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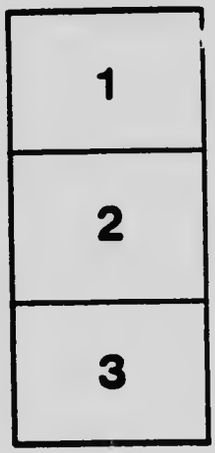

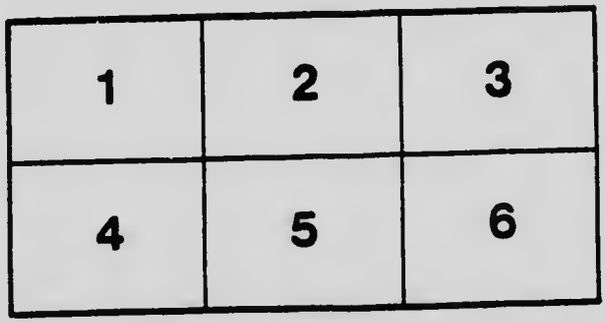

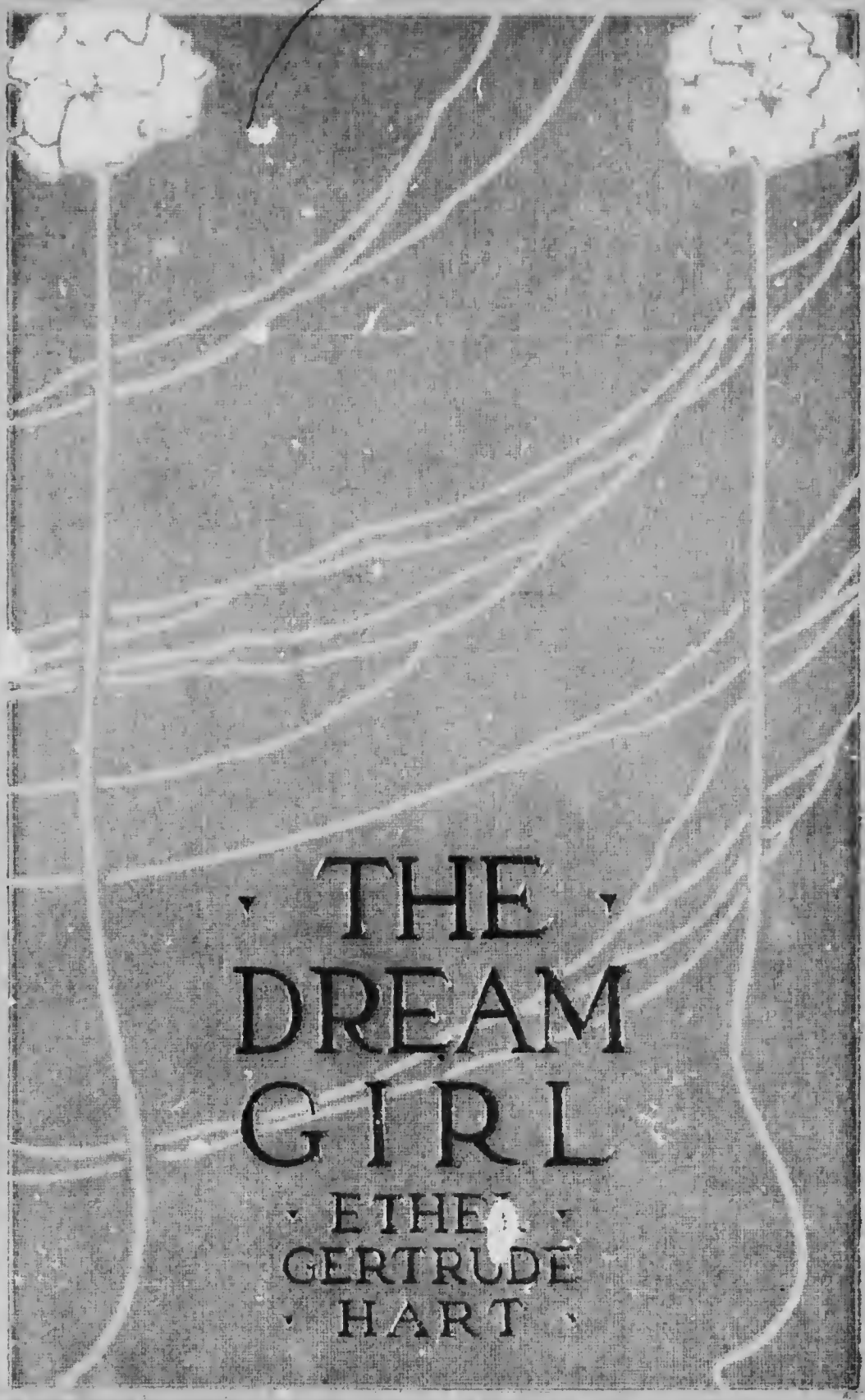
THE
DREAM
GIRL
ETHEL
GERTRUDE
HART


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THE DREAM GIRL

My garden is much more a dream than I am, I assure you.

The Dream Girl

by

Ethel Gertrude Hart

Illustrated

by

Gordon Grant

TORONTO
THE MUSSON BOOK COMPANY
LIMITED

PRINTED IN GARDEN CITY, N. Y., U. S. A.

MOTIF

I lived with visions for my company
Instead of men and women, years ago,
And found them gentle mates, nor thought to know
A sweeter music than they played to me.
But soon their trailing purple was not free
Of this world's dust,— their lutes did silent grow,
And I myself grew faint and blind below
Their vanishing eyes. Then Thou did'st come to be
Beloved, what they seemed. Their shining fronts,
Their songs, their splendours . . . (better, yet the same . . .
As river-water hallowed into fonts . . .)
Met in Thee, and from out Thee overcame
My soul with satisfaction of all wants . . .
Because God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame!

—Mrs. Browning.

TO

THE MAN OF LAW

AND

ANOTHER

I

FROM MAX HERRICK

These flashes on the surface are not he.
He has a solid base of temperament:
But, as the water lily starts and slides
Upon the level in little puffs of wind,
Though anchored to the bottom, such as he.

—TENNYSON.

She that could think, and ne'er disclose her mind.

—*Othello, Act II., Scene I.*

FAIR UNKNOWN:

Polly says that above all things I am histrionic; and that that just sums up the whole situation. And she ought to know. But at least it was at her suggestion that this correspondence was dreamed into being. And you consented. Always remember that . . . you consented.

It seems a bit odd, doesn't it? Two people who know nothing of each other save through a slip of a girl — who are never to meet — how decided both you

and she are on this point — and yet a friendship on paper is hazily approaching us, and I am sending out the first thought waves. How do you feel about it?

I am wondering very much whether you regard it, and me, as a mission! Polly is inscrutable on the subject.

"Why dig for motives?" she suggests. "A man with an imagination like yours should never be at a loss."

I leave you to guess at the scornful inflection with which these words were uttered. What a practical little soul it is, this Polly of ours.

I wish you could have seen her when she told me about you, Lady-of-the-Mountains-and-the-Mists . . . one tumbled wave of hair shadowing that

clever forehead of hers, and her eyes divided between blazing indignation at me and cool contempt of me.

The room was firelit, and the coal was sending leaping tongues of flame to dance reflections in the tiles. Outside, the fog was creeping steadily up from the river flats.

And I — was grumbling!

No, I don't do it often; only with conviction. And honestly, I think I have cause. But here, that small friend of mine and I part company.

"You might," she asserts carelessly, "have been killed." And considers this fact a crushing one.

"Pity I wasn't," I growl. "At least you would have had the mournful gratification of feeling that I had come by my death in a fitting manner."

Her eyes flicker.

"Yes," she says. "I ought to have thought of that. It really would have been most pathetic, and romantic. 'Gallant rescue of a child in which the hero loses his life.' . . . Can't you see it — done in headlines, Max, and a special article all to itself? Even I should have come in for some of the glory. . . . I, who have the inestimable distinction of typing your stories for you. And you — though tardily — would have been famous!"

And that is all it would have meant to Polly. . . .

So now you are beginning to know what manner of man Max Herrick is — very much at your service. A dreamer of dreams — a writer of stories which have never made any stir in the world;

and, at the present time, six-foot-one of helpless manhood.

Polly looked up just then from her

Polly is sitting now by the fire

cushion by the fire, and her eyes were amused.

"You are getting sorry for yourself already," she said, demurely.

"Have you come to the part about the fire yet? Send her the newspaper clipping — it will preserve your modesty, and tell her all that you want her to know."

Yet this is the girl whose white face was the first I saw when I came back to life, to find I had lost quite a piece out of it — after the rush through an inferno of smoke and heat, and a fall that seemed to last for years.

But perhaps I was dreaming then, or still semi-conscious. For I fancied I heard a quick catch of the breath and a gasping "Thank God!" Polly certainly would not thank God because I had taken hold of things again.

I hope I shall not bore you by writing

so much of her? You see she has somehow grown into my life since the day, two years ago, when I lit upon Mrs. Collop's select establishment, and found in one of my fellow boarders a girl who could not only type my stories, but criticise them pretty caustically.

I suppose it is friendship — this comradeship of ours. Certainly for me, life would lose much of its sauce piquante if Polly slipped out of it. And, from her side, it must be diverting to have some one to lecture and quarrel with.

She tells me that she has explained the situation to you — explained me. And I can imagine it is on this wise, and that Max Herrick as edited by Polly Carrol is a man who, being blessed with far more money than is good for

him, has played with his life, and taken nothing seriously.

Well . . . I wonder!

Only last night I had a sermon all to myself on the subject that seems a tireless one.

"It isn't as if you were editing a paper," she said musingly.

"There would be some excuse then for your regarding everything and everybody as copy. You are even" — with a flash of those wonderful eyes of hers — "studying me now with a view to reproduction. And I shall have the pleasure of typing my own utterances later on. Is anything real to you?"

"Mrs. Collop's excellent beefsteak pudding, for example," I suggested lazily. She shrugged her shoulders.

"You would write about anything," she said hotly.

"This — because I gave you a crop of freckles in my last yarn," I said temperately. "That seems to have rankled."

"Me?" she said with a little, shadowy smile playing round her lips. "I like that. You know so much about me, don't you?"

"Is there more than one Polly Carrol?"

"Not at all," she said icily. "I am quite on the surface of things."

"Just so — who ever supposed otherwise? Still, an interesting study."

And then I was treated to an indignant rush of colour.

But turn about is only fair, isn't it, Dream Girl? There now, I have found

a name for you, and it suits you rarely. So much for a prophecy. For you live among the mountains, and you have grown to look like them. And. above all, I catch a hint of exquisite compassion in your eyes.

How do I know? Well, you see I write — that tells its own tale. And a woman who is willing to receive and answer letters from a sick man she has never seen, must have — just the touch that Polly lacks.

And here, compunction seizes me. For she has been rarely good, this comrade of mine; and my day begins when she puts the cover of her typewriter on, and slips in to my room to make it home. My prison would be dreary enough without her.

And though indolence is supposed to

Polly is out taking her walk

be my prevailing characteristic, I don't think it is. I like to be in things.

I suppose she told you how I came to be Max Herrick, horizontal, not vertical . . . ?

A fire in a small up-country hotel, and a kiddie in danger, and a ladder that gave way. You can fill in the gaps, can't you? I was pretty ill for a while with burns, and the shock to the nerves. A man ought to rise above such things, oughtn't he? At first there were forty-eight hours to each day at least, comma'd, and dashed (very much dashed), and full-stopped by dressings of burns; and paragraphed by liquid atrocities that represented my special diet. A NURSE — capital letters all the way through, please — the ruler of my destiny. She continues, though I

am promoted to lounge suit and full diet.

Do you wonder that I am sorry for myself — on paper?

She is out for her walk now, and I believe she measures her steps. Her very smile is professional, and never reaches her eyes. And I grumble, and obey, and am, like Ellen Thorneycroft's novel — "In Subjection."

Do you read Ellen, I wonder? And do you wish that in this particular child of her brain there was more Fowler and less Felkin? I do. If women novelists will get married, why write in conjunction with their husbands?

I asked Polly this a while ago, and her mouth twisted.

"Don't know, I'm sure," she said,

sarcastically. "I don't write novels, and I'm not married."

As if that settled the question! And if you could have heard the scorn she infused into "I don't write novels," you would have been sorry for me.

It can't be good for me to feel so constantly subdued, now can it? Dream Girl, there are mists about your mountain home — see me through these. Don't be too practical.

It was a strange experience to come back to things normal after those weeks of shadows. To be no longer puzzled by faces that seemed to spring suddenly at me through vapour, and, as suddenly, vanish. To face a dado that had ceased to be a mass of crawling reptiles, and resolved itself into regular lines and curves that kept still. To find the fire an

old friend — not a continuation of the horror!

When Mrs. Collop lumbered in, and shed tears two shades paler than ordinary ones, to match her eyes; and ventured to suggest, between heavy sniffs, a grilled steak of the delectable quality known as undercut — I felt as if I really had left Mist Valley, and was back in the world that somehow has generally turned its sunny side to me.

But when I realized that an indefinite time must elapse before I could put my foot to the ground — six months at the very least in the hands of the Woman-in-White — no apologies to Wilkie Collins — the title suits Nurse better than it did that ill-starred heroine of his — my language grew lurid. And Polly was in as usual.

"Months," I said; for I thought she wasn't sufficiently impressed. She laughed rather shortly.

"Yes, isn't it awful?" she said. "I don't wonder you feel bad about it. Every luxury you can think of, no duty to whisper reproaches while you take your ease — doctors who are far too good to you, and friends who make you their first thought. It really could not have been worse — unless you had been disfigured!"

But her face softened quite suddenly.

"Is your foot feeling very bad, Max?" she asked. And it was — quite bad, you know; and sympathy from her is rare. I seized it eagerly.

Would it strike you that I was a pessimistic sort of chap? Don't be afraid to tell me — I am used to abuse.

She has said just enough about you to make me wonder much. That you are old in experience — but romantic.

"Tell her all that is in your heart," she suggests saucily.

Suppose I should do just that, Dream Girl! Would it bore you? For you are a girl, you know — and a very kind one.

This has taken a week to write, and has been done in easy stages.

It is nine o'clock — Nurse is climbing the stairs ——

And if my temperature has gone up . . .

Fancy a man being governed by his temperature!

Dejectedly yours,

MAX HERRICK.

II

FROM THE DREAM GIRL

Memory's the streamlet of the scene,
Which sweeps the hills of life between;
. . . . . .
Upon its shores we rest
And love to view the waters fair,
And see lost joys depicted there.

—MRS. BROWNING.

DEAR SIX-FOOT-ONE OF GRIEVANCES:

Why dejectedly? Your letter did not read that way at all. I should not call you a pessimist — perhaps just a little bit of an egotist. You are certainly fond of introspection. But that may belong to the gift Polly makes so much fun of to you. I say to you, advisedly, I am not going to tell you how she speaks of it to me. You have quite as good an opinion of yourself as you ought to have, Max Herrick — horizontal.

Why am I willing to write to you? That requires consideration. No, I don't think I am approaching it in the light of a mission at all. As edited by

Polly Carrol, you present possibilities. Poor Six-foot-one of helpless manhood — you didn't want me to know you were tall, did you? You really are to be pitied, even though your durance vile is is to be terminated at the other side of some months.

And Polly is right — it might have been a great deal worse. If it had been your spine, now! And, any way, you are not taking the real rest cure. That is a pretty drastic affair. All communication with the outer world cut off, no books, no papers, no letters. How would you have liked that? Your doctors, and even the Woman-in-White, must be letting you down as gently as they possibly can.

So Polly tells you that she has explained you to me? Well, I suppose she

has. She has certainly put at my disposal detached bits of you that seem curiously contradictory and jumbled up, and rather like those puzzle pictures we used to amuse ourselves with as children.

I shall judge for myself, and whether my judgment — from this distance — will be a more correct one than hers, so near you, you must determine, you Writer of Stories.

In the meantime, I want the atmosphere of this place to get into your room, to draw you out of it at times.

This house of mine is rather like a Swiss Chalet with the mountains behind it, and a road that winds its way through wild, bush country. We call it a road, but it is little more than a track, and a very rough one at that, down which the coach comes once a week, bringing our

mail. In the season the wheels crush dozens of wild flowers that stain the soil with purple, and pink, and yellow, and white, and every shade you can think of.

Coachie is a celebrated character. He knows every settler's home for miles

The coach comes once a week bringing our mail

round, and almost every history connected with the occupants. He will eye your writing, my friend, and wonder — he takes a keen interest in my cor-

respondence. Last week he was polite, next time his look will be a question that some day his lips will utter. Are you to be a relation — for six months?

We live very near to the heart of things in this part of the world. So little happens that much is made of the slightest deviation from the ordinary rut.

I wonder if any one loves Stony Creek as I do?

In my garden — I am sure "Elizabeth's German Garden" was no lovelier — there is a riot of colour that would fairly intoxicate you. It is far more a dream than I am, I can assure you. Think of pictures of Japanese Fairyland — perhaps you have even been to the Flowery Land? Well, I haven't cherry blossom to carry you there, but

— for the rest! The soil is a rich dark loam, sandy and moist, for there are springs bubbling up in all directions. And a creek with rustic bridges runs

Coachie is a celebrated character

through it, twists and turns and wanders — a creek with boulders, and ferns — stodgy cabbage ones, startlingly green against the dark background of

rock — and delicate, spreading fronds of maiden hair.

And I have planted Iris on the banks in patches and, in one clear, sunny pool — Water Lilies.

Then the May, and the Jackarandah — and the Virginia Creeper that sets the Chalet in living gold and fire in the fall o' the year! Picture it with the mountain behind, purple with shadows, and rosy-violet, and silvery-mauve when the mists creep down the slopes and stay a while. And then talk to me of town life — you daren't!

Could any orchestral music be sweeter than that I listen to when the birds look at me with their bright, shy eyes, and sing — and sing?

There is even a dispute occasionally between first and second violin — till

the rest join in and drown the quarrelling in a burst of melody that swells and dies away — and in the distance an echo trembles.

Some of them fairly chatter to me, and in the winter, fat robins feed out of my hand — strut and eye me while the crumbs are thrown out. Don't tell me they are not the same birds every year — I know better!

I think it is such a pity that you have a dado in your room that is capable of springing to life when you are sicker than usual. Don't you sigh for self-colour? I should.

I quite agree with you that Miss Fowler was much nicer than Mrs. Felkin. I suppose she would be indignant at the idea. Perhaps she is too happy to write well — what do you say?

Love doesn't put one "In Subjection," that is, it need not. Two fronting the world, fronting everything — together. All that means.

I am still smiling over the look of exquisite compassion with which you have credited me. That will be rather hard to live up to. And yet, I realize that it may be more possible than if I were as near to you as Polly is. At least I — and you — will have perspective.

I saw that newspaper cutting. It was a big thing to do — a bigger would be to [illegible] your prison into something else. Don't you agree? Perhaps you do this — in spite of the grumbling I could almost imagine that you do. A strong nature will rise above environment — or bend it to suit its purpose. And even nurses have their points.

Your mental picture of me would be interesting and enlightening. From what Polly has told you, you think I have rather an American style — I

know. . . . Silvery hair, and young eyes. A maiden lady of uncertain age, but romantic tendencies.

Wouldn't you like to know?

This much: My life is not in any sense of the word a dream one. It has to be lived faithfully and sturdily. Will you be very much shocked if I tell you that I am one of the world's workers, and that my orchard, and my poultry farm, and my bees support one of the dearest little Dresden China grandmothers that ever came straight out of a fairy tale, and myself?

Sorry, but the truth will out.

I have been typing this on a discarded machine of Polly's, on the balcony in a blaze of sunshine. Presently I must say good-bye to the mountains and the amethyst shadows and you, and prepare dinner. I shall bring to the meal a substantial and undreamlike appetite.

You must enter into detail next time. Tell me about your doctors, and the

NURSE — even Polly — as you see her.

Something is burning in the oven. Till the next ——

THE DREAM GIRL.

You hesitated between that and Dream Lady. Do you really think it possible I may be young — to match the eyes?

I don't need to tell you not to grow bitter. A man who talks about being governed by his temperature has the saving sense of humour.

D. G.

III

FROM MAX HERRICK

. . . . For the mind recoils
Upon itself, and the wrecked heart lies cold,
While heaviness collects the shattered spoils.
It is not in the storm, nor in the strife
We feel benumb'd, and wish to be no more —
But in the after-silence on the shore,
When all is lost, except a little life.

—BYRON.

. . . . How my life is all read backward, and the charm of life withdrawn.

—MRS. BROWNING.

YOU — GIRL!

Of course you are young — to match the eyes. Silvery hair, indeed? I never imagined anything of the kind. But I do know your eyes — they have caught and held the purple shadows you speak of. And you are tall and slender, but not thin. Certainly not thin. And I shall tell you things I would not dream of telling Polly.

In this way, two parts of my nature will have full play. Between you I may develop into something distantly resembling a man! So I beg — don't be too practical. If this correspondence of ours is to begin and end in vapour — let that look of understanding that I see

so plainly, creep into your eyes — glance through your letters.

No, I don't like being pitied. There is a vast difference between the article that has been so lavishly served out to me lately by strangers, curious and otherwise — and the close touch of a nature that realizes.

So I have the saving sense of humour?

Je-hosh-a-phat!

Well, I need it.

Of course, Polly has told you about Mrs. Collop. Not? as Herr Ernst Lindt would say! Her late husband must have had a keen sense of the fitness of things when he bestowed his name upon her. She "inclines," as she would put it, "to run to fat, my dear." I should say the fat had run to her. Her face is a vast, shapeless expanse of —

not flesh, nothing on earth will convince me that it is flesh — a substance that resembles badly made yeast dough. Her mouth is a slit that turns up good-

humouredly at the corners, and is very useful for eating. And her eyes are unripe gooseberries. Collop was a brave man — I write this after due deliberation.

Picture her this morning with a capacious apron, and an expression of tribulation. Her voice (a pale one — faint, lavender-gray — don't voices remind you of colours?) depressed.

"Mr. Herrick-my-dear, I don't know as you ever experiences the feelings as I gets. I feels just as if my legs would fly off a-top of my boots."

Mr. Herrick-my-dear, never, in the course of a somewhat varied life, having experienced that rather weird sensation, says so — much to the worthy soul's satisfaction.

After a few pleasantries — she really has the kindest heart in the world — she leaves for the kitchen, where she resolves herself into a chef, who is nothing short of a genius. Maids

she must have, for this is a big house, but —

> Maids may come, and maids may go,
> But she cooks on forever.

I should think I am not in solitary confinement — very far from it. "They come — not as single spies ——"

At first I was most exemplary. I smiled sweetly and informed them ——

"No, I wasn't fond of lying down ——

"Yes, I was thankful I was able to dress and be on a lounge ——

"Yes, I was fond of music — good music," I added, savagely—for I saw that I would have concerts that would stretch out indefinitely if I wasn't very firm.

"Yes, I read occasionally — sometimes thought about what I read, though this, less often, being a strain on my limited faculties ——

"No, I didn't find rapture in talking about my symptoms ——

"Yes, my doctors were the best of their kind ——

"Yes — quite alone in the world ——

"Yes, I was indeed fortunate in having such a friend as Miss Carrol ——" And so on, ad nauseam.

I am thinking of having a board done for the foot of my lounge with an inscription to the effect that I have the usual complement of feet, and expect to use them some day. I told the Woman-in-White this, and she smiled her wintry smile. Of course, she has her points — who ever doubted that? But her immaculate white dresses make me shiver. When Polly slips in in the red frock that is getting so shabby, I feel positively grateful.

So you are not afraid of my growing bigger? There you are, you see, understanding already. What a nice Dream Girl you are. Polly now ——

Oh, it's a fine old world, and there are good people in it. With Herr Lindt to play the soul out of me — Kendal — my particular chum, about whom more anon — a perky young reporter who is the last thing in audacity, to turn my room into a newspaper office while he hits off to a nicety the little mannerisms of "the staff" for my edification — the breezy medicos, and Polly to scold me, and sing to me, and make up jolly fires for me — what more can I ask from life but the one thing it has taken away from me — my castle in Spain?

Why do these castles always resolve themselves into thin air?

Tell me that — you who are part fay!

Oh, of course I shall tell you about it — and Her.

She is very young, and her parents begged me to wait. Then, this came. She was away in Sydney at the time visiting some relatives. As soon as I was able to write I did the only decent thing to do — offered her her release. You see there was fear at one time that I might be partially crippled.

And I wasn't cad enough to expect her to wait while I — tried to get better!

Only — well, I was fool enough to think that though that particular castle in Spain had toppled to the ground, the love that had superintended its erection would glorify the ruins. Do you know what I mean? What I wanted her to do —? Can't say exactly, but you will

guess. Perhaps, to come just once and give me a look of understanding from her pretty, baby eyes — tell me that though we must wake from our dream, it had been a sweet one, and meant something to her.

In short, I had fancied that particular make of satin was silk-backed — not cotton.

Does the mere fact that I am "laid by for repairs" mean that the real man, the personality, is crippled, too, I wonder? She seemed to find it so.

She had not answered my letter except by saying she was coming to see me as soon as she returned. And one day a hansom stopped before the gate, and she and her mother got out.

The violets have been early this year,

and there were bowls of them about my room.

Girl — have you had your story, and do you understand?

It always seemed to me that the sunshine grew brighter when she was near

— she is so beautiful. A fur toque on her fair hair, and Parma violets on her

muff. A bunch of the real flowers tucked into her belt. She left these with me.

And I must lie — and let her come to me! Hard, don't you think?

For a moment I forgot that her mother was there, blonde, and portly, and important. I only saw the small, flower face.

"How horrid for you," she said. And under her breath, "And for me, too."

Well, I need not have worried myself about the difficulty of keeping a distance between us — it was quite easy. In some subtle way she was not the girl I had petted; she was older. She sat where I could watch her, contrast her soft fairness with the hard features of her mother. And we talked about the

things folk always talk about when they want to forget that they have ever shared thoughts, wishes. It was — strange. No word uttered could have emphasized the difference, but I was determined to clearly define the position.

"You received my letter — understood?" I asked.

She gave me a shrinking look.

"Yes, it was inevitable, of course. But I don't think I quite realized till I saw you — you are so thin, and altered. Oh, Max, why did you do it? You ought to have thought of me."

"Do you mind if we don't talk about it?" I said.

"But you ought to have taken more care of yourself. You — belonged to me."

Past tense already, you see, Girl. And anything grimmer than her mother I have yet to see.

"You understand," I said tersely, "that you are free?"

"Of course. But it is all so humiliating. Did you — suffer at all, Max?"

"Oh, no," I said jauntily; "burns don't hurt, you know."

Yes, I said that — quite brutally.

"Fancy you a cripple, Max! And you used to have such a splendid figure."

Past tense again. Is everything to be in the back of my life? Fate has surely played me a scurvy trick this time. Don't you think I may grumble just a bit — on paper?

And though I kept silence, that was

better than saying the words that were trembling on my lips.

"I've brought back your letters, and — the other things," she said, biting her lip. "I am going away — it will be better."

"Yes, it will be better."

"How easily you say it," she said childishly. "I thought at least you would be sorry."

And, as I live, Girl, there were actually tears in her pretty eyes.

It was just at that moment — they were crossing the room to say good-bye — the mother standing looking at me with an expression of faint distaste — that Polly began to sing in that crooning voice of hers ——

"Does yer want de moon to play wid
Or de stars to run away wid,
Dey'll come if yer don't cry."

Perhaps I had been wanting just that — the moon to play with! The thought of Polly was like a moral shower bath. I had heard the keys of her typewriter rattling all through this interview — she told you she had moved her office here, didn't she? — and I knew by the song that one more day's work was over for her — the little everyday girl who keeps sunny in spite of what must be drudgery.

When I looked away from the window I was alone, and I heard a silken rustle on the stairs. And Finis was put to that book of my life.

"Tell me something funny," I said when Polly's face appeared in the doorway. "I want to laugh."

Did they hear us, I wonder, as they drove away in their han-

som? After all, it doesn't matter, does it?

Write to me soon!

I am — better, I think. Your letter, perhaps, or the ones that are to come. I told Polly this just now, and got a mischievous smile for answer. Then she eyed me keenly.

"Yes, the prescription is A1 at Lloyd's," she said judicially. As it is.

Madame — your humble,

MAX HERRICK.

So the grandmother is like Dresden China! She wears a white, woolly thing over her head, doesn't she?

IV

FROM THE DREAM GIRL

Though thou loved her as thyself,
As a self of purer clay,
Though her parting dims the day,
Stealing grace from all alive;
Heartily know,
When half-gods go
The gods arrive. —EMERSON.

I found me thy thrall,
By magical drawings,
Sweet tyrant of all!
I drank at thy fountain
False waters of thirst;
Thou intimate stranger,
Thou latest and first.
—EMERSON.

POOR FRIEND!

All the same, you are not as badly hurt as you imagine. Your account is too circumstantial. Unless, indeed, Polly is right, and, sooner or later, everything presents itself in the light of copy. At present, you are calmly diagnosing your case, and sympathizing with yourself, because the symptoms are well marked, and you are feeling as melancholy as you ought to, under the circumstances.

I want to shake that baby with the pretty eyes and the Parma violets. It seems to me rather a pitiful kind of love that would not wait while you are "trying to get better." Inexcusable,

too, for you really are getting better, fast. And, even if that tiresome foot makes you halt a little through life — this is only a guess, you know, not a prophecy — Why!

But perhaps she only admired you for your broad shoulders, and the rest of it. Some girls are like that.

Polly's letter on the subject is explosive. I am afraid the "baby eyes" rather got on her nerves. They belong to a kind that does not wear well — not washing blue. Shall I suggest Dolly Dyes?

How do I know they are blue? Don't all men rave about celestial orbs? And if they had been green you would have told me more about them — their translucent depths, and the play of light and shade.

Let me print it in capitals — SHE WAS NOT WORTHY OF YOU.

Yes, that does make it easier. Not quite at first, but it will. And I am sorry and glad at one and the same time.

So she left the violets with you — and you promptly threw them into the fire after she had gone! No, you didn't tell me that.

And the bowls of them about your room made you feel suddenly sick, and you longed for daffodils! You see I have my fairy's cap on to-night.

Well, if I were you, I would not connect the scented beauties with a girl who is not in the least like them, even if she wears them. They belong to the open air, and have stolen its sweetness. She — is evidently exotic.

I have just been out into the garden

in the wind and the rain to pluck two of my special violets for you. I don't think the gale of to-day has beaten all the perfume out of them. I shall put them in this letter, and burn them if you dare!

Such a storm there has been. All day long the trees on the sides of the mountain have been tossed to and fro protestingly. They have swayed, and groaned, and lamented, and one near the house is creaking dismally as I write. There must be more than tree to them. Have they souls, do you think — and does the storm partly liberate them, and rouse them to something like frenzy? Just then the rain came on drenchingly, and the flowers that have kept reminding me of wee, fragile faces with hair that was con-

stantly being blown into their eyes — will be holding themselves up for the sweetness of the blessed downpour. Some will be beaten to the earth — that is life — the survival of the fittest. But the rest! They seem to glow with new colour — and won't it be good to put on strong shoes to-morrow and get out amongst them!

There is a great fire of sheoak burning in my big fireplace. Such red, flaky coals — we must have toast for supper to-night, Grannie and I. And after I have made it, I shall slip along the hall, and coax our only winter guest to join us, and cease his relentless tramping up and down the room.

I want you to know my poor Man-from-the-Mallee.

He came into our lives accidentally

one day, and has stayed with us ever since. And one night he told me his story. That there was one I knew — it only needed a glance into the sombre eyes, and the almost white hair above a face that should have been young — to tell that! He is a nervous wreck, and seems to have left the best part of his life behind him. Really left it, I mean. Past tense, indeed, in this instance.

He had been told by his doctor to get away from city life, get away from himself if that were possible. And he thought a man might well bury himself in Stony Creek. So he walked over the hills, down The Gap — and into our lives. We have never wished him out of them since, though his presence in the house has not made for either happiness or comfort. Like you, he has

money. But in his case, he insists that it came too late.

He thought a man might well hang himself in Stony Creek

You must know, Six-foot-one, that here in these bush homes we have no daily paper to distract our minds — no circulating library save in the nearest

township, twenty miles away. And we have fallen into the habit of reading lives closely, closely. We take time to do it, and do not form rapid, superficial opinions.

I am Jack-of-all-trades. Being blessed with a slight knowledge of things medical, weird happenings come my way. I ride miles over the mountains at times to take charge of a case our energetic young medico has entrusted me with. And they bring sprains to me, and cuts, and listen to my words of wisdom with far more respect than they render Doctor Kensington — dear, good fellow that he is.

And even the Man-from-the-Mallee meekly obeys me sometimes. Already he has begun to put on flesh, and to look less like a walking skeleton. But

his eyes look back — and I want them to look forward. They shall, too.

He suffers from terrible headaches, and one night he came into this room to try the spell of the inglenook, and to tell me about his life. I remember so well his haggard face when the pain had gone, and he was leaning back in the depths of the big, easy chair.

Grannie had fallen asleep, her knitting still in her lap, her little, fine hands folded peacefully, and the diamonds in her rings catching fire from the dancing flames. The past in her face — but its beauty, and its calm. Traces of pain in plenty — but pain smoothed out. And her hair, fine as silk, as soft as "the white, woolly thing she wears over it." How on earth did you guess that?

At first he rather snapped me up, as he has a fashion of doing.

So I said, "Don't talk if you don't want to."

And then he turned, and I knew by his face something was coming. Something hard, and bitter — as it was.

"I do want to talk," he said, wearily. "Don't take any notice of my temper — it's a way I've got into lately. It is possible you might understand."

My friend — it is good to have suffered if one — can understand. And if it will help you to know it — if I can be more to you because you know it — I have had my own story. That it has not ended yet — that Finis has not been put at the close of the last chapter —does not make it any the less sad, perhaps. I can understand, do under-

stand: and that is positively all I can tell you about it. Are you hurt — after your own candid statement? But — my poor Man-from-the-Mallee! His face was almost ugly in its hardness.

"I hate the sound of rain," he said, abruptly. And when I told him of my love for it, he laughed cynically.

"Wait till I tell you — you will realize that there is always 'the other fellow's' side of the question."

Six-foot-one, you are not interested in the first part of his story. He is English and came out here as so many others have done, to make his fortune on the fields — a younger son from a good old family. His life has been most remarkable in its vicissitudes. I think he has rambling blood in his veins.

He was unfortunate everywhere, and his evil star, as he puts it, took him at last to the Mallee. He left a girl behind him — if you had seen the ugly sneer about his mouth as he described her!

"A girl gently born, beautiful, all the rest of it. Cried when I came away till her face was quite disfigured. How that rain pours! Well, I struck the Mallee drought time, and got let in, in more senses than one — it was pretty hideous. Not only my own struggle, though that was hard enough — but what I saw. It was — ghastly. Honest men slaving patiently, doggedly, and in vain. Children sickening from improper food when credit at the stores gave out, and horses too weak to make the journeys. There were prayer meetings in the little church for rain — the

rain that did not come — though these good folk had faith to move mountains — not enough to move their God. Did you speak?"

But I had only said, "Don't!" That "their God" told its own, dreary tale, didn't it?

He laughed.

"You, too?" he said mockingly. "I thought you were too sensible to believe in a religion that failed when it was most needed."

"Did they think it failed — think He failed — the ones who prayed?"

"No, that was the odd part of it. They had faith to move mountains, I tell you. And when the answer was delayed, told their God that no doubt He knew best.

Well, I did not pray — I watched,

and grew into an old man. I lived it through — the horrible days when we drove the cattle to the nearest water holes where a few feet of fairly liquid mud did duty for the thing that was needed so urgently. Watched the poor brutes stragger in and sink — too weak to get out again. And all the world seemed dying.

"There was an old chap near my selection who used to go out regularly with an empty watering-can and hold it over his bit of crop — trudging backward and forward. Brain gone, of course. Rather upsetting.

"Now, do you wonder that I hate the sound of rain — the rain that came too late? I have listened for it with my senses reeling. At last my luck turned. An unexpected legacy came to me —

a bit melodramatic, isn't it? and I sent for HER."

Mr. Herrick, you should have seen the look, heard the sneer!

"I bought a run, and put a skilled manager on. There was a pretty homestead, and I worked day and night, getting things ready, and — dreaming. Oh, I dreamed!

"The best rooms were for her dainty ladyship. I grew to see her there. I told myself what a brick she was to come to me instead of expecting me to go to her. English girls are not like you independent Australian ones, you know.

"At last the weeks dwindled down to days, and I was in Melbourne, waiting. Oh, yes, she came. Did you think she didn't? But on the voyage out — you

must really excuse the melodrama — she met 'the other fellow' — a dashing

young cavalry officer on furlough, with a melting tenor voice.

"They had matters pretty well fixed up before the boat reached the wharf, and there was nothing left for me to do but to bestow my blessing. That was

tolerably easy -- once the first gulp had been got over. I was wide awake by that time. One always wakes from dreams. I should have remembered.

"And then — it still sounds like fiction — the lives between me and my inheritance went out, and nothing remained for me but to go home, and fulfil my responsibilities as a British landlord. I am quoting from my solicitor's letter. I suppose I shall make up my mind to it, some day. Funny old world, isn't it?"

I did not answer. What was there to say! I am sure he knew I was sorry.

Everything in his life has been too late, he says. But I am wondering. And in my next letter I am going to tell you about Winsome.

You don't show these epistles to Polly, do you? Read her parts if you will — only parts. For, do you know — I always feel that letters are sacred. Even if there is nothing private in them. The writer has meant the atmosphere for the reader alone — has shown a part of his, or her, personality that is exclusively the property of the one for whom the words were penned.

Moods are sacred — don't you think? So respect mine! It is good to trust one another.

And you don't like Nurse? Poor boy! Doesn't she approve of smoking?

Your very substantial

DREAM GIRL.

Understanding? I wonder! So I am slender — but not thin!

V

FROM MAX HERRICK

Were she pitiful as she is fair,
Or but as mild as she is seeming so!
—ROBERT GREENE.

GIRL:

The violets were quite fragrant when they reached me, but I am deeply, darkly, desperately blue. Polly has tried scolding, snubbing, what not! And what is the good of writing when all one could say would be confusion to every one and everything? I put it to you — in all confidence!

Send me another letter from the clouds!

This Nurse is getting on my nerves. Folk should not be so immaculate. You have discovered that I do not like her. Strange! I don't believe I mentioned her in my last letter. Are you part

witch? And who told you that I smoked?

Yours in
the depths,
MAX HERRICK.

Reminds one rather of
"On the head,
Of
Wilkins Micawber,"
doesn't it?

VI

FROM THE DREAM GIRL

As she turned her face in going, thus she drew
me on to love her,
And to worship the divineness of the smile hid
in her eyes.

—Mrs. Browning.

DEAR MR. HERRICK:

I have counted the lines in your last effusion, and shall return in kind with mathematical accuracy.

You have no business to get the blues. Polly tells me that the burned foot is healing beautifully, and that you are gaining flesh and strength. Aren't you just a little bit ashamed of yourself? You should be.

Who told me that you smoked? My dear sir, there is an aroma about your writing block that is unmistakable. Do you puff cigars luxuriously while you are penning my letters?

It was the fact that you said so little about the Woman-in-White that gave

you away. Or, rather — I debated. For it may have quite another meaning ——

Puzzle that out, disconsolate lover!

Your

DREAM GIRL.

VII

FROM MAX HERRICK

For often you have writ to her; and she . .
. . . . . .
Herself, hath taught her love himself to write
unto her lover.
Two Gentlemen of Verona, Act II., Scene 2.

The idea of her life shall sweetly creep
Into his study of imagination;
And every lovely organ of her life
Shall come apparell'd in more precious habit.
More moving delicate and full of life
Into the eye and prospect of his soul.
— *Much Ado about Nothing, Act IV., Scene 1.*

LADY:

I am cap in hand, I am humble, supplicating, what you will. And my particular shade of blue in future shall be forget-me-not! You did pay me out properly, and I won't forget my lesson. Mea culpa!

Polly's face was mischievous when she brought me that very thin envelope, and an imp of mockery was in her eyes.

"You can't have quarrelled already!" she said meditatively. "I thought you and she were kindred spirits, and that you saved the other thing for me!"

When Polly looks like that I always want to throw something at her . . . she exasperates.

Show her your letters! What do you take me for.

Your violets have done their work, and reconcile me to the purple masses scattered about this room every day at my request. So I think you must make up your mind to forgive with

all the graciousness you can command.

I did never want to see them again; but you're right, right every time.

Do I smoke while I am writing to you? Perish the thought!

And you are debating about Nurse and me — ME? Girl, how can you? She has gone out for her walk; you notice I always choose this time for my letter to you. And I am off the leash. I could even — smoke. But I shall not. She does dislike My Lady Nicotine, and, incidentally, I suppose the man who woos her. Well —

"If it be so, so it is, you know,
And if it be so, so be it."

My troubles — as the kiddies say!

That Woman-in-White shall only go a certain length. How would you like

it, when you are propounding a deep problem, to be met with a cool "It is time for your nourishment, Mr. Herrick"? You know I never have luncheon, or dinner, or supper — it is always nourishment! Yet I am gaining strength under the régime, you say! Yes, I mean to, too. If ever a poor prisoner tried to shorten his sentence by good behaviour!

I have been reading up on medical subjects lately in order to meet her on her own ground. But her cool smile makes me flounder, and I fool round, and tie myself into knots (granny, not reef).

She is so infernally sure about everything.

Lindon — one of the medicos — enthuses. "Mighty fine little nurse,

Herrick! Wish there were more like her." And Scott, M.D., as we always call him, because he is so small and so horribly, knowingly clever, grins cheerfully, puts his hands in his pockets and delivers his soul.

"You've got rats, my boy — rats with extra curly tails. You'll be head over heels in love before you know where you are." And even you . . . ! Yes, I'm gritting my teeth, and I'm using language that isn't exactly sick room. And I want to shoot the lot of you.

If you imagine that is the type of woman I admire, you are wide of the mark — that's all.

I simply don't enter Nurse's scheme. I am a collection of bones and sinews and muscles, with a heart thrown in for the express purpose of allowing her to

feel its pulsations. And I am interesting because I happen to have exhibited some unusual symptoms, etc.

She even concedes that I have the average amount of pluck. But when one has allowed for this . . . Pshaw!

You and Elizabeth would have disturbed her immaculate soul. Her garden would have straight, white gravel paths, and the beds would be tiled round — the tiles well showing. And each plant would be labelled with its botanical name — you know the sort of thing I mean. One meets it in nursery gardens — and nightmares! Whereas, the kind of thing you and I like, is a wild where flowers have got beyond a mere bowing acquaintance stage, and shake hands quite often.

And you can pick big bunches, and never miss them.

You and I — that looked good as I wrote it. But wouldn't Polly laugh?

So you want to know about the folk here. I think you would like Kendal — my particular chum. He describes himself as a cynical man of law, and does the thing rather well. The cynicism I mean. But it has a trick of peeling off quite suddenly whe. his heart is touched.

Nurse and he fight as a rule. This, I note with quiet joy. At first I used to chip in. She is so amazingly cool and audacious.

But Polly laughed impishly.

"For a writer of books, you really are very dense, Max Herrick," she said. "Don't spoil sport. They

are both having a thoroughly good time."

Which scared me not a little. Seen from the writer's point of view the situation does bristle with possibilities.

"Great Scott!" I said feebly.

"Hadn't it occurred to you," she asked with much sweetness, and that particular twist to her lips that always makes me yearn for paper and pencil, "it is only in books that one can make one's characters do just as they should?"

"And not always then," I growled. "You don't mean to say that you think Kendal is falling in love with Nurse?"

"If I did . . . ?"

"Horrible. It would be nothing short of a tragedy."

"Think so? Oh, I don't know. He

admires pretty women. And she is very pretty, you know."

"Polly! That petrified creature!"

"She isn't petrified when she is talking to him. I have noticed quite a soft colour in her cheeks after they have been fighting for a while. And you notice he refers to her as — 'your little nurse.' When a man — especially a lawyer — calls a woman of normal size little . . .'"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Polly — the idea is too dreadful!"

"Work it out in a story," she suggested; and a few minutes later was typing busily.

Well — perhaps I shall do that, some day.

Come to think of it, Kendal is here much oftener than he used to be. I

must warn him. And, above all, I must put temptation out of his way by getting better as rapidly as possible.

Besides, Lindon calls her little. I must remind Polly of that.

Last night there was dead calm, and

clear, frosty air. The smoke from the factories stretched across the sky and

spread itself out fan-shape. And, in the terrace opposite, Herr Lindt was playing Rubinstein's Melody in F on his 'cello.

Girl, is music a terrible thing to you at times, as well as a beautiful? And was I quite a baby when I felt as if the pain of all the world was gathered into those throbbing notes? I remembered injustices done me when I was a child — injustices that I suffered again with the boy's ignorance, and the man's bitter knowledge.

And then I wanted Her — the beautiful face of her —the pretty ways that were so full of charm.

For she did mean something to me. Even though I have not told my story as your Man-from-the-Mallee did, and my hair has not gone white. You have

taken me at Polly's valuation, I suppose, and I cannot blame you. It has been rather a "Primrose path" so far. But I think I am capable of a love that would mean to me everything. Whether I am ever to inspire it . . .

Imagine this said with a sneer, and a mocking light in my eyes. Stage accompaniments, you Girl — how they appeal to women! You deserved that!

So your story is being written! Perhaps you are more to be pitied than I. It seems to me that finality is always better than suspense. I wish you could have told me more, of course, but, since you can't, I must respect your reticence, and never seek to break it down.

But if the man is treating you badly — has treated you badly — then I hope I may never meet him. I suppose I

am blundering, and have vexed you, or hurt you. That would be worse.

You would be interested in the Terrace opposite.

Six two-story houses constitute it, and in each house is some one who plays — something. A violin teacher lives at the farther end; the man next door goes in for piccolo and flute; the third holds a weary little teacher of music

whose brass plate sets forth the fact that she is A.T.C.L., and all the rest of it; and the end place, pretty well fronting my windows, is where Herr Ernst Lindt lives, moves, and has his being. His plate says Professor of Languages — and one might fancy the 'cello incidental but for the Melody in F. That has genius behind it.

He is quite a character; short, fat, and forcible. To hear him on the subject of The Fatherland is a liberal education. His eyes grow deep and misty, and one would wonder what induced him to leave it if one did not know of a certain Fraulein Elsa, who is "von great artiste — you unnerstand." She has promised to wait till this thoroughly good fellow has made some sort of position for himself out here. He

fondly dreams he can do it — teaching languages in a provincial town.

She is touring in Germany at present and her people very much object to the betrothal, although, as Lindt takes care to explain, he is of good birth, only poor. And he plods steadily on, and writes long letters full of the enormities of "zese Eenglish" to — "the girl he left behind him." Let us hope he will not share the fate of the Man-from-the-Mallee. One wonders — fears also — the life of a popular public singer will scarcely prepare this German fraulein for a quiet home with the Professor, as he loves to be called. Still — he is the man of her choice. He has read me extracts from her letters, and his face is a sight to see

"Mein Liebchen!" he says softly

under his breath — "mein Liebchen!"

Well . . . !

I have been looking again through your last long letter, seeing the fire of sheoak logs and the inglenook. Why don't you fly down and make me some toast?

Of course trees have souls. Don't you remember your Hans Christian Andersen on the Dryad? The pine trees have the lonely ones — the cedars, the sad — the poplars, the prim, superior ones. Query — can souls be prim? I leave you to follow things out.

What a bundle of energy Polly is these days! She used to keep her evenings free, but lately I have heard the click of her typewriter keys far into the night. And she simply will not listen to reason on the subject. Me, she

laughs at, derisively. I hope there is no special need, but one dare not question her. She is so quiet about herself, and so casual. It has always seemed to me in spite of our close friendship she wishes me to start from the day I came here. What she has left behind her of sorrow — of home life — must only be guessed at.

Did she tell you there was a prospect of my "halting through life" as you put it? Prophecy, or not, it seems rather likely. The sinews were touched, and at present massage is being tried — so far without result.

But in other ways I am wonderfully better. Nerves recovering tone, appetite enormous. I am even thinking out a new story! Good enough, isn't it?

We have such jolly evenings. Sometimes the tired little music teacher comes over and accompanies Herr Lindt — touches the keys with strange vigour

when one takes into consideration the slim, white fingers — and interprets a Master in a way that brings tears into the Professor's eyes.

"She has ze soul," he will say, while his bow wanders across his 'cello, drawing out fugitive notes that throb and vibrate through my room. "Ze leetle creature should go to my country. She vould be appreciated."

And it does seem sad, you Girl — that this musician's undoubted genius should expend itself in teaching scales to blundering pupils. Life — I suppose!

The other night they were here, and the Woman-in-White having gone to see some friends in an other part of the town, we had a specially good time.

After they left, Polly stayed on, and the fire was sulky. She had rather a talent in this direction, as no doubt you remember.

She was kneeling down on the carpet, and a flame suddenly leapt up and searched her face. This room is a big one, you must know, and the electric light near my lounge leaves the fireplace end almost in shadow.

She threw herself on to her pile of cushions, those little restless hands of hers clasped round her knees. And her face — I found myself wondering how a man who loved her would describe her — tried to forget for a moment that we were only friends, and studied her in silence.

Did I ever notice before how rarely lovely she is?

You know, it has been good for me, this comradeship. She takes it, and me, so naturally. I suppose our disregard of conventionalities would hor-

rify some estimable souls; but I do not need to tell you how profound is my reverence for this girl who is my chum in every sense of the word. My pal!

She usually favours me with such mocking indifference that I see that, and nothing else. But her face that night — for the space of the few minutes in which I merged myself in the identity of the man who loved her — seemed something apart — rare. Absurd, wasn't it?

For I am not in the least in love with Polly. Not in the very least. I write this, lest you should imagine that because I approve of the way her hair was about her forehead, and the quick, light movement of her . . . but you have already classified me as a sort

of "Sentimental Tommy," some distance after Barrie. I know.

She looked up. I think I must have simulated rather cleverly that other man who is not I, for her cheeks flamed, and her eyes flashed stormily.

"You," she said witheringly. "are looking sentimental. Were you thinking out a flowery sentence for your next letter?"

And then it was my turn to flush vexedly. She is so horribly unerring in her aim.

"What were you thinking about, fair lady?" I asked lightly.

"Fair lady!" she said with lifted eyebrows, and an amused drawl. "Oh, no — never that, Max. You must have been thinking about Stony Creek. There is only one Dream Girl. Do you

know that your letters always take double postage?"

"I would like to see her," I said irrelevantly.

And then - - I suppose you have told her all about that protégé of yours — she quot[illegible]me words of his very deliberately 'You would be disappointed. [illegible]e always wakes from dreams." [illegible]d I felt as if a chill wind had passed over me. For I mean to visit you some [illegible]y - do you hear? I realize you most vividly — you, and the garden with its hint of Japan — and the room [illegible] is lived in, and is home. And I wish . . .

But what [illegible]he use of wishing? Fairy godmothers are out of date — gone with pumpkin carriages, and the like. But oh — Dream Girl — one

wants sometimes to go back to Fairyland and believe in things — even in the beautiful princess!

Polly would say I am sentimentalizing again; and in the distance I catch the flutter of white under a silver-gray cloak. The controller of my destinies at this present stage will be here in a few minutes with the mechanical smile that never reaches her eyes, and a cool — "I must say I like the way you take the rest cure, Mr. Herrick."

She considers that I am improving under her tuition. That is refreshing, and gives me encouragment.

And — here she is! Picture the smile of compassion with which she will remove these evidences of correspondence, and proceed to take my temperature.

I shall bite that thermometer in two some day!

Auf wiedersehen!

Your devoted and repentant,

MAX HERRICK.

Some one was advising me to take to knitting the other day. It is supposed to exercise a soothing influence on the nerves. What would you suggest?

VIII

FROM THE DREAM GIRL

Just the opposite of dreamy
She laughs at sentimental woe,
Her eyes are always bright and beamy.
— BOURDILLON.

. . . Pure and true,
The good stars met in your horoscope,
Made you of spirit, fire, and dew.
— BROWNING.

POOR SENTIMENTAL TOMMY:

You should not have given me that hint; it is so delightful to find new names for people. Especially when they fit so perfectly! Don't knit, if you please — surely the days are not too long with all that you manage to crowd into them! It seems to me, that, for a man who is "laid by for repairs," you have rather a good time. I want to hear that Melody in F. It is a big favourite of mine. And of course the Herr Professor plays you Evening Star from Tannhauser? 'Cellos affect me.

And then — the new story!

I suppose you don't happen to be able to do caricatures — they would be

interesting? Send me a picture gallery — the Man-of-Law, and the tired little music teacher, and Herr Lindt. Even Polly — as you see her. Try to catch her when she is off guard some day, and you are looking at her with your own eyes; not those imaginary ones of the man who loves her. If I were you, my friend, I would let that one experiment be the last. Polly would resent that keenly — find it hard to forgive.

You — are rather an epicure in emotions, are you not — Sentimental Tommy?

I was very much amused over one part of your letter. Why should you imagine that "the man" in my life has treated me badly? Talk about blundering masculine judgment. I could see that you were quite ready to enter the

lists as my champion. How kind of you, Sir Knight!

Your deduction was not flattering to my vanity. You see me as a poor soul whom love has passed by, after just a casual call; don't you? I always notice that if a girl remains unmarried, the masculine members of her acquaintance jump to the conclusion that no one has wanted her. You are so irresistible, you creatures of razors and shaving brushes. You say to yourselves, or to each other, "Rattling nice girl — how on earth does it happen that no one has ever wanted to marry her?"

And we — well, the people behind the scenes laugh quietly to themselves, and nobody is hurt.

But I was going to tell you about Winsome. Does the name suggest a

picture? I want it to do just that. By the way — don't take a dislike to the Man-from-the-Mallee. How vicious you were about the stage accompaniments!

She is a little bit of a girl who has had no girlhood — who ought to be pretty, but who looks, as a rule, like a bleached flower. Her eyes so seldom sparkle — I have seen them look dewy, though — and the pink so rarely tinges her tiny face. It is all a bit pitiful.

Your description of the Terrace reminds me of her, for she comes of a family, each member of which plays something! They have elevated the playing from a means of livelihood to a profession, and are away at present in New Zealand.

Winsome and her father live quite

near the Chalet, and have rented an orchard for two years. She says that after one has been pursued by scales chromatic and diatonic issuing from

almost every room in the house — after one's meals have been eaten to the accompaniment of arpeggios and musical discords or otherwise — it is heaven

to be in this quiet spot. And she never means to copy music again!

She says this with an odd little droop about her tired mouth. She was fetch-and-carry for the rest, and her worst nightmare consists of giant notes that will not stay on their lines and spaces, but keep tumbling about all over the paper. And, as fast as she puts them back, they fall out again.

She would tell you she was not at all musical, and you might believe her — till you heard her sing. The child has soul, and it throbs in her voice.

There is a big room in this house that I have made into a music room. In it is my piano, a relic of former days, when the Grannie and I were better off. For it is rather a good one — a Broadwood Grand. I have tried

to educate the simple furniture up to it.

You should see the firelight dancing on the polished floor, and the rugs that supply the note of colour. The Grand stands on a little, raised platform — and it sounds . . .

And Winsome and I sing there, quite often.

Lately the Man-from-the-Mallee has been finding his way in. He sits by the fire with one hand shading his eyes, and listens. And I have wondered — just by being her sweet, tired, little self! It is calling out the man in him, and has given him an interest outside himself. And he seems to enjoy strolling up The Gap and talking to her father, the meekest, tamest soul it has ever been my lot to meet.

So I am dreaming dreams.

Winsome will not expect too much — will be content to give more than she receives. Child as she looks, she had the gate of Fairyland opened just a little way and then shut — leaving her outside. And perhaps you may be more interested in her story than in that of the Man-from-the-Mallee whose white hair you allude to so spitefully.

Her people have always lived in this neighbourhood, and I have known them for a long time. Joan, the eldest girl, is very gifted; but I consider her violin stops short somewhere. Her technique is fine; there is light and shade and her playing is descriptive. But — perhaps I am hypercritical — it has never spoken to me, once. Her face seen over her fiddle is always very calm

and dreamy, her bowing most graceful. But . . . the man in this case is a fine, strapping young fellow, who has haunted the family, and seemed to regard Winsome as his special property. She has been his confidante, mentor, what not, ever since he came into her life, an awkward schoolboy. And she counselled, and listened — and lost her heart. I thought, every one thought it could have but one ending. He came oftener than ever after the others went on tour.

And one night, I told myself that they would find themselves — and each other.

She was staying with me at the time, her father having gone on one of the camping expeditior his soul loves. And the man was very pale, and eager,

and wanted a long talk with Winsome. And for once her eyes sparkled, in spite of their weariness. She has never expected much from life — had never expected, till then. . . .

I put long trails of Virginia Creeper in the music-room, and the fire was glorious. And I thought a lot about them.

But it was Joan he wanted — Joan who has always taken things in her careless, imperious fashion.

Oh, you Writer of Stories — you can see it, can't you? The child listened — and I know how the colours went out and everything got gray and misty. She bore herself so bravely too. I think there must be a great many brave women in this world of ours! I can fancy how quietly she heard him, and how her face looked. I know how I

felt when she came out to me later, and clung to me for a minute, and I saw the frozen sweetness of her eyes, and the steady look into the future.

She had promised to help him in the matter; to even plead his cause with Joan. He was to write to her from time to time to let her know how he progressed as he followed his capricious ladylove from place to place.

"That is the best of having money," he said boyishly. "I shall haunt her till I win."

And that is just what he has been doing. Going about with them from town to town. Joan's smart, flippant letters have been full of descriptions of the disconsolate swain who appeared at all the concerts with the same absorbed look on his face.

At first she was laughingly impatient, and full of suggestions that Winsome should marry him and take him off her hands. And then . . .

"I've given in, Win, for peace sake. And, besides, Hal says he will give me three years in Leipzig if I will settle down and marry him at the end of the time. He is a real good old sort. So

I've said yes — firmly — and everybody is envying me my ring.'

She showed me the letter, and watched me while I read it. I wonder if you have noticed, you man of sentiment, that, as a rule, it is the woman who demands, who obtains? She asks imperiously — and takes.

Self sacrifice is accepted graciously — and then thrown carelessly aside when it becomes wearisome. The girl who grasps with both hands, and laughs lightly over her triumph, scores every time!

But I don't envy her, you know. Life — to me, means something very different.

And Winsome — it has struck me lately that she has not been looking nearly so tired. Once or twice she has

even ventured to contradict my friend of the Mallee. If I can see them quarrel in real earnest, I shall begin to practise The Wedding March! And the small girl has gentle blood — she would not be out of place even in his stately halls — with love as beautifier! He showed me a photo of his home the other day. It looks — English . . . all that means.

Spring is here. Did you know it? The garden is calling, and I shall put gloves on and grub busily in the warm fragrant mould. There are heaps of annuals to transplant, and dead leaves to clear away — and another year to begin.

The wild violets are out, and the myrtle. And you can't see them. Poor — Sentimental Tommy!

I think your nurse must be an exceptional woman, in spite of hypodermics and clinical thermometers, and — nourishment. How particularly savage you were about that. And I suppose it never entered your head to reflect how terribly complicated matters would have become if she had ended by falling in love with you?

Be thankful that to her you are only the patient. I shudder when I think of what life might have held for you. For you would have given in, you know!

You hadn't considered that phase of the question? Of course, you hadn't. But nurses I have known — and there is the heading for a magazine article for you. Work it out. Real, and imaginary ones.

I have a profound respect for her — your handwriting is ever so much steadier. Be decently grateful, and don't expect every woman you meet to spoil you.

I should watch the Man-of-Law — it looks suspicious. But, for goodness' sake, don't attempt to warn him. Why you silly man, don't you know that that would be the very way to precipitate matters? Damn her with faint praise if you really imagine anything you say will have the slightest weight. I should leave well alone. I once tried to match-make — the man fell in love with the wrong girl.

And that is what you men generally do.

Your

DREAM GIRL

So you want to go back to Fairyland, and the beautiful Princess? Well, you may, some day. Save those looks for her, and don't waste any of them on the little everyday girl who is your comrade. I understand perfectly what her friendship means to you — in face of the fact that she hasn't told you much about her life. You seem to have discovered that, in spite of the typewriter and the office, Polly Carrol can remain a gentlewoman. There are others, too.

And you reverence her? Good! But wouldn't she laugh over that? I can imagine the sweeping bow with which you would be favoured.

I do know a great deal about her, naturally — she is my closest friend. But what Polly has

not told you. Patience, Sentimental T———y!

You were going to tell me about the Man-of-Law. I am waiting. Is it possible that you are jealous of him — with Nurse?

IX

FROM MAX HERRICK

How sour sweet music is,
When time is broke, and no proportion kept!
So is it with the music of men's lives.
—*Richard II., Act V., Scene* 5.

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank.
—*Merchant of Venice.*

GIRL:

I am forwarding some sketches in answer to your request. Whether I can draw or not you must decide. At least I can vouch for all being true likenesses — that of Lindt, the best, perhaps. Though, don't you think Polly is rather good, and doesn't she pose perfectly for Dear Lady Disdain. Another minute, and she might pour the vials of her wrath out upon me — at least, so I fancy. You may curl your lip over the whole lot. As for Kendal — that is his usual "Gentleman of the jury" attitude — a little, weary smile at the corners of his mouth, and a sort of "Hold on — there's

more to come. I haven't started yet."

So I haven't told you enough about him — and you suggest jealousy as a

possible cause. That is quite beneath contempt! It is for his own sake that I shudder at the thought of an entanglement in the direction you

wot of. I am behind the scenes, and I know.

I am breathing more freely as time goes on. Polly scared me a bit, I confess, and you didn't mend matters. But women don't know everything -- Even women who live in Chalets, and know men from the Mallee, and little, tired girls with quaint names. I like your Winsome.

But, I say, take one bit of advice from me — keep your eye on the Man-from-the-Mallee. It may be your singing he listens to on the firelight evenings! Just a friendly warning, you know.

But Spring is here, as you remark, and I suppose most of your time is spent on the balcony!

This is going to be a hot, dry season, they say. But, blow the north wind

never so fiercely, Nurse's face is as cool and white as the spotless attire she affects. This exasperates me. Kendal and I were discussing her yesterday, and I chuckled. For if this sounds like love, I have never dropped across the genuine article.

He gave his dry smile, and said thoughtfully:

"Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null, dead perfection, no more."

I thought it quite conclusive. A man does not talk in that way about THE woman. And he grinned appreciatively when I assured him that her mind was made up of shelves with everything correctly labelled, and put away in its right place; and that she never forgot where each article was.

Give in? You — Mountain Fairy!

I stopped short just then, and [illegible] resuming an hour later. Where do you think I am?

Out on the veranda . . . OUT! And even though the journey was accomplished in an ignominious fashion on crutches, with Nurse closely in attendance — here I am; and half the town has stopped at the gate to tell me how glad it is.

To be sure, Polly, discovering by some occult process of reasoning that I was elated, immediately proceeded to take me down by assuring me I was the latest sensation — but the evening air is blowing about me, and a screen at my feet shuts off the too inquisitive public; and the electric light just near enables me to scribble this to you.

From every window of the Terrace opposite floats music. They seem to be serenading me. Herr Lindt's room is lighted up . . . he has forgotten his blind as usual, and I can see his fair, jolly face rapt with inspiration. Listen, you Girl . . . it is that identical Evening Star you love so much. I am not quite near enough to see the heimweh in his eyes, but I can imagine it. He is dreaming of Elsa . . . his fairy princess.

Love is blind. I have seen her photo, and I assure you she is nothing more than a good-looking German Fraulein, with a merry twinkle in her eyes. But to him . . . you may fill in the blanks.

He has had new pupils lately, and his dream expands. According to him,

she is "Von leetle daisy — that is, how you call it . . . not?"

And when I tell him that she will certainly have forgotten him by the time he gets back, he spreads his hands on his knees and says placidly,

"Ach — so? Vat a nonsense!"

It must be good to be so sure.

The little music teacher came to her window just then and looked out. The heat is wilting her, and she is very white and drawn. She is giving her last lesson for the year, and rest is coming none too quickly. I hate to see women look as she is looking. From what Polly says, Xmas isn't going to mean much to her. She is not going away for her holidays . . . cannot afford it. And here am I, with more money than I know what to do with! What an

unequal old world it is. Of course I want to do all sorts of things . . . but just because I happen to be a single, unattached man . . . my hands are tied!

Her pupil, a great, awkward child with fingers like skewers, is making every mistake it is possible to compass. Crash! Does she know that my nerves are strung on red-hot wires . . . seemingly not, for on she goes with a persistence worthy of a better object. And I meditate on the folly of parents who will persist in the belief that music . . . music can be taught to any one. What it is meaning to the worn little teacher I can faintly guess. Somehow, her face, or the still, hot air — the wind has dropped — has set this evening in a minor key.

It only needed Polly to come out at that moment, and walk to this secluded end of the veranda, standing where the light streamed over her hair.

Is it altogether my fancy, or is this heat trying her more than last year's did! She assures me flippantly that she is much nicer as a Winter than as a Summer Girl.

"Don't get fanciful, Max," she says, rather crossly. "I hate to feel that I am being watched."

So I must keep my fears to myself. I am not half satisfied. Her eyes are not so often merry . . . they look . . . if one were not talking about Polly . . . almost sad. And her face is so dead white. Kendal says she is working too hard, and has told her so. She takes it quite gently from him

. . . almost gratefully. But from me! I don't think Polly should treat me in such an off-hand manner . . . shut me out of her life as she does.

"Aren't you nearly finished?" she asked, saucily. "If you overtire yourself the first time I don't know what Nurse will say."

"Nurse!" I said . . . and you may guess at the exasperation in my tone. "If my life is to be planned out by her I might as well go into a glass case at once. It is my fixed belief that she lies awake at nights thinking out new restrictions. When a fellow is getting better, too!"

Polly laughed. Perhaps it is because I have heard it so seldom lately that I noticed what a pretty laugh she has. It ripples so.

"Sorry!" she said, penitently. "I should have avoided the sore spot. You are getting more fractious than ever . . . that is a good sign."

"Hang it all," I said irritably, "if you only knew how long I to throw away these crutches and race you down to the gate. . . . "

"I know," she said softly, "I know. Don't ever suppose that I forget, Max. It is rather an upside-down world, isn't it? So many in this town to-night longing for the rest that is irksome to you . . . so many."

She said it under her breath, and did not stir when I said incredulously, "Polly!"

At that instant my half-defined fears were full grown. You know how erect she is, how full of unconquerable energy! Well, gradually she seems to have lost that look and to have become listless. She can't be sickening for something?

Dream Girl . . . I have the feeling that you are needed . . . you, and no other. You are not always to be in misty distance . . . do you hear? If ever a time should come when Polly

needed you . . . Girl . . . . you wouldn't refuse to materialize then?

She seems sadly alone, and a man blunders so. Come to think of it, Scott, M. D. has looked at her pretty searchingly lately — he has rooms here, you know.

Solicitude from me she will not accept — she would tell you it is not my rôle. What is, I wonder? To grasp with both hands as did that imaginary woman of yours! I suppose Polly would say so. And you?

"I am thinking," she said, "how beautiful the creek will be to-night."

"The creek, Polly!"

"Hasn't she told you about it . . . your Dream Girl? Oh, I know it quite well, I have stayed with her several times. Max . . . it is fairylike

. . . the shine of the water over the stones, and the cool, delicious bubbling sound of it. There is one bend where the boulders almost meet, and a myrtle tree has taken root. I keep seeing it . . . the flowers trailing in the water. And the moonlight has just touched the mountain — picked out the rugged granite, and the stunted trees. . . ."

There was intense longing in her voice. Her face was very wistful, and tired. That intangible fear had me in its grip again.

"You want to be there, Polly," I said. "Well . . . why not!"

She looked at me with a hunted expression that I am going to remember.

"Don't, Max," she said, unsteadily. "Don't."

Oh, Girl . . . you with the second sight, and almost the fairy wand . . . exercise your magic here. If the difficulty is money . . . think a way out of it. She needs a change sadly — it must be managed somehow. She — need never guess that I had anything to do with it . . . your woman's wit will find a hundred ways out . . . it must.

For we are in for a record summer, they say.

Transplant Polly to the mountains, and the creek, and the garden. Let her fight the Man-from-the-Mallee . . . even that would be good for her. And when she comes back — if I don't find out all there is to be found out about you, my Lady! ! !

Think . . . think! And don't

delay. There is something sapping her strength.

If you don't — well, I shall discover for myself where this mysterious Stony Creek is . . . even though you have so carefully covered up tracks, and have your letters posted under cover to Polly. How well you have thought things out!

Again . . . music . . . the band this time, playing a quickstep in the Reserve.

Yes, quite ready, Nurse!

Worriedly yours,

MAX HERRICK.

My apologies to Winsome — let me know how the little idyll progresses! She has been, in printer's parlance — crowded out this time.

Your pardon, Lady!

X

FROM THE DREAM GIRL

The days come and go like muffled and veiled figures sent from a distant, friendly party; but they say nothing, and if you do not use the gifts they bring, they carry them as silently away.

—EMERSON.

DEAR DANA GIBSON THE SECOND:

You can sketch . . . quite nicely. I do not wonder your pride was touched when I asked you whether you could draw. I am looking at each in turn, and thinking busily. Polly is right . . . your nurse is very pretty. And that looking-glass study of yourself — which I did not ask for, Sir Egotist, but am very glad to have — is it a true likeness? Because — if so, a man with that chin

should have done something with his life.

Polly's is surely flattered? I think when you drew her, you must have allowed that imaginative look to once more creep into your eyes. If she had seen it . . . well . . . I have warned you. Certainly, she is Dear Lady Disdain . . . but, even loving her as I do, I am sure you have idealized her face.

It was good of you to act upon my suggestion so promptly, you must be second-cousin-once-removed to the man who makes his living by lightning sketching. Sepia wash, too . . . how beautifully you have finished them off— And what a pity you have so much money . . . there might have been the makings of an artist in you. . . .

While I am on this subject, it is good of you to think of it, but we are not in Fairyland, remember: she would guess at once — Polly, I mean.

I shall scold her for working so hard . . . but beyond that! And I think there is need . . . for her to work. She may have many little troubles that will account for the worn look. I think she has been a bit sad for quite a long time. And all my magic fails. Give her a steady, patient friendship that will not question too much . . . give her your very best. And don't worry her if she looks "dead white" pretty often. Life isn't a dream. Polly takes it seriously — has to take it seriously.

You said a while ago that you were studying up on medical subjects so as to

impress Nurse. Poor fellow — I imagine your helpless flounderings, and extend pity to you.

Some years ago I was bitten with the craze for First Aid to the Injured. Living in this lonely part of the world one has to know a little about bush surgery.

At the first exam. many were the experiences. The medico who questioned us viva voce was a burly giant with a rough face, and the kindest heart in the world. Two of us were in the torture room at the same time, and my companion completely lost her head.

"This boy," said our inquisitor, indicating an unfortunate youngster who had been the victim of our bandaging all through the course of lectures — "has been poisoned by gas. What treatment would you suggest?"

"What — treatment?"

"Exactly. This young lady has given the symptoms, but you know there is never much time to waste in cases of poisoning of any description. You are twelve miles away from a doctor . . . ."

His voice was mild and insinuating, his eyes encouraging.

"I would . . ."

"Just so, that is what I wish to get at. You would . . . ?"

There was a silence that could be felt. The unfortunate girl's eyes rolled in a frenzied fashion.

"I was well up in all the other poisons," she whispered tragically to me.

"I would suggest," said the doctor, blandly, "that you pay a little attention

to the patient whose condition is rapidly becoming critical!"

"I would . . . take him out into the garden" — this, with a desperate plunge — "and — hose him. Oh, but that isn't right, either — there might not be a hose. I should certainly take him out into the garden!"

The doctor's smile was inscrutable.

When we were given our papers, a little society butterfly looked up into his face with melting sweetness.

"What would you do in a case of snake-bite, Doctor, twenty miles from the nearest township?"

"What would you do, Madam?"

"Goodness! I can't imagine. I know" . . . this with a brilliant smile, "I should keep the child quiet and send for the doctor." He looked thoughtful.

Winsome was indeed crowded out of your last letter. But I am going on with my story. If you are tired of these epistles you have only to say so, and I shall ring off. Indeed, I feel the time to be approaching when this will be the wisest course to pursue. You are on crutches now, you see, and I shall soon "Fade away and gradually die." You did not send me a sketch of the Dream Girl . . . as you picture her!

As for your remarks about the Man-from-the-Mallee . . . I should smile. Fall in love with me, indeed! I think they have almost reached an understanding of each other . . . and it came about in this way. And when I tell you about it, you will understand why you haven't had a letter for such a long time.

A few miles up The Gap there has been a tragedy that has spread itself out over a good many years. A man and a woman, and a love that failed to hold . . . quite an old story. She was beautiful, and had a wild, lawless streak in her, and our quiet life grew unbearable to her. So she went, and for a long time nothing was heard of her. And the man lived on alone, dourly; and let the thing bite into his soul. He spoke of her, and of it, once to me, but only once . . . and we have grown used to his face of frozen misery. It has been one of the things that belonged to us — and The Gap.

Lately he went away, to see the old folk at home he told me in a half-unwilling fashion. And, soon after he went, the unexpected happened. For

she came back; to die, as it seemed at first — a wreck of the wilful creature who had broken the bars of her cage. What her life has been we can only guess at — I fancy she would call freedom by a different name, now.

Winsome found her, desperately ill, cowering over a fire she had made in her deserted home. And Winsome goes straight to the heart of things, always.

I can fancy how she talked, in her gentle, tired way that moonlight night. But a great deal has had to be guessed at, for she has been very ill. And we were not to ask any questions that would agitate, the doctor said.

One thing . . . it was the Man-from-the-Mallee who told it me, with an odd catch in his voice, and a gentler

light in his eyes than has been there for many a weary day.

"She fancied that the touch of a good woman's lips might hold back the bitter, mocking words that were wounding her

The light in the deserted house

so. And she kissed her . . . with that throat!"

It was in one of his long night

rambles that he came upon them . . . attracted by the light in the deserted home. And when I told him that I was sure God had sent him in that particular direction, he nodded, sombrely.

She had done a great deal by that time, our little Winsome; and the poor, weary soul, fast in the clutches of diphtheria, was tossing restlessly on the bed, and her nurse was watching for the help she had prayed for.

Even then, she would not let him enter the house . . . she has, throughout her life thought for others . . . and on his way for the doctor, he stopped for a few minutes to tell me all he knew.

And I looked into his eyes, and saw what he was suffering.

"I will go to her," I said. "Grannie

is too old for there to be any fear of infection — and I never take anything like that."

He thanked me mutely.

So I have been in quarantine . . . and it has been a strange experience . . . the only break in the monotony being Doctor Kensington's visits, and those of the Man-from-the-Mallee. We never allowed him to come nearer than the garden path, and greatly he has chafed at the restrictions. But it was necessary to keep communication with the other world — and the Chalet!

The little grandmother rose nobly to the occasion, and every day sent up by the doctor or our Mallee friend, food stuffs that would have kept going a garrison.

And it is all over now — there is no need to disinfect this letter for you.

But I shall never forget these weeks. The lonely night watches — and the delirium. The immediate danger was soon over, thanks to anti-toxin; but the poor creature was worn out, and heart-sick besides. And, as soon as she recovered, Winsome took it — badly. I shall never forget that man's eyes when I had to tell him — the utter despair. But he wasted no time.

A specialist all the way from Melbourne . . . two trained nurses . . . everything she needed, and much she did not. I realized what gold could do . . . with love behind it.

She was very ill . . . and it has been a fight. At first the city man was more than doubtful.

"No stamina," he said as he was driving away to catch his train. "Worn out before her time."

But she has come back — to a protecting love that has lifted my poor Man-from-the-Mallee — will lift him.

And she knows it now: the knowledge is bringing a rare beauty into her face. She looks — alive!

And the nurses have gone — fancy a wee country home like that turned into a hospital —! and the man has come back. And two people who have been through the fire are learning to trust each other again — and to forgive.

Do you know . . . the summer is trying even up here among the mountains. And I cannot think of another word to write. Shall this be the last of

your Dream Girl? She has gone far enough along the road of life with you, and wants a long rest. Imagine her vanishing into the mists, and purple distance.

D. G.

XI

FROM MAX HERRICK

I do beseech you —
Chiefly that I may set it in my prayers —
What is your name?
—*The Tempest, Act III., Scene I.*

—I am Sir Oracle,
And, when I ope my lips, let no dog bark!
—*Merchant of Venice.*

YOU EXASPERATING . . . .

I imagine nothing of the kind. Ring off, indeed? Not much! You have come into my life, and you are going to stay there. I shall allow you — ten minutes for refreshments . . . say!

Your letter annoyed me, interested me, and finished up by worrying me.

What was the man who isn't treating you badly thinking of when he allowed you to take such risks? It sent a shiver down my spine . . . Diphtheria!!

That Man-from-the-Mallee wants his head punched. . . . You may say what you like about him, but it is very

evident to me that he was thinking of no one but his blessed Winsome!

I beg your pardon, Lady . . . the girl was a brick, of course. But then, so were you — you ran an equal risk! So my hat is off to both. But I'm angry with you, all the same.

This has made me determined to find out all I can in reference to you. I am setting about it in dead, grim earnest. So I give you fair warning.

As for letting you "fade away and gradually die" . . . bosh. Yes, I repeat it — bosh!

We have taken too much interest in each other's lives to ring down the curtain at this early stage. I mean to discover all that is to be discovered concerning you. I . . . Max Herrick!

If you don't write at once on receipt of this . . .

Disgustedly yours,
SOME DISTANCE AFTER DANA GIBSON.

So glad you appreciated the sketches. Am forwarding with this my idea of the Dream Girl.

XII

FROM THE DREAM GIRL

Fear not, . . . take thy fortunes up;
Be that thou know'st thou art, and then thou
art
As great as that thou fearest.
—*Twelfth Night, Act V., Scene* 1.

MONSIEUR:

After such subtle flattery you make it difficult for me to insist upon letting the silence fall between us. That sketch is quaint and fanciful, and I like it.

You are a bit of a genius. Of course it is not in the least like me . . .

Do you know, you have done an odd thing — accidentally, no doubt. You have idealized . . . very much idealized . . . Polly's face! Did you show it to her before you sent it to me? It would have amused her not a little.

For what purpose should we continue this correspondence? Soon you will be

ready to take up a man's work in the world — your soul is ready now, I think.

That being the case . . . you have dreamt it all . . . wake up!

D. G.

XIII

FROM MAX HERRICK

Oft expectation fails, and most oft there where most it promises.

— *All's Well That Ends Well.*

We are such stuff as dreams are made on.

—*The Tempest.*

GIRL:

I shall not wake up! If anything is more real to me than you are, I shall like to know what it is!

Allow me to inform you, Madam, that Max Herrick is once more Six-foot-one-Vertical . . . and that in a fortnight's time that Woman-in-White will be taking on a new case.

And I will not stand any nonsense. This is my first and last word on the subject. Just when everything is getting so interesting, too!

Oh, I could laugh . . . you have been so far out of it, you and Polly . . . prepare to feel as small as you should!

Last night the Man-of-Law came, bringing with him . . . The Girl . . . looking very pleased with herself.

And Nurse . . . I ought to save this for another letter . . . measure for measure Nurse . . . are you paying attention? . . . is engaged to a fellow who is travelling on the Continent just now! The Man-of-Law reminded her of him, hence the pink colour, and the animation. She was merely keeping her hand in. But haven't I enjoyed the thought of telling you!

I told Kendal how near I had been to warning him, and he smiled. His smile means quite a lot.

Nurse's best fellow is little, and has twinkling eyes. She unbent so far as to show me his photo last night.

"He looks — plucky," I said, tentatively. She actually laughed.

"You think he needs to be?" she asked, tolerantly.

"I suppose," I hazarded — "he is very fond of you?"

And then I got a shock. For her eyes positively softened, and got dreamy.

"I think he is," she said under her breath. And did not mention temperatures that evening.

Talking about temperatures . . . this heat is awful. If I were only the Man-from-the-Mallee now, and could . . . let me be sure I quote correctly . . . "walk over the mountains, down The Gap, and into your lives."

If my hair would go white I suppose that would constitute some claim on you ——

Girl — there is a mocking light in my eyes . . . a sneer is curving my lips . . . I am speaking in low, broken sentences . . . I — have — a — headache! (This last, is literal fact!) To our next — and first — merry meeting!

MAX.

XIV

FROM THE DREAM GIRL

But there's more in me than thou understand'st.

— *Troilus and Cressidd.*

I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick; nobody marks you!

— *Much Ado About Nothing.*

SIR EGOTIST:

I am sorry for the headache — but all the same — this is Good-bye.

My congratulations to the Man-of-Law, and the Woman-in-White. I feel quite troubled to think that "little bit of property" can't be "made over jintly."

I really am too weary to write any more. Don't you understand . . . I . . wish to write.

THE DREAM GIRL.

It was not in the contract that you were to get so desperately interested in my concerns! Anyway . . . this is final!

XV

FROM MAX HERRICK

Wipe not out the rest of thy services by leaving
me now;
The need I have of thee, thine own goodness
hath made;
Better not to have had thee than thus to want
thee

—*Winter's Tale, Act IV.*

GIRL:

I never knew before that Shylock was a woman!

M. H.

XVI

FROM MAX HERRICK

"For Love, the King, so many names there be,
So many aspects doth His beauty wear,
Some passing sweet, and some so strange that we
Scarce recognize, and will not know him fair;
'Nay, thou art Pain,' we cry with shrinking heart;
And veil our faces that we may not see;
'Yet grief,' he answers, 'is Love's counterpart,
Who shuns him, shuts his door as well on me.'"

DREAM GIRL.

I am writing this though it seems terribly likely that it may never reach your eyes. If you had only trusted me more!

It was not idle curiosity, and it has grown to be sore need. I have so fallen into the habit of sending you my moods by post . . . this, though I must write it, does not seem likely to reach you.

But you are somewhere — and, if there be anything in mental telepathy — you must break the silence. You must.

It is not only my need, though that is sore enough — but Polly's.

I have been dreaming too long . . . and the mists have rolled away. And I am fronting a chasm. I suppose it is always this way. What was it that your Man-from-the-Mallee said — "Everything was too late in his life —!"

And, if you ever read this, you will say the gnawing pain at my heart is not very real — or I could not write about it. . . . But you do not know.

We are having record heat. Day after day insupportably hot, and at night, strong east winds that have a blight in them. One feels they hold disease . . . death. As, indeed, they do.

Folk have ceased to talk about the weather — it is typhoid instead; and the question is, who next? For there is a pestilence raging in the place.

Each day Scott comes in with a graver face, and I do not ask him now as I did at first, "Any more cases, Doctor?"

For the thing has come too near to be more than whispered. We have it in this very house. And it is Polly . . . Polly.

And I know that if the life that is flickering so uncertainly should go out, it will take all that is best of me with it. I know . . . at last.

Girl . . . if you had only let me do what I wanted to do. . . . Now, when it is too late, my money can be used for her. As you said — "Gold . . . with love behind it."

But it can't give life . . . it can't undo these months of drudgery that have been steadily sapping her

strength away while I looked on, and did not understand.

If she had been with you . . . oh, I don't want to reproach you — when you know, it will be hard enough for you. I tell myself that you will miss her letters, that a time will come when you will write to me questioning the silence. And I must wait for that.

When you know, you will come as you went to Winsome. This — is Polly. . . .

A while ago Nurse came in. I did not ask the question that is always on my lips — she spoke without that.

"Quite bad, Mr. Herrick. You want the truth, don't you? The poor little soul has nothing to fight with."

But her eyes were sorry for me.

There is no disguise between us. She seems to understand.

Am I too circumstantial this time? For oh — Girl . . . this is the real thing. It hurts . . . cruelly.

I am waiting here powerless, and in the room across the hall lies a shadowy Polly whose soul seems far away — and always restless. And all my love cannot reach her — all my deep love.

Perhaps . . . if I had wakened sooner! What do you say? Love can do such mighty things. I am thinking of all that would have been possible — if she had cared.

I would have made her care . . . it is not possible I could have failed . . . I would have taken her by storm.

I was remembering a while ago Betsy

Trotwood's "Oh, Trot — blind, blind, blind."

Why are we allowed to be so blind? You — have loved — can you tell me?

Memory is a searchlight that is relentless. It shows me that I always cared: a fire as well, for it sears to agony.

Dream Girl, even you must have guessed — and have laughed at my folly in supposing that that other . . .

This is part of my very being.

If you could be here . . . caring for her. You might have let me know who, and where you are. I have wild pictures of your coming to her — calm, strong, self-reliant. And I could have talked my heart out to you.

It is some small comfort that I can walk again . . . to have lain . . . !

The east wind has started up again . . . one feels it carries death. . . .

They will not let me see her — she is very delirious, and in her intervals of consciousness too utterly weak to risk any agitation. Does that tell you how bad she is — Polly, who used to rally me, and scold me, and rouse me to battle?

This room is full of her . . . memories that spring at me. I see her everywhere.

And I want her in my arms.

I am listening all the time — and there is so much to listen to. For the nights are horrors. It is not Polly who is there, but some one who talks endlessly . . . laughs, and sings, little broken snatches that are always merry . . . that break my heart.

But worse times come when she is typing . . . and she cannot remember.

Yesterday they left her for a few minutes while Nurse consulted with the doctors . . . and I stole across the passage, and stood looking down at her. And though I was so near, she did not know me, while every fibre of me was crying, "Polly — I love you." But her soul was right away. I could not reach it.

Oh — if you had seen her, you who love her, too — the little, little creature.

I crept away before Nurse returned. And I am wondering how much I gained. I cannot forget. I say to myself, "That wasn't Polly!"

Many times a day they come, the

doctors who are so sadly overworked these times . . . and there have been three consultations with a Melbourne specialist already.

Even you cannot deny me this now . . . and if you did! Love has rights. If any earthly power can save her. . . .

Lindon has just been, and for the fiftieth time I am so deadly sure he wants me to be prepared for something. But is one ever prepared for that?

His eyes are tired, and sad. They have all loved her . . . we have had to stop folk coming to the door . . . the bell disturbed her — and there were so many.

"You must save her," I said. And he smiled wearily.

"All I can do," he said. And then was off. And I have to face the night with that. Then Nurse ——

"We are changing the treatment a little—she is no worse—really!"

And . . . almost abruptly—"I suppose you don't believe in prayer?"

And I thought for an instant . . . that it would be good to have a God who would listen . . . and answer!

She is very delirious again, as she always is about this time of night, and Nurse is soothing her gently. But it only reaches her for a while. And the wind rushes in through my windows with a dry, gasping sound . . . and the stars are bright. Horribly bright.

The ice can has just stopped with a fresh supply but they might pack her in ice, and it seems as if that cruel

temperature would rage on. The real danger is the heart . . . she has had one or two nasty collapses already.

Strange, isn't it? I am remembering only her merry moods to-night. I keep seeing her on her pile of cushions at the fire that was always so jolly last winter — her mouth curving mischievously as she lectured me.

And her eyes . . . ah, I must have known even then that they were the most beautiful in the world . . . misty, and shining — and wistful. And I would give all I have if she could be here now to fight me in the old way.

Just across the hall . . . and a whole world between us!

Nurse again . . . I think she realizes how horribly restless I am. It is Polly's own wish that I shall not see

her . . . she made them promise at the very first. I must think that out.

Oh, Dream Girl . . . you must come! If — Fairyland was best after all — for there, wishes had wings.

The doctor is back . . . both of them are back.

She is worse . . . very much worse. And the night grows more stifling. It will never be cool again, I think.

There will be no sleep for any one . . . how she has won love. . . .

The moon was blood-red when she rose . . . even now, is glowing like a ball of fire. Folk are out on verandas, paths, anywhere. In a few hours the sun will be back . . . it seems as if he has never been away . . . and the papers will be full of sensational

articles about the record weather, and the sudden deaths from sunstroke, or graphic accounts of madness from the fierce heat. And I shall still be waiting . . . or I shall know.

The air is full of insects that make the silence of the house more noticeable. They buzz and drone, and dash against the electrolier with a clicking sound that rasps my nerves past endurance.

Polly seems quieter. Oh, Girl . . . Girl . . . I could not bear that! She was always so much alive . . . and she will fight. . . . She never gave in to anything!

To-day, they took her hair off. The doctors were anxious for this days ago, but Nurse's heart failed her. She brought it in to me a while ago, and held the thick, curling mass as if she loved it.

But it seemed to me part of Polly . . . something live . . . and I have put it away. I — shall not look at it again.

Dawn already — bright and glaring. A cloudless sky, and menace in the sting of the wind. Polly talks excitedly of her typewriter, and some letters that must be attended to. Once I heard my own name. It must be that she will want to see me ——

Lindon again. . . . We shall soon know, he says. And left me to imagine.

Twenty-four hours . . . fourteen hundred and forty minutes to be lived through. He thinks by that time . . . and yet, I would keep them back if I could.

It is going to be the hottest day we have had.

XVII

FROM MAX HERRICK

When some beloved voice, that was to you
Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,
And silence against which you dare not cry
Aches round you like a strong disease and new . . .
What hope? what music will undo
That silence to your sense? Not friendship's sigh,
Not reason's subtle count; not melody
Of viols, nor of pipes that Faunus blew;
Not songs of poets, nor of nightingales
Whose hearts leap upward through the cypress trees
To the dear moon; nor the angel's sweet All-hails,
Met in the smile of God: nay, none of these.
Speak Thou, availing Christ!—and fill this pause.
—MRS. BROWNING.

GIRL:

Do you remember, how to the Man-from-the-Mallee all the world seemed to be dying! The papers made ghastly reading to-day. Eleven o'clock, and in this sheltered room the temperature is 112. What will it be by afternoon! And still not a cloud to break up the brass of the sky. The death rate even in this town is something to sicken one.

And I must write, or I shall lose my reason. Write — though the feeling that you may never read these letters adds to the unreality of everything.

Do you remember the woman, who, when her brother died kept on writing

letters "To Maurice in Heaven" . . . till the unbearable silence overcame her, and stifled her?

Girl . . . where are you? You must be going to know some day, or surely even I could not have the heart . . .

I have wondered whether you are ill, too, and I remember the risk you ran, and how terribly infectious diphtheria is — and that last, tired letter. Perhaps while I am listening here you are battling for your life. And I shall lose you both.

This will be written in snatches. If what they fear is coming, comes — I am to go to her. And any moment . . . Half an hour ago Herr Lindt was here, carrying carefully some delicacy for "ze leetle creature." He comes over the road

many times in the day, and so far, his offerings have been singularly inappropriate.

This time it was a monstrous crayfish . . . and he entreated me to plead with the doctors that she might be allowed to "peeck von leetle beet." He is convinced that they are starving her, and cannot be made to understand. He sits and talks about her with the tears streaming down his cheeks. He remembers everything she has said and done, I think. And he has never once jarred. To-day it was almost more than I could bear . . . he has not wavered in his certainty that she will recover. And to hear him talking like that, when I know . . .

When he left me he gripped my hand, and we stood for a moment looking at each other.

Herr Lindt is convinced that they are starving her.

"Eet ees that you lov her as I lov mein liebchen," he said, brokenly. "Not?"

"Yes," I said. And he went away without another word. He has never touched his 'cello since she has been ill.

Word has come that there will be no ice to-day . . . the machinery has broken down under the tremendous pressure.

Girl . . . I am going in to say good-bye!

Yes . . . I wrote that yesterday, and to-day . . . ? I wonder how the widow felt when her son came back to her from the dead. . . . No, I don't wonder at all . . . I know.

She is going to live . . . so weak, that it is a question of scarcely breathing

our hopes, but over the worst, and with her face toward recovery. I am sure of it.

And because you are going to read these letters after all — what a budget there will be for you to go through — I can bear to tell you about yesterday.

When Nurse came in for me, it seemed as if everything had stopped. I wondered almost at the clock ticking heavily in the hall. The room was very still, and hot to suffocation, though the wet sheet at the window made a little current of cool air near the bed.

But I only noticed that dully. I saw nothing but the little, cropped head sunk so deeply in the pillows.

"Is she suffering?" I said . . . or some one said . . . it did not seem to be I. But Polly's face answered

the question. Tiny, and wasted as it was, every line had gone out of it. It was the face of a child.

I . . . had heard of that, before.

Nurse's voice came from a distance . . . miles away.

"I don't need to tell you to think only of her — you have done that, all along."

And, oh . . . Girl . . . think of talking like that before Polly . . . and she taking no notice. It was ghastly.

I was so sure she would know me . . . I held her hand closely. And her eyelids were half shut, like a dying bird's.

And I knew that she was going from me — that I was to see her go. That I could clasp her hand tightly, but it would slip out of mine.

And then . . . oh, Dream Girl, when that story of yours has ended happily, and there are children to put to bed . . . tell them about Him . . . let them get to know Him, then. It was such a wonderful thing that happened to me.

I knew that Polly was going — and that all my agony was powerless to keep her back. And — like a flash — came the memory of One who, when He was on earth, healed the sick, I went right back to childhood . . . and the child's faith came strongly, strongly. All the years of unbelief blotted out, and as if they had never been.

I knew why the Christ of God won the love of the heart. . . . In the deeps of life — one needs Him.

And I felt that He was in the room

. . . and the world had gone back two thousand years. And it was the little maiden He had come to waken to life. . . .

It did not seem as if I had to ask Him . . . after that first wild cry that surely reached!

The little, drooping face turned ever so slightly on the pillow, and her eyes unclosed listlessly. And they were weary . . . but Polly!

And I said, "Polly — I want you — you must come back to me, Sweetheart."

There was a faint, quivering smile that began in her eyes, and reached her lips.

"Stupid old Max," she said weakly. "Do you mind if I go to sleep?"

And I knew that it was no vision, but

a blessed reality, and that we were living in the year 1908 — and that Polly was back.

Her hand stirring sometimes in mine. . . . Oh, you Girl . . . stirring . . . and live!

And the heat flush on her cheeks was good to see after that awful, waxen pallor.

She was still sleeping sweetly when her fingers slipped from mine, and I followed Nurse out of the room.

"Good boy," she said, approvingly, when I threw myself down in the biggest chair I could find, and ate as if I had been famished. "You have obeyed directions splendidly so far — but it is almost too much to hope that you will continue to do so." And -- as I live, Girl (what a trick I have of saying

that!) the very commonplace way in which these words were uttered made me realize that Polly was really, and actually, round the corner. We haven't talked much for a long time.

"Quite satisfactory," she went on in her old professional way; "but you must be sensible, and help us. For a while . . . a fortnight, say . . . I am going to keep you out of the room. Your eyes give you away. I am sorry to have to put your romance into such matter-of-fact words . . . but you don't mind that, do you? My patient must not be startled; and you must be content for a long time to let her quietly get better . . . eat, and drink, and sleep like a child, with no complex emotions to upset our calculations. More ham?"

"More ham . . . !" I spluttered indignantly. "You are a rattling good nurse, but you don't know everything. Polly will remember when she wakes. . . ."

"Don't flatter yourself — she will probably do nothing of the kind. You must be patient. . . . I mean it, Mr. Herrick."

And she says this in quite the old style . . . and I groan inwardly, and submit.

For I would have a much easier way out of the difficulty. If Polly were my wife, I would carry her away from them all, as soon as she was fit. I want . . . My Own Way . . . and that is the long and short of it, I . . . would be so gentle with her. But, no it is not to be thought of . . .

Those two medicos and the Woman-in-White are three too many for me.

I wonder what Polly would say?

The clouds that have been gathering heavily all the afternoon have drifted away, and the sun is making everything in the street look bronze, and ugly. And — just over the way . . .

Oh, Dream Girl — it might so easily have been Polly!

The little music teacher I told you about has indeed given her last lesson. All through the holidays she has lain, tossing restlessly . but that is over now. And at least, she has had kind friends about her. And I think . . . on The Other Side they will make things up!

It seems almost too hot for funerals; yet there have been so many these days

And the coffin is so pitifully small. . . . In one of the hansoms I see Herr Lindt. He will be wondering, no doubt, whether they will let "ze child play her piano up zere."

But I think she will want a long rest first.

That was yesterday, and still no change. I suppose we shall get used to it in time. Polly is waking — I can hear Nurse's voice, and . . . surely . . . a low laugh?

Then, the Woman-in-White, with her eyes suspiciously moist, though her lips are twitching.

"She wants to know," she explains, "whether Mrs. Collop has melted into lard with the heat, and if we have taken steps to preserve the same."

And now I know she is really better,

and old Sol may do his worst since she is well enough to be mischievous.

And then . . . a lecture. How many have I had since yesterday . . . ? And boiled down, the substance is the old . . .

"My patient must live the life of a child for quite three weeks . . . she must, indeed. Is that Herr Lindt?"

"Yes, and for heaven's sake don't let him know the end of that crayfish. He dislikes cats anyway . . . but if he knew that General French had nearly burst himself over that cherished shellback, more than the cat would stand in danger. Nurse . . . dear . . . I believe there is a change coming!"

"Go out and whistle for it," she

suggests. "Softly, now — you are such a big, clumsy fellow. . . ."

And I whistle . . . ? Oh, "Polly darling," of course!

Girl, I shall soon have your number, and ring up!

Yours,
MAX.

XVIII

FROM MAX HERRICK

And every living thing did joy in life,
And every thing of beauty did seem
living . . .
Oh, then, life's pulse was at my heart reviving.
— MRS. BROWNING.

I will be the pattern of all patience; I will say
nothing.
—*King Lear, Act III., Scene* 2.

LADY:

Just three weeks since I last wrote, and already she is beginning to ask questions . . . Polly, I mean. But there is no need to explain to you, you understand that there is only one She in the whole world. She does everything with conviction, and her recovery has been a very rapid one — when one considers . . .

This evening being calm and beautiful, and that Woman-in-White having as much sense as two ordinary people put together, Polly, on a lounge piled with cushions three deep — I counted them as they were carried out, and even sacrificed two dearly loved ones of my

own . . . is on the veranda, sniffing the air with every appearance of content.

She is rather a more substantial Polly than she was a fortnight ago, though

she still looks ridiculously small, and her rough little head is so quaintly boyish. And her eyes are as big as the proverbial saucers — why always sau-

cers — pallid, shallow things? — and her lips tremble when she laughs. But her hands have ceased to be birds' claws, and she looks — vital!

Ten minutes ago Mrs. Collop lumbered down the path clad in white, with an extraordinary confection — go up top for that, my boy! — that I believe you women call a sun-hat on her head. Picture that face peeping coyly out from frills of lace that go all round the blessed thing.

She turned in the path — a proceeding fraught with danger to some pot plants on the lawn — and looked at us with swimming eyes.

"You look so natural like," she faltered, one fat hand wandering toward that part of her physiognomy where pearly drops had gathered. "Mr.

Herrick-my-dear, it reminds me of the time when Collop and me . . . ."

"You'll be late for church, Mrs. Collop," said Polly in that uncertain little voice of hers. And the good soul went swaying down the path and through the gate.

"What a pity to cut short her eloquence," I said, sotto voce.

Polly did not answer.

And the sun went down, and the chimes ceased.

"Do you know," Polly said, suddenly, "when I was so ill that time I had a strange experience. I was almost too tired to fight, you know . . . and I'm not even sure that I wanted to. And I was drifting out on a calm sea — drifting away. And a voice called me back. I took up the oars again most

unwillingly. And I had the fancy that it was your voice, Max. Absurd, wasn't it?"

"Very," I said, choking back the inclination to tell her all. For it's jolly hard on a fellow to have to play the game of friendship when one means something so different.

"I don't believe," said Polly petulantly, "that you are a bit glad I am better. You are thinking of your Dream Girl all the time, and I come in nowhere."

"Think so?" I said, leaning in rather a bored fashion against the veranda post, and telling myself that she must know — that my eyes . . .

Why, even Nurse said they gave me away. And one can't muzzle eyes!

"I have been wondering," she said

with a little, shadowy smile playing round her lips "whether you have fallen in love with her?"

"Go up top," I said lazily. "Your perspicacity is growing with every hour of your life. How long did it take you to arrive at that conclusion?"

And oh, Nurse, Nurse . . . surely this shall be accounted to me for righteousness! It would have been so easy to tell her then. Silence for a while, then ——

"Where is she, Polly? I want to tell her all about your illness. I want to know her — see her."

"Good boy," she said with a trace of the old mockery. "You want — so much. But that was always your way. Let it rest, Max — it is all over — your need for her gone. You have long

ceased to be the bundle of nerves you were when she took you in hand. You are almost — the finished article!"

"Polly . . . I believe you are jealous of her!"

And then I was treated to an old-time flash.

"What amazing discernment! Did you think that would annoy me? Let your Dream Girl remain an episode."

"So that was all I meant to her?" She laughed softly.

"Did it have its feelings hurt, then?" she asked, mischievously.

"Hang it all, Polly," I said, irritably, "I tell you we got to understand each other perfectly. I could tell her things . . . "

"That you couldn't tell me? Oh, I quite grasp that. There was so

much you couldn't tell me, wasn't there?"

"At least she did not make fun of everything I said, as you do!"

"No? What an exemplary young woman . . . I must take lessons. To understand you. . . . Poor Max! If I had realized that things were so serious, I would have done you such a beautifully typed Misunderstood to pin on to your lounge. . . ."

"Polly, you are getting better!"

"So the doctors say, Mr. Herrick, I really think they are right."

"I can't understand how you and she came to be friends. . . ."

"Opposites in nature . . . that is the only solution I can offer."

"Will you give me her address?"

"So that she may heal the wounds

I have inflicted? How did you exist without her that time I was ill?"

"It was — horrible!"

Now . . . what made my voice break as it did just then? You will guess, Girl.

Polly looked at me very wistfully.

"I could not provide against such a contingency, you know," she said, slowly. "I will act as postman again, if you are really determined. But I can't see anything to be gained."

"Polly," said I, abruptly, "does a girl know when a man is in love with her?"

"If he tells her so, Max."

"Not unless?"

"Not unless."

"You mean in actual words?"

"How else?"

"Well, I think she ought to guess."

"She does guess sometimes . . . wrongly. It makes her more careful next time. You men are blundering creatures, you know; you sometimes talk about the girl you love — to the girl who loves you."

Polly looked so worn when she said this that I was relieved when the Woman-in-White appeared, and her patient obediently swallowed the cupful of Benger's Food that was her present occasional martyrdom.

"Quarrelling?" Nurse asked, with her eyebrows lifted slightly. "Mr. Herrick, I cannot give you a diploma for nursing — my patient looks feverish."

"Want the thermometer?" I said, flippantly. "Oh, I forgot — you al

ways carry it with you, don't you — 'to be well shaken before taken.' I must be a worse character than I imagined! I made a bad patient . . . and now I am to be equally a failure as a nurse!"

"Go over and see Herr Lindt," Polly suggested, weakly. "And Max . . . if you could delicately convey the idea that even full diet does not mean a huge fowl a day, you would save my feelings, and his purse — good old soul that he is."

But it was just at that moment he appeared, a capacious Panama hat on his curly head.

Now it was always pretty to see him with Polly — I watched them with an odd tightness at my heart. For she is such a shadowy sweetheart as yet.

Off went the Panama, and the Herr Professor made a low bow.

"My Lady," he said, under his breath. "Oh, but you are too ezzerial . . . you vill fly avay!"

"I never felt less like flying, Herr Lindt!"

"Ach! — Zat ees so. Ze leetle creature must eat many fowls — ees eet not, my good voman?" with a glare at Nurse — of whom he is more than half in awe. "And much good, red beef. Ze poor professor has missed ze leetle lady all zis sad time — he has shed tears . . . many tears."

Polly lifted her weak, little hand, and touched his softly.

"Did you cry, really? How lovely of you. I shall never forget that. I am quite sure Mr. Herrick did not cry."

Now — what spirit of evil entered into her that she should say that? The good fellow's feelings nearly gave me away.

"My Lady, eet ees not zat all can relieve ze feelings by ze tears. Zere are ozzer vays. My Herrick — yesh, he tramp up and down viz his face as vhite as paper, and hees eyes, zey alvays ask somezing — al-vays. And ve tell him, 'See, she vill soon be better.' But he shake his head, and he vill not speak — ve are as ze good God made us. Leetle creature . . . if you had not come back, my Herrick I do not know vat he vill do at all."

"Herr Lindt," said the Woman-in-White abruptly, "I had a letter from a friend of mine who is abroad, yesterday. He has heard Fraulein Elsa sing

in Wiesbaden. He says her voice is very brilliant."

And then the light flooded the clever face.

"Ach! but you should hear her seeng!" he said, softly.

And the tension was relaxed.

The Professor was lost in reflection.

"Since she vas von leetle child I have faithful been," he said, dreamily. "Beeg, long plaits of hair each side of her head — you do not see zem so in zis country. Ze colour of flax. And her eyes like ze blue lakes — calm — calm. But zey sparkle for ze poor professor, and some day he vill go back. Not?"

"Soon," said Polly, with conviction. "She will be so happy ——"

"My Lady, I have ze deep love; she vill not forget."

"No, she will not forget."

He bent low over her hand, and touched his lips to it.

"Eet ees a leetle lady of snow," he said, sorrowfully: "but ze roses vill come back — eh, my Herrick?"

He went down the path slowly, and a few minutes later we heard his 'cello. He was playing Handel's "Largo" with his heart in the long, drawn out notes.

"How do you know she will not forget?" I asked, Polly and I being alone once more.

"I have heard bits of her letters. She loves him," said Polly, simply.

"How do you find these things out 'leetle creature'?"

She laughed roguishly.

"I am going to quote Nancy Stair.

'They come -- and then Nancy's head-dicks' . . . do you remember?"

We both laughed. But, oh, Nurse, were you altogether wise? For it is not a child's soul that looks out of Polly's beautiful eyes . . . it asks a question . . . and I want to answer!

Might it not help her on the long road if we went side by side, and I lifted her over the rough places . . . and she knew that my heart was hers — for keeps?

For Polly and I were meant for each other.

She is going to forward this with the others. Tell me what you think . . . you who have passed this way!

Your puzzled,

MAX HERRICK.

Give the Man-from-the-Mallee my respects, and good wishes. More power to him, and Winsome.

Please answer by return. You have arrears to make up, you know. Sample lot will do, with more to follow.

I have been thinking back. It is only a little over six months since you were as hazy as an undeveloped film on a No. 2 Brownie. And now . . . ?

You will consider yourself rung up. Are you there . . . ? Who is speaking . . . ?

XIX

FROM THE DREAM GIRL

But men are men; the best sometimes forget.
— *Othello, Act II., Scene* 3.

DEAR SIX-FOOT-ONE-VERTICAL!

You are almost as persistent as a woman. Polly is right — you are exceedingly greedy. Let me entreat you to beware of cupidity. Of course, long before you receive this you will have blurted the whole story out. You say Polly and you were meant for each other . . . ! But, what a long time it has taken you to find that out! There was first the Parma violet girl — and then . . .

And now Polly is background, and foreground, and middle distance. And the next?

I am wondering. Allowing for the overflow of sentiment, this looks like

the real thing. Make sure, you dreamer of dreams — make quite sure before you tell her.

I am sorry for your time of strain. But perhaps, if it helped you to find yourself — you may be thankful for it some day. I wonder — ?

No, I didn't take diphtheria.

I am afraid that you are decidedly less respectful since I have ceased to be "an undeveloped film on a No. 2 Brownie"! The very idea . . . Apologize at once!

Indignantly yours,

THE DREAM GIRL.

I have given Polly permission to tell you about me. Are you satisfied now, Sir Arrogance?

XX

FROM MAX HERRICK

'Tis not enough to help the feeble up,
But to support him after.
— *Timon of Athens, Act I., Scene* 1.

YOU DEAR GIRL:

I have made quite sure. And if you dare to mention Parma violet girls again, I'll execute summary vengeance. She has promised to be my sweetheart, for keeps, but it seems to me that she is almost as doubtful as you are as to my stability. I deserve it, of course. But that wistful expression of hers cuts like a knife. It isn't good to feel that her trust in me will have a struggle.

Of course she cannot realize what those awful days meant . . . and I cannot tell her. I want to shut off the memory . . . but . . . if I ever fail her!

Something is troubling her — I am

sure of that. Of course I may be out of it, as usual, and it may be only weakness that makes her droop at times — calls the shadow into her beautiful eyes. . . . I wish I knew.

It is good to know that I have won her . . . but, oh, Dream Girl . . . can you tell me how to bring back the old Polly? If you can . . . you have done so much, that this seems possible . . . send along the prescription by return of post. It shall be carried out to the letter.

I am . . . sure she cares, you know . . . though she has said so little. Just one startled look . . . but I understood.

I didn't say much either. If my life doesn't tell her . . . but it shall.

She would distrust protestations, this Polly of mine.

Do you know, I can't settle to writing. Strange, isn't it? I want the Polly who used to snub me and scold me — the Polly who has seized my heart relentlessly, and holds it by right of possession.

And . . . in spite of her eyes . . . her promise . . . there is something between us.

So you see, we need you, Girl, to sweep away some cobwebs. I think you could convince her that this love is abiding — for all time.

And some day soon — she will come in laughing softly, and you will be with her. And she will say in that whimsical fashion of hers . . .

"This . . . is the Dream Girl, Max!"

Till then,

Your impatient,

MAX HERRICK.

Herr Lindt has taken passage by the *Bremen*. He has come in for a fine little property in Germany . . . an eccentric friend of the family has gone aloft! He was over last night, saying good-bye, and his face was a picture.

"I shall hear her seeng soon," he kept saying, over and over again. "Ach! but you do not hear such music in zis country. You vill breeng ze leetle creature to Germany some day, my Herrick . . . ees eet not so?"

And I promised, of course. Polly's eyes seemed to hold the wish.

When he went, his face was flushed with genuine emotion at leaving us.

To-day he sails, and we shall miss him, and the 'cello.

This isn't the sort of letter you expected me to write, is it? But Polly's face comes between me and the page so often. And I wonder . . .

M. H.

XXI

FROM POLLY CARROL

Love, that hath us in his net,
Can he pass, and we forget?
— TENNYSON.

But nature never framed a woman's heart
Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice.
— *Much Ado About Nothing.*

MAX . . . MY DEAR:

Yesterday we dreamed dreams and saw visions. And to-day I am wondering how I shall tell you. How you will take it. But oh . . . don't forget that Polly loves you . . . and forgive her if you can.

Max, there is no Dream Girl — there never has been. All the letters that have meant so much to you have been written in this room by the little "everyday girl" — Polly.

It is rather an impossible situation, isn't it? And you will want to take a good, long breath before you go on.

Sometimes I wondered that you did not see through the whole, pitiful sham

. . . I got frightened halfway, and wanted to turn back, more than once. But, by that time, the thing that was entered into to while away a few, weary hours, had grown into something more . . . something that seemed necessary to you. That is my excuse.

You will of course be angry — just at first. That is why I am writing, instead of telling you. You may even find it hard to forgive . . . I shall not blame you. But the dread of having to write this letter has pressed heavily lately. More heavily since I knew that you cared.

For I realize what she has grown to be to you . . . this girl who never existed. Max . . . it is a little hard on me, too! When you have read

this, you will answer your Dream Girl for the last time — and she will know.

For there has been some truth in her after all. Perhaps she has just been showing you another side of herself — Polly, I mean. And you liked that side, Max. I can't forget that. You must judge which is the real Polly . . . the one you were meeting and crossing swords with . . . or the one who wrote to you.

And whichever one you decide on will be wrong . . . for she is both!

And now — what do you think of her?

I have been reading your letters over again. . . . I almost know them by heart. They thrill me, and they hurt — at one and the same time. But I got to know the real Max through them . . . the Max I hoped was

there. I wonder whether, through hers, you got to know the real Polly?

Oh, yes, I have cared . . . ever since the day they brought you here, and I thought you had come back to die, or were facing invalidism. And at first, you did not want to live.

My one thought was to rouse the Max Herrick who was dormant. You had been looking on at life . . . and it hurt. For I am sure I always saw what you were capable of being.

Think . . . dear. . . .

And one night — you had been utterly listless and apathetic — the idea came that I carried out so successfully. I wanted to give you an interest right away from this place — take you into another world.

I could not show you in real life the

side I revealed in my letters . . . it would have been dangerous. For I knew then, that the last thought in your mind was love for me. You — all but told me so, you know. I was good for making jolly fires, and singing to you. And I was your chum.

But it has helped you, Max? Roused you to a more vital hold on life. . . . If you are tempted to be angry, you will remember that, won't you?

It . . . wasn't altogether easy for me, you know, as we got on. To know you were writing to your Dream Girl as if she were the stranger she seemed to be, and to read some of the things you said about me. Do you remember? I have been going through the letters to-night with an odd pain at my heart.

"I am not in the least in love with Polly . . . not in the very least."

And I was to read that . . .

Sometimes I felt tempted to let the whole thing slip — it hurt too cruelly. But I could not.

It became a sharp pain in more senses than one, too. For it was all true . . . only it had happened years before I knew there was such a man in the world as Max Herrick.

And on those close, stuffy nights when you scolded me for writing so late, I dreamed myself back into the happy days when Grannie and I — my parents died when I was almost a baby — lived our lives by Stony Creek.

Often, I have taken my hands from the keys, my heart aching with a physical pain as I thought of the

mountains, and the garden that was literally Fairyland.

Yes. . . . It was all real . . . even the Man-from-the-Mallee — and Winsome . . . and the diphtheria.

When you wrote that time, begging me to be careful, it seemed so strange.

And the letter in which I said I was

too tired to write more — oh, Max, it was so pitifully true. I was sickening for that fever, and you were so persistent. I was a bit light-headed, that night, I think. I know the keys kept jumping up at me, and I had to rest between each word.

I don't know how I did it . . . and met you, every day. I manifolded my letters, or I should have been in a difficulty many a time. As it was, my tenses got jumbled up, and I was afraid you would guess. I wanted so badly, to tell you that Winsome married the Man-from-the-Mallee, and went to England with him, and then I remembered that I had not left time.

I have gone through the letters you wrote when I was ill. They say — a

lot — to me. They seem . . . real. And now I have hurt you.

Dear . . . I love you with my whole heart . . . but we must make very sure. It would be better for Polly, as well as for the Dream Girl to remain an episode, unless . . .

One letter made me very happy — or rather, the sketch that came with it . . . that one of the Dream Girl that was an idealized Polly. You . . . knew my face rather well, didn't you, Dana Gibson the Second?

But oh — I am puzzled. Perhaps I have just crossed your path . . . I . . . Polly . . . not the Dream Girl!

Even if I only teased you, and fought you, and . . . roused you — Dear! that was something?

It is only Polly, Sir Egotist — a little saddened with the battle of life, and more than a little tired. And though we have got to know each other rarely well . . . if I were to slip out of your life. . . . No, that isn't quite fair; is it? I did not mean to wound.

But oh, Max . . . wait . . . I should still be the Polly who has irritated you so often — and perhaps some one with a more clinging nature. . . .

You must decide — for both of us.

If you are too angry to forgive me, I am still going to keep your letters. They belong to the Dream Girl, and she will take them away with her into the clouds . . . and the purple distances. And sometimes you will remember, and wish the mists were not

quite so thick — and that you could see her once again with the "look of exquisite compassion in her eyes!"

You were right . . . I was jealous of her. Absurd, wasn't it? But you will understand why.

I am not begging mercy at your hands, Six-foot-one-Vertical . . . I do not feel in the least meek, or subdued. It is I . . . Polly . . . and if you do not want me . . .

I shall wave my hand at you and vanish. The Chalet still belongs to me, only, when Grannie died there was a mortgage on it, and it suited me better to put a tenant in, and typewrite here. That was why I was working so hard — though the writing at night was usually . . . the letter. It has its comical side.

I cleared the mortgage at Christmas — and I can go back now. I shall, if . . .

And you may forget both Polly, and that shadowy creature who signs herself for the last time,

Your

DREAM GIRL.

Write your answer, Max, and slip it under my door to-night.

XXII

FROM MAX HERRICK

Doubt that the stars are fire;
  Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar;
  But never doubt I love!

— *Hamlet.*

. . . Now thy image doth appear
In the rare semblance that I loved it first.

— *Twelfth Night, Act V., Scene* 1.

SWEETHEART:

I wrote something to the Dream Girl once that you may remember. It was when I thought I was going to lose you — and I wanted you in my arms. And, because I want that more than anything in this life, I can't write, Polly.

Dream Girl . . . little everyday girl . . . Polly . . . you, out of the whole world . . . did ever any unworthy man have so much given him, I wonder?

Little love, you can't go now. I shall never let you go again. I can't quite take it in yet . . . have we gone back to Fairyland, you and I? And I nearly lost you . . . so very

nearly. And it is life we are facing . . . not a dream world . . . though we shall still see visions.

But it is beautifully real, dear heart. And you won't despise me because my first feeling was one of sadness. For I think of the weary look that was coming to live in your eyes . . . and I see you — those stifling nights typing away for dear life to please a sick idiot's whim. How di. you manage it all, Sweet?

It must be that I shall be a better man for this. . . . Do you remember my telling you that between you both it might be that I should develop into something distantly resembling a man? Do you, Polly darling?

I am planning . . . the Chalet, and the inglenook, and the garden

and the myrtle in the bed of the creek, and . . . MY WIFE!

We two . . . and the world in the distance. And a book to be written in collaboration that shall mean something. You can never again taunt me with imagination, you know.

Soon . . . Polly . . . you won't keep me waiting long? I want to hold away from you everything but happiness . . .

More power to the Man-from-the-Mallee, and Winsome. All the same, I owe him a grudge over that diphtheria business. If you had taken it, and I had never met you! It doesn't bear thinking of.

I shall write to the Woman-in-White for congratulations. She had a great deal to do with your recovery, but I

think my voice must have reached you, and called you back. For my heart was in it — small love of mine.

And you are not begging mercy at my hands? That was a flash of the old Polly. Head up, eyes shining . . . mouth mutinous . . . my girl!

And you'll come to me when you've read this . . . and I'll tell you all I can't write . . . with my arms around you.

Your lover,

MAX.

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