's irritability. She left the two culprits in a state of collapse.

"One more performance like that, and I shall marry Jean Jacques Petard, and disappear," announced Isabelle, violently, as the door closed on them.

"Isabelle, don't talk like that," begged Miss Watts.

"Let's go back to Bermuda; I hate it here!" said the girl, going to the window. "We've got to get out of this hateful house. The spy will be busy this morning, so we'd better make the best of it."

A motor drew up to the curb and a man got out, looking up at the numbers.

"O my Lord!" cried Isabelle, as if it were a prayer. She ran out of the room and down the hall, with Miss Watts, startled into action, hurrying after her. Before the bell sounded, Isabelle had the door open. Captain O'Leary looked, first surprised and then delighted.

"Cricket!" said he.

"Larry—Larry!" she cried.

He took both her hands and beamed on her—beamed. Then suddenly he was aware of Miss Watts, and he surprised everybody, including himself, by saluting that lady's cheek.

"Captain O'Leary!" she exclaimed, and kissed him back. They all went into the living room, talking in chorus—asking questions, answering them—incoherent and excited.

"Larry, when did you come?"

"Just landed. Where are your parents?"

"They're out. Oh, I'm in an awful lot of trouble with them."

"Why didn't ye tell me ye were leavin' down there?"

"I thought you knew. We left on a cable from Wally to hurry home. I told everybody."

"I didn't know. What's this trouble ye speak of?"

"I oughtn't to begin the moment you come."

"Yes, ye ought. Let's hear."

Miss Watts gave a deep sigh of relief. Isabelle began the story of her patriotism. Here and there Larry asked a question, and when the climax was reached, he leaned back and roared. Isabelle's eyes suddenly misted with tears.

"Oh, but Larry, it isn't funny, it's awful! He's trying to make Wally pay a lot of money for my letters, and if Wally doesn't pay up, he is going to sell them to a nasty society sheet called *Chit-Chat*."

His face was grave enough to suit her now.

"Where is the little whelp?"

"He's usually across the street looking at the house, or following me around," she began.

"Ye mean to say he follows ye?"

"You may think I'm to blame, Captain O'Leary, for not telling Mr. Bryce of this, but Isabelle thought it would mean that her parents would keep her indoors. She is

dreadfully in disgrace with her parents," Miss Watts said.

"Poor little crickety-Cricket," he murmured.

"You don't blame me, do you, Larry? I know it was silly, but I just wanted to be a patriot, and to practise my French."

"Sure I don't blame ye, ye blessed baby," he laughed.

She choked a little; it was so good to be championed.

"Mr. and Mrs. Bryce have gone for a conference with these men this morning, and we all hope they may settle it," sighed Miss Watts.

"Where is this conference?"

"At Wally's lawyer's office," said Isabelle.

"Get your hat, Cricket; we'll go say a word or two at this conference."

She looked at him inquiringly, and went for her wraps without a word.

"Oh, Captain O'Leary, we have needed you so!" exclaimed Miss Watts.

"Woman, woman, why didn't ye cable me? As it is I took the first boat."

"I know you and Isabelle want to be alone, but I'm so in disgrace now, with Mrs. Bryce, that I dare not let her go with you, unless I go."

He frowned, then smiled.

"Of course, get your bonnet. Isabelle and I will have enough time later, to catch up on our affairs."

So all three of them got into the Captain's taxi, and hurried to the address which Isabelle gave the driver.

There was some little difficulty in Mr. Clifford's outer office, but Captain O'Leary simplified it, by lifting the

office boy out of the way, bodily, opening the door and marching in, followed by the two women.

Startled glances were lifted to this tall officer, strange to them all, who strode in, unannounced. The lawyer rose angrily.

"How did you get in?" he demanded.

"Walked. Present me to the Bryces, Miss Watts," he replied.

Miss Watts in a trembling voice said:

"Mrs. Bryce, this is Captain O'Leary, a friend of Isabelle's and mine from Bermuda."

Mrs. Bryce stared—too astonished to speak. The tall young man bowed.

"This is my father," said Isabelle. The two men shook hands.

"I object to this man's coming in here," began the editor of *Chit-Chat*.

Captain O'Leary fixed him with a stormy eye.

"We'll hear your objections later. I know all about this rotten deal. Is this Jean Jacques Petard?"

"This is none of your business," began Clifford, but he never finished it. With one long arm Captain O'Leary reached for Monsieur Petard, lifted the gentleman by the seat of his trousers and his collar, bore him toward the door. Isabelle opened it for him.

"Don't kill him," she said, as he went out.

Wally and Clifford rushed after him. Isabelle followed and Miss Watts got as far as the door. Max and the editor sat still, but sounds came to them from the outer hall.

It was about ten minutes later that O'Leary strode into the room again, with heightened colour but otherwise undisturbed.

"We'll hear no more of Mr. Petard, I think. Now sir, it is your turn."

The editor defended himself with a chair.

"What business is this, of yours?" he yelled.

"Miss Bryce is going to do me the honour of marrying me, and you'll jolly well see how much it is my business. Put down that chair, it is words for you, not blows. Mr. Bryce, if the ladies will leave us, we can settle shortly with this gentleman."

Max and Miss Watts lost no time in obeying the hint.

"Close the door, Isabelle, please," he said to her.

"Who is this man?" demanded Mrs. Bryce.

"Don't talk! If that creature hurts him," said Isabelle, her ear at the door.

There were sounds of angry voices inside, loud argument. Then silence. After what seemed a long time, Larry opened the door.

"Come in, now, please."

They filed in. The editor was huddled in his chair. He was pretty much to pieces, nervously. Larry held up a package of letters.

"Mrs. Bryce, the letters are in my possession. May I keep them, for the present, Isabelle?"

She nodded.

"This gentleman has just signed a paper, drawn up by Mr. Bryce and me, signed by Mr. Clifford. This will be

held by Mr. Clifford, in case of need. That ends this conference, I believe," he said affably.

The editor left hastily. Mr. Clifford went into the outer office, and Max turned to Isabelle.

"Why didn't you tell us you were going to marry this man?" she demanded.

Isabelle looked at Larry inquiringly, whereupon he took her hand and drew it through his arm.

"Ye must forgive her, Mrs. Bryce, ye see she didn't know it. I've never had a chance yet to ask her."

Max was used to shocks, but this morning had been too much for her. At this astounding statement on the part of their god-like liberator, she sat down suddenly, bereft of words, and stared at the two young people.

"Take me home, Wally," she said, "I can't stand any more!"

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

"**S**UPPOSE,"—said Mrs. Bryce, as they got into the limousine, "—suppose we postpone explanations until after lunch. I'm too worn out to understand anything you may say."

So conversation was casual enough on the way home. Once there, Isabelle manoeuvred to get Larry alone, but Wally stuck to him like a father.

"Wally," said his daughter, sternly, "Max wants you."

"What does she want?"—impatiently.

"You."

He went, reluctantly. Larry held out two eager hands to Isabelle, but she ignored them.

"Sweetheart," he said, anxiously.

"Larry, you told a lie."

"Many of 'em, darlin'. Which one?"

"You said I was going to marry you."

"Aren't you, crickety-Cricket?"—anxiously.

"I haven't decided—yet."

"But won't ye decide, dearie?"

"I may—when I'm properly asked."

"What is properly, Mavourneen?"

"I don't know. I've never been proposed to before, except by —an Jacques Petard."

She was entirely in earnest, so he humoured her.

"Would ye prefer the formal 'Will-ye-do-me-the-honour-to-become-me-bride?' sort, or a more impassioned style?"

"Oh, Larry, you must advise me! Which would you take?"

With a laugh—half amused, wholly tender—he took her into his arms.

"I'd take the quickest way to get ye, little wee leprechaun."

"Larry, I won't let you off. I do so want to be proposed to."

"My dear," he said gently, "I love ye a very great deal. I want ye to love me a very great deal, and to be my wife."

Both arms went around his neck. She drew his tall head down to her, and kissed him.

"Thank you, Larry; I will," she said.

He gathered her up and went to sit in a chair big enough to hold them both. He kissed her eyes, her saucy chin, her hair. He told her in tender ways, known only to the Irish, how he loved her, how he wanted to make for her a shield of his love, to keep her safe and happy.

"Do ye love me, Cricket?" he begged her.

"Larry," she said, solemnly; "I feel as if you were all the people I have loved in my whole life—Ann, Mrs. Benjamin, Jerry, and Herbert——"

"And Percy?" he teased her. "When did ye begin to love me?" he asked, in the old way of lovers.

"On the boat, going down."

"Ye didn't."

"I did."

"I felt it comin' on me, stronger and stronger, at Bermuda, but that night when ye came into my arms in the garden settled it. I had to come and find out who ye thought ye were lovin'."

She only laughed. Luncheon was announced and the family appeared. The meal was more or less the usual midday repast, but to Isabelle and Larry it might have been ambrosia, or sawdust. They made motions of eating, between long glances. Wally and Max tried not to notice, but Miss Watts's face was wreathed in a fatuous smile of satisfaction.

Later, when they went to the living room, she started to slip away, but Isabelle put her arm through the older woman's and led her along.

"We'll face this out together," she whispered.

"We seem to have had the end of this story, Isabelle; suppose we now have the first of it," said her mother in an amused tone.

The Captain and Isabelle smiled at each other.

"Will you recite it, or shall I?" he asked.

"Together."

"Chapter One. The good ship 'Astra' . . . The hero forces his acquaintance upon the heroine . . ." he began.

"Didn't you want to meet him?" inquired Max, curiously.

"Certainly, but I didn't want him to know it. All the women on board made fools of themselves about him."

"Deceivin' little minx! Is this the way ye brought her up, Mrs. Bryce?"

"I didn't bring her up. She's brought herself up. Go on with the story."

"The hero curried favour with one Miss Watts in hope of advancing his suit . . ."

"Miss Watts was foolish about him, too," announced Isabelle.

"I was," admitted Miss Watts.

"The heroine promptly acquired one Major O'Dell, of the English army, one odious youth, named Percy, one nondescript yclept Jack——"

"And an Irishman named O'Leary," boasted Isabelle.

"And an Irishman named O'Leary. She led them all a pretty dance, and when her affairs were so complicated that a lawyer couldn't straighten them out, whist! she disappears."

"Engaged to a Frenchman!" supplied Wally. "Catholic tastes, our Isabelle, a regular internationalist."

Larry looked at Wally as if seeing him for the first time, and laughed appreciatively.

"The Irishman followed," prompted Isabelle.

"The Irishman followed. Now he wishes to apologize for the abrupt way in which he intruded into the peace conference. He makes the proper, if somewhat belated request, that Mr. and Mrs. Bryce will look upon him kindly as a son-in-law."

His gay smile went swiftly from Max to Wally.

"Isabelle, has he proposed yet?" asked Max.

"Yes."

"Did you accept him?"

"Yes."

"I cannot believe that you could ever do anything so sensible."

"Thank you," bowed the Captain. "Mr. Bryce, the British consul has full information about me. I am a captain in the — Regiment. I am on sick leave, wounded at Ypres."

Wally put out his hand and grasped O'Leary's.

"I'll have a talk with the Consul this afternoon, but if Isabelle likes you as well as I do, your case is safe right now."

Isabelle fell upon Wally and hugged him. The next victim was Miss Watts.

"I know you'll be happy, my dear. You know how to take care of her, Captain O'Leary."

"Trust me," he said.

Isabelle went and stood in front of her mother.

"Well?" said Isabelle.

"I think you ought to kiss me, don't you?"

She did.

"It is ridiculous for you to be engaged before you're out," remarked Mrs. Bryce.

"Max, I never intended to come out. I made up my mind about that long ago."

Max shrugged her shoulders and held out a hand to Larry.

"I'm glad we are going to have such a handsome person in the family," she said.

He bowed over the hand.

"Ye're remindin' me that 'handsome is as handsome does.' I invite ye to watch me."

She laughed.

"Don't talk any nonsense about getting married, for this child is only eighteen."

"I'm expectin' my orders any day," he said, turning to the girl.

"To go back—there?" she cried.

He nodded. She went to stand in the circle of his arm.

"Max, when Larry goes, I go with him, if it is to-morrow," she said—quietly, firmly.

No more was said about it at that time, but it was an issue that had to be faced very shortly. Two halcyon weeks followed for the lovers, and then for Larry a summons came. He brought the news to her one afternoon. When he came into the room she knew. She went into his arms with a little cry—

"Dearest, when?"

He held her close for a moment.

"I must sail on Saturday, belovedest."

He felt the shiver that went through her, but she made no protest.

"I can be ready," she said.

"Little love, I've been thinkin', maybe ye'd better not go. Maybe ye'd better stay here and wait for me."

"I'll wait for you, just as close to those dreadful trenches as they'll let me come!" she said, fiercely.

She summoned the family and told them the news. She

wished to be married on the morrow and sail with her boy on Saturday.

"But you've got no clothes!" protested Max.

"We'll be married to-morrow at five, Max; here or in a church, whichever you say."

"Here, of course," said Wally.

"We don't want any fuss, or people, or excitement. I will pack to-night so that Larry and I may have the whole day free to-morrow," said Isabelle, with a quiet authority that silenced them all.

For once Max let her have it her own way. She had always dreamed of Isabelle's wedding as a big fashionable event. It was like her daughter to do it this way. She actually went off for the entire day with her lover, coming back only in time to dress.

There were no guests except Miss Watts and Martin Christiansen. Major O'Dell, whose orders took him back on the ship with them, acted as best man for Larry. Just as she was hurrying downstairs, Isabelle met Wally, waiting for her. He slipped a box into her hand and said brokenly:

"Little secret between us, Isabelle. I know you're going to be happy with this chap, but I'm frightened,—it's all such a gamble!"

She put her arms about him and kissed him tenderly. He felt that she had grown into a woman over night.

"It's all right, dear. I'm not frightened. I'm sure!"

"Lord, but I'll miss you!"

"Dear old Wally—dear old Wally!" she said very close to tears.

It was a simple brief ceremony, this wedding. They were all a little solemn with the thought of what this world in dissolution might hold for these radiant young lovers. Larry O'Leary's face was something to remember, when Isabelle plighted him her troth, and there was a sudden womanly dignity in Isabelle's bearing that made the eyes smart.

But later, at the wedding supper, no one could resist the boyish happiness of Larry. He swept them all into his joyousness, and when the time came for their farewells, there were no tears, only good wishes and high hopes.

In the motor car on the way to the hotel, Larry's arm held Isabelle close.

"Wee wife," he said, softly; "wee wife."

There was no need of words, their happiness was folded round them like a cloak. They dined in their sitting room, as merry as larks.

"Happy, darlin'?" he asked her.

"I suppose that's what you call it! I've got a whole new world, Larry. That's your wedding gift to me!"

He kissed her hair and went into the other room for a second. When he came back he held something behind him.

"Heart of me," said he, "I've a confession!"

"Larry!"

"It's only luck that you're here to-night."

"What?"

"There once was a leprechaun visited me in the night, and she left me something to know her by. I've been

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lookin' for her ever since. I swore I'd marry her when I found her!"

"Yes?"—anxiously.

"Will ye see if ye'll fit my leprechaun coat?"

He held out the orange-and-black Chinese coat, and laid it about her shoulders.

"Larry! it was you!"

"Yes, darlin', an isn't it luck that it's *you*!"

The coat and its owner were folded close to Larry's heart. Both of them had come home.

THE END.



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